

Social Media and News : Australia Vs Facebook

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Sushil Kumar Modi, a member of the Rajya Sabha, suggested India follow Australia's lead and adopt a legislation that compels Facebook and Google to pay local news publishers or face forced arbitration.

In news: In Australia versus Facebook, issues affecting media everywhere

Placing it in syllabus: Law & Policy

Dimensions

- Social Media
- A. What is it ?
- B. How is it Different From News Media?
- C. Significance of news through Social Media
- D. Problems of News through Social Media
- 3. How did Australia correct the Problems?
- 4. Should India go for such a law?

Content:

Social Media:

What is it?

- Social media are **interactive digitally mediated technologies** that facilitate the creation or sharing/exchange of information, ideas, career interests, and other forms of expression **via virtual communities and networks**.
- Social media are **interactive Web 2.0 Internet-based applications**.
- **User-generated content**—such as text posts or comments,

digital photos or videos, and data generated through all online interactions—is the lifeblood of social media.

- **Users create service-specific profiles** for the website or app that are designed and maintained by the social-media organization.
- Social media facilitate the **development of online social networks** by connecting a user's profile with those of other individuals or groups.
- Additionally, social media are **used to document memories**; learn about and explore things; advertise oneself; and form friendships along with the growth of ideas from the creation of blogs, podcasts, videos, and gaming sites
- Some of the most popular social media websites, with over 100 million registered users, include Facebook (and its associated Facebook Messenger), TikTok, WeChat, Instagram, QZone, Weibo, Twitter, Tumblr, Baidu Tieba, and LinkedIn.
- Social media has empowered ordinary people of India, and nearly 1.4 billion people use social media with Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook WhatsApp

How is it Different From News Media?

Creation and dissemination of content:

- **Traditional Media** is based on the **principle of one-to-many**. An Editor decides what is news; which news reports should be published in the day's newspaper or which reports should be telecast in the next bulletin. The news consumers, that is the readers and viewers, have no role to play in the creation or dissemination of content.
- **Social Media**, in contrast, is a media that works on the **principle of many-to-many**. Any individual can create and share content. This makes the **content creation process more democratic**.

Focus or purpose:

- Social Media, as the name suggests, is a media where people come to interact with friends, relatives, acquaintances etc. It need not be news-based. In fact, a very small part of the Social Media universe is devoted to creation or dissemination of news.
- The Traditional Media is primarily a news media. It has traditionally performed the function of gathering and disseminating news, and continues to do so.

Interactivity:

- Social Media allows users to comment on content created by their friends, relatives or peer group. All comments are in real time. They enrich published content, and empower people to share views.
- The Traditional Media is tightly patrolled. All communication is one-way: from the editor to the readers. The most that a reader can hope is to get a letter published in the Letters column of the newspaper. There is, of course, no guarantee as to how much of the letter will be edited before it is published. This interactivity is even more limited in the case of television.

Speed:

- Social Media is instant. Reports published on Social Media sites can be accessed instantly.
- Traditional Media takes time to disseminate information. In the case of newspapers, this is limited to once a day; television or radio can update reports more frequently. But they cannot match the speed of Social Media unless they go live.

Cost of creation:

- It costs a fortune to set up a newspaper, radio or

television station. Few individuals can therefore hope to become publishers.

- Social Media platforms allow free posting of content. Anyone can therefore become a publisher or broadcaster.

Reach and numbers:

- The reach of Social Media is staggering. It connects billions of individuals across the globe.
- In contrast, the reach of traditional media is limited to the number of readers or viewers that individual newspapers or channels may have.

Significance of news through Social Media

- Social media isn't just for keeping up with friends and family, and it isn't just for marketing. Social media is often the point from which breaking news stories emerge.
- Social media as a news source is the use of online social media platforms rather than more traditional media platforms to obtain news.
- As print continues its decline, social media sites are an important way for news organizations to reach readers. Social media sites, in turn, enjoy the attention these breaking stories bring.
- Facebook and Twitter make news a more participatory experience than before as people share news articles and comment on other people's posts.
- According to a study of online news consumers in 2015, social media has been one of the main sources of their online news.
- According to the study, 41% of respondents identified social media as the source of their online news and 56% shared news stories with others on social media.
- Currently there are nearly 160 million Whats App users, 150 million Facebook followers and 22 million Twitter accounts actively in operation in India
- Many internet users will see the breaking stories on

their feed and go to the news sites to learn more. The survey found a 57 percent increase in traffic to news sites referred from social media.

- The center of power is shifted from only the media (as the gatekeeper) to the peripheral area, which may include government, organizations, and out to the edge, the individual.

Media outlets have reported that Facebook plans to launch its **news tab feature** (available in the US since 2019) in the UK, with likely tie-ups with The Guardian, The Economist, and The Independent. And that Google is rolling out its news offering platform, **Google News Showcase**.

Both these **platforms aim to formalise payment pacts with news outlets**. In a statement last month, Google said that News Showcase – which features story panels that allow participating publishers to package the stories that appear within Google’s news products – has on board more than 450 publications in a dozen countries, including Le Monde, Le Figaro, and Libération in France; El Cronista and La Gaceta in Argentina; TAG24 and Sachsische Zeitung in Germany; and Jornal do Commercio in Brazil.

Problems of News through Social Media:

Unreliability of News

- Unlike traditional news platforms such as newspapers and news shows, news content on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp, allows users without having professional journalistic backgrounds to create news.
- This raised concern over authoritative reliability on account of lenient moderation and the open-access element of these public platforms

Pessimistic Bias

- Research suggests that posts of a more pessimistic nature that are also written with an air of certainty are more likely to be shared or otherwise permeate groups on Twitter.
- Similar biases need to be considered when the utility of new media is addressed, as the potential for human opinion to over-emphasize any particular news story is greater despite the general improvement in addressing potential uncertainty and bias in news articles than in traditional media.

Political Polarization and Selective Exposure:

- Because of algorithms on social media which filter and display news content which are likely to match their users' political preferences, a potential impact of receiving news from social media includes an increase in political polarization due to selective exposure.
- Political polarization refers to when an individual's stance on a topic is more likely to be strictly defined by their identification with a specific political party or ideology than on other factors.
- Selective exposure occurs when an individual favors information that supports their beliefs and avoids information that conflicts with their beliefs

Propagating misinformation, disinformation and fake news:

- In today's times, one of the main carriers of fake news is the social media, though other forms of media – print and visual – are also responsible for endorsing and spreading fake news.
- The purpose of fake news is not to pose an alternative truth, but to destroy truth altogether, to set us adrift in a world of belief without facts, a world where there is no defense against lies.
- Actually, the purpose of fake news is to manipulate, to weaponize information, made out of whole cloth at times,

to achieve political or societal goals.

- We have seen the impact of fake news in misleading people, spreading false propaganda or maligning people and communities.
- In India, fake news based on fabricated and non-existing facts especially on social media has been instrumental in instigating communal violence.
- Moreover, the rise in the volume of fake news aimed at hate mongering in the last few years has increased the probability of creating communal hatred and instigating violence.

Ownership of media/news content:

- Social media content is generated through social media interactions done by users through the site.
- There has always been a huge debate on the ownership of the content on social media platforms because it is generated by the users and hosted by the company.
- Added to this is the danger to the security of information, which can be leaked to third parties with economic interests in the platform, or parasites who comb the data for their own databases.
- Google, Facebook and YouTube freely use print and news channels for the news content without any remunerative payment for the revenue generated.

Sustainability of News Media:

- News broadcasters are passing through their worst phase in recent history.
- They are in a deep financial crisis as revenue flows from news media companies to digital social media companies.
- Ensure that public interest journalism needs to be put on a sustainable financial footing.

Other Concerns:

In a research Pew Research Center found that 50% respondents reported that the following were either a “very big problem” or a “moderately big problem” for getting news on social media:

- One-sided news (83%)
- Inaccurate news (81%)
- Censorship of the news (69%)
- Uncivil discussions about the news (69%)
- Harassment of journalists (57%)
- News organizations or personalities being banned (53%)
- Violent or disturbing news images or videos (51%)

How did Australia correct the Problems?

- Australia’s parliament passed a world-first law to force digital giants such as Facebook and Google to pay local publishers for news content
- The legislation will ensure “news media businesses are fairly remunerated for the content they generate”
- News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code Act 2020, mandates a bargaining code that aims to force Google and Facebook to compensate media companies for using their content.
- Regulators around the world have been closely watching the legislation as they grapple with the advertising dominance of Facebook and Google, who now face the prospect of similar measures cascading around the world
- The provision requires Google and Facebook to enter into payment negotiations with media companies – with an arbiter mandated to adjudicate if no agreement is reached – or face heavy fines
- The arbiter is deemed important mainly for smaller publishers who may face a negotiation skew with the platforms.

The core issue:

- Paying for news feed in itself appears to be less of an issue for the tech giants, given that Google agreed to pay news publications in France just hours before threatening to remove its search functions in Australia.
- The fight in Australia is in fact, centred on how much control these companies would be able to retain on their payout process – operational aspects such as deciding the quantum of payments for news feed sources, and having to reveal changes in their algorithms.
- European authorities have specifically linked payments to copyright, without putting a forcing device into the agreements.
- Australia's code, on the other hand, is almost entirely focused on the bargaining power of news outlets vis-à-vis the tech majors, and has some coercive features as well.
- It is more of a competition issue in Australia, of power equations between traditional news outlets and tech platforms, with the question of abuse of dominance by the latter hanging in the balance.

Should India go for such a law?

- Policymakers in India have so far focused on the dominance of intermediaries such as Google and Facebook, which are positioned in a way that service providers cannot reach customers except through these platforms.
- A substantial discussion on the impact of intermediary platforms on the health of news media outlets is yet to begin in any meaningful way.
- Dailyhunt and InShorts are the other major news aggregators in India.
- News is not free and has never been. Publishers must be adequately compensated for their work
- There is a market imbalance between news media organizations and social media giants who benefit from

their work.

- The government must make Google, Facebook and YouTube pay to print and news channels for the news content they are using freely.
- India should take a lead by making Google and Facebook pay a fair share of earnings they make from domestically produced news content.

According to a FICCI-EY report for 2020, there are 300 million users of online news sites, portals and aggregators in the country – making up approximately 46% of Internet users and 77% of smartphone users in India at the end of 2019.

With 282 million unique visitors, India is the second largest online news consuming nation after China. In India, digital advertising spends in 2019 grew 24% year-on-year to Rs 27,900 crore, according to EY estimates, and are expected to grow to Rs 51,340 crore by 2022.

Mould your thought: Governments should ensure that public interest journalism could be put on a sustainable financial footing in the age of social media. Comment.

Approach to the answer:

- Introduction
- Discuss the social media being used as news source / aggregator
- Discuss the problems with this model
- Discuss the solutions to these challenges (Australian Law)
- Conclusion