

“The Role on Social Media vs Traditional Media: A Comparative Study of News Consumption Trends (2008-2023)”

Siddaraju C

Associate Professor of Political Science

Govt. First Grade College,

Hebbal, Bangalore-24

Mobile No: 8970620891

Email ID : siddarajulohitha@gmail.com

Abstract:

Media is a cornerstone of democracy, playing an essential role in the functioning of democratic systems by informing the public, shaping opinions, and serving as a check on government power. This article explores how the media strengthens democracy through various mechanisms, such as promoting transparency, ensuring accountability, and enabling civic participation. Visualizing global press freedom rankings and the influence of media ownership, this research also addresses the challenges posed by the digital age, such as misinformation and media concentration, and concludes with recommendations to strengthen media's democratic functions. And also reflect the changing nature of how news is produced, consumed, and shared in the digital age. The challenges posed by the shift from traditional media to social media, reforms are necessary to protect the integrity of journalism, combat misinformation, and ensure that media continues to play its vital role in a functioning democracy. These reforms should target both media platforms and societal factors such as media literacy and accountability.

This paper provides an in-depth comparative analysis of news consumption trends from social media and traditional media platforms (television, newspapers, and radio) over the period 2008 to 2023. The study traces the rise of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, which have increasingly dominated the information landscape, while traditional media has seen a steady decline.

Key words: *Democracy, social media, Traditional Media, Participation, Accountability and transparency.*

Introduction:

The media landscape has undergone a radical transformation in the last two decades. From 2008 to 2023, the dominance of traditional media in informing the public has been steadily eroded by the exponential rise of social media platforms. While traditional media sources such as television, radio, and newspapers were once the primary means for citizens to receive news, social media has now become a powerful alternative, especially for younger generations. The media, often referred to as the "Fourth Estate," is a crucial institution in democratic governance. Its ability to inform, engage, and monitor political power is essential for ensuring transparency and accountability. However, with the

rise of digital platforms and social media, concerns have emerged about misinformation, biased reporting, and the erosion of traditional journalistic practices. This paper will explore the media's evolving role in democracy, with a focus on contemporary challenges and solutions. This shift raises critical questions about the reliability of news, the rise of misinformation, and how media consumption affects public opinion, political participation, and democracy. This study examines the transition from traditional to digital platforms by analysing data trends and the implications of this significant change.

Traditional Media: Meaning and Definition: Traditional Media encompasses long-established communication methods, including print (newspapers, magazines), broadcast (television, radio), and outdoor advertising (billboards). These media channels rely on centralized content creation and distribution, typically involving professional journalists, editors, and broadcasters. Traditional media provides information in a one-way flow, from the source (publisher or broadcaster) to the audience, with little opportunity for immediate feedback or interaction. Common definitions are "Traditional media refers to the established forms of mass communication, such as print, broadcast, and outdoor advertising, that deliver content from professional creators to a wide audience in a one-directional flow" (McQuail, D. (2010)).

Social media: Meaning and Definition: social media refers to online platforms and digital technologies that enable users to create, share, and exchange information, ideas, and content in virtual communities and networks. These platforms allow individuals and organizations to interact in real-time through posts, comments, videos, images, and messages. Social media encourages user-generated content and facilitates two-way communication, often making information exchange instant and global. Some popular social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, and YouTube. Social media is characterized by its emphasis on user participation, community engagement, and the democratization of content creation. It plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, disseminating news, and fostering social movements due to its accessibility and speed.

Common definitions are "Social media refers to digital platforms and tools that enable users to create, share, and engage with content and communities through the internet" (Dominick, J. R. (2012)).

Objectives of the Study:

To compare the trends in news consumption from social media versus traditional media between 2008 and 2023.

To assess the implications of this shift for journalism, public opinion, and democratic processes.

To examine the challenges posed by misinformation, media literacy, and echo chambers in the context of social media.

To investigate the impact of digital media on traditional journalistic practices and public trust.

Methodology: This study adopts a qualitative and quantitative methodologies to analyze news consumption trends. research approach, combining both primary and secondary data. Additionally, case studies on major global events are examined to understand how different media formats shape public discourse. Literature review of media theory and democratic engagement. Data from Pew Research and Reuters Institute on news consumption habits between 2008 and 2023. Press Freedom Index and Democracy Index data to assess the relationship between media formats and political engagement. Content analysis of major news events and how they were covered across both social media and traditional media platforms.

Social Media vs Traditional Media an Analyses:

In today's rapidly evolving communication landscape, media encompasses a broad spectrum of platforms, from traditional outlets like newspapers, television, and radio to modern digital and social media platforms. The role of media in society has expanded dramatically, driven by technological advancements and shifting audience behaviours. To better understand media's impact, it's crucial to analyze the contrasts and intersections between traditional media and modern digital media in key areas such as content control and creation, audience engagement, speed and reach, and credibility and Accountability.

Traditional Media operates under structured frameworks, with professional journalists, editors, and media companies creating and distributing content. In contrast of Modern Digital Media, particularly social media, empowers individuals to create and share content directly, bypassing traditional gatekeepers. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and blogs allow everyday users to produce content with global reach. The rise of social media has transformed how audiences engage with media (Zaller, J. (1992)). Digital platforms enable interactive, real-time communication, where users can comment, share, and discuss content immediately. The traditional media follows a one-way communication model. Audiences passively consume information without direct interaction, which limits engagement but also creates a more controlled and authoritative flow of information. Digital media excels in speed, offering instant publication and real-time updates that can reach a global audience in minutes. On the other hand, traditional media operates at a slower pace, with set publication or broadcast schedules. Traditional media is widely regarded as more credible due to established journalistic standards and accountability mechanisms. Reputable newspapers, TV stations, and radio outlets adhere to ethical guidelines, and their professional oversight ensures content accuracy and reliability. Digital media, particularly social platforms, face challenges with credibility. The absence of gatekeepers allows misinformation, fake news, and unverified content to spread easily (Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010)). The shift from traditional to social media represents a significant transformation in how we engage with information, as social media allows for faster, more dynamic interactions and a greater degree of content democratization.

Characteristics of Media:

Media as a Watchdog: One of the most critical functions of the media in democracy is its role as a watchdog over governmental power. By investigating and reporting on corruption, human rights abuses, and policy failures, the media ensures that public officials are held accountable.

Media and Civic Participation: Media facilitates civic participation by informing citizens about electoral processes, political platforms, and public policies. This is especially evident during election periods when media coverage can shape voter perception and influence turnout.

Challenges in the Digital Era: While digital media has democratized information, it has also contributed to the rise of misinformation. A pie chart can show the distribution of misinformation across social media platforms, emphasizing the spread of false news during major political events.

Media and Political Manipulation: While media is essential for democracy, it can also be used as a tool for political manipulation. Governments or political actors may attempt to control the media to influence public opinion in their Favor.

Media Freedom and Democracy: Using the *Press Freedom Index*, we can analyze how media freedom correlates with democratic quality. Countries with higher press freedom scores generally have stronger democratic institutions, while those with restricted press face more authoritarian tendencies.

Media Trends in new Consumption: The shift from traditional media (TV, newspapers) to digital platforms can be illustrated with data from Pew Research, which shows that social media has surpassed traditional media as the primary news source for younger generations.

Factors Driving Social Media's Dominance: Accessibility and Convenience are Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide real-time updates that are easily accessible on mobile devices, compared to traditional media which requires scheduled viewing or physical access.

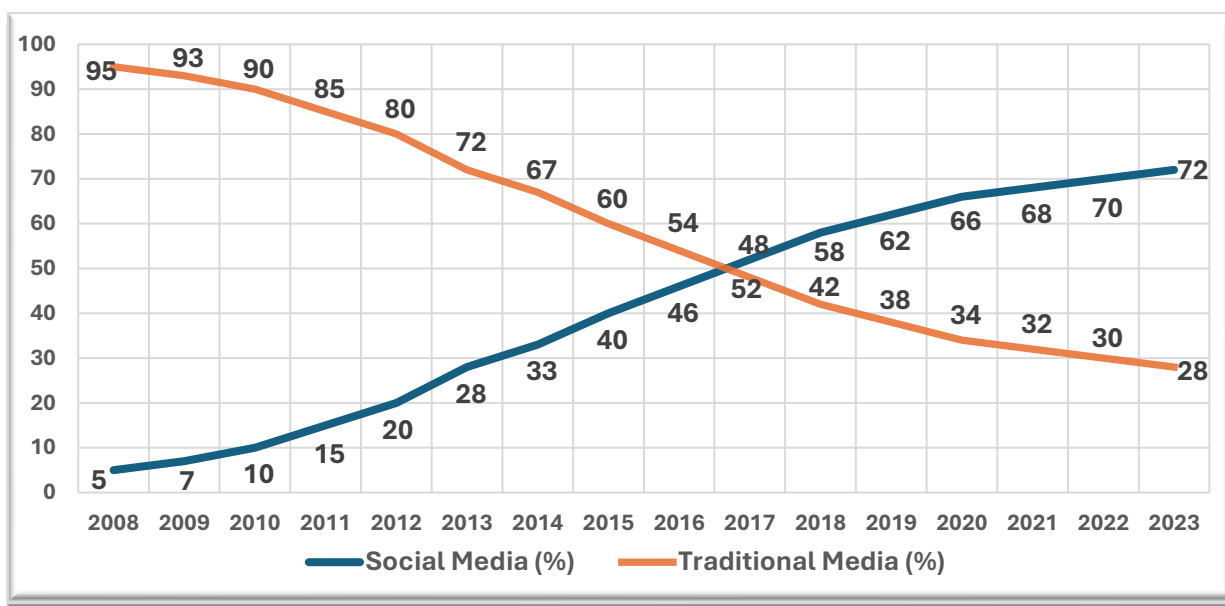
Impact on Journalism: The rise of citizen journalism and decentralized news sources has democratized information sharing but has also led to the proliferation of misinformation. Traditional media, with its emphasis on editorial standards and fact-checking, has struggled to compete with the immediacy and viral nature of social media content.

Challenges in the Social Media Age: Misinformation and Fake News, Echo Chambers and Media Literacy are social media platforms have become breeding grounds for the spread of fake news. The viral nature of misinformation undermines public trust in journalism and has had significant consequences, particularly during elections and crises.

Key Principles and Facts of Social Media vs Traditional Media (2008-2023):

The transformation of the media landscape from 2008 to 2023 is underpinned by several key principles and facts. These help to explain the shift in public news consumption patterns and the broader societal impacts of the rise of social media and the decline of traditional media sources (Pew Research Center. (2023)).

Chart: Trends on Social Media vs Traditional Media (2008-2023)



Source: 2023 Pew Research Center study

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1. Democratization of Information:

One of the defining principles of social media is the democratization of information. Unlike traditional media, where content is produced and controlled by a few centralized organizations, social media allows anyone to share news and information instantly. This has led to greater diversity in the sources of news, as well as broader participation in the creation and dissemination of information. Above the chart By 2023, 72% of people in the sample data were consuming news via social media, up from just 5% in 2008. This rapid growth reflects the increasing accessibility and reliance on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as primary news sources.

2. Speed and Real-Time News Updates:

Social media excels at providing real-time updates on breaking news. Traditional media, while more rigorous in its reporting, cannot compete with the immediacy of social media platforms. News organizations now use social media to break news, and it has become the go-to source for many during crises, protests, or other major events. Major news events like the Arab Spring in 2011, the Black Lives Matter movement, and election results have all been disseminated and amplified through social media platforms, often outpacing traditional media outlets.

3. Personalization and Algorithms:

One of the most significant shifts in how people consume news has come with the advent of algorithms that curate content based on users' interests, preferences, and online behavior. This personalization of news allows people to see content they are more likely to engage with, but it also creates "echo chambers," where users are exposed primarily to information that reinforces their existing beliefs. Studies have shown that algorithm-driven platforms like Facebook and Twitter contribute to the creation of information silos, with 64% of social media users reporting that they primarily see content that aligns with their political beliefs.

4. Decline of Traditional Media's Audience and Revenue:

As more people turn to social media for news, traditional media outlets have faced significant financial pressures. Newspapers and broadcasters have seen sharp declines in advertising revenue, and many outlets have reduced staff or closed entirely. The shift from print and television advertising to digital ads, particularly on social media, has eroded the traditional business model of news organizations. Above the chart shows Between 2008 and 2023, newspaper revenue is declined by more than 50%, while digital advertising on platforms like Facebook and Google grew exponentially during the same period.

5. The Rise of Misinformation and Fake News:

One of the biggest challenges brought by social media is the rise of misinformation, including fake news. Unlike traditional media, which adheres to journalistic standards and ethics, social media platforms are more open and unregulated, allowing false or misleading information to spread quickly and widely. This has become a major issue, particularly during elections and public health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. During the elections studies estimated that fake news stories on social media were shared over 30 million times, leading to widespread confusion and the distortion of facts. Social media platforms have since implemented fact-checking measures, but misinformation continues to be a problem.

6. Public Trust and Credibility:

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Traditional media outlets have historically been held to rigorous journalistic standards, ensuring accuracy, credibility, and accountability. Social media, by contrast, lacks the same editorial oversight, leading to a decrease in trust among the public. Surveys have shown that while more people use social media for news, they tend to trust traditional media sources more for accuracy and reliability. In a 2023 Pew Research Center study, 55% of Americans said they trusted news from traditional media sources, while only 25% said they trusted news from social media platforms.

7. The Role of Investigative Journalism:

Traditional media remains the primary source for investigative journalism, which plays a crucial role in holding powerful institutions accountable. Investigative reporting requires time, resources, and editorial independence—attributes that are less common in the fast-paced world of social media. Major investigations like the Panama Papers or revelations about political corruption are typically produced by established media organizations rather than social media platforms. In 2022, traditional media outlets in countries with strong press freedom were responsible for exposing multiple high-level corruption scandals, while social media mainly amplified the findings after they were published.

8. The Evolution of Citizen Journalism

Social media has also given rise to citizen journalism, where ordinary individuals document and report on events in real-time. This has been particularly valuable in authoritarian regimes or during crises, where traditional media may be censored or restricted. However, the lack of professional training among citizen journalists raises concerns about accuracy, bias, and the verification of facts. During the 2019–2020 protests in Hong Kong, much of the real-time footage and reporting came from citizen journalists using platforms like Twitter and Instagram. Traditional media often relied on these sources for breaking news.

Challenges of the Shift from Traditional Media to Social Media:

The rise of social media as a dominant source of news has introduced several challenges that affect journalism, public trust, and democratic processes. These challenges reflect the changing nature of how news is produced, consumed, and shared in the digital age. Here are the key challenges associated with the shift from traditional media to social media (Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010)):

Misinformation and Fake News: One of the most significant challenges posed by social media is the proliferation of misinformation and fake news. Unlike traditional media, which follows editorial standards and fact-checking processes, social media platforms allow the rapid spread of unverified information.

Declining Quality of Journalism: The economic pressures faced by traditional media due to declining revenue have led to the downsizing of newsrooms and reduced resources for investigative journalism. As more consumers turn to social media for news, traditional outlets have had to compete for attention by producing more sensationalist or clickbait content, often at the expense of in-depth reporting.

Algorithm-Driven Echo Chambers: Social media platforms use algorithms to personalize news feeds, showing users content based on their preferences and past behaviors. While this personalization enhances user experience, it also creates "echo chambers," where users are primarily exposed to information that aligns with their existing beliefs.

Lack of Editorial Oversight and Accountability: Traditional media operates within a framework of accountability, adhering to ethical guidelines, editorial oversight, and journalistic standards. Social

media, however, lacks these mechanisms, making it difficult to regulate the quality and accuracy of news content.

Decline in Media Literacy: As the media landscape becomes more complex with the rise of user-generated content, there is an increasing need for media literacy skills that enable individuals to critically analyze the news they consume.

Decreased Public Trust in Media: As the media landscape becomes more fragmented, public trust in the media has diminished. Traditional media, though still generally more trusted than social media, has seen a decline in credibility due to the perception of bias, sensationalism, and corporate influence.

Fragmentation of the Public Sphere: Traditional media historically served as a unifying force in society, providing a common set of facts and information. In contrast, social media fragments the public sphere, as different groups consume entirely different sets of news and narratives based on their interests and beliefs.

Reforms of Social Media and Traditional Media:

In response to the challenges posed by the shift from traditional media to social media, reforms are necessary to protect the integrity of journalism, combat misinformation, and ensure that media continues to play its vital role in a functioning democracy. These reforms should target both media platforms and societal factors such as media literacy and accountability.

Strengthening Media Literacy Programs: Improving media literacy is one of the most important reforms to combat the spread of misinformation and fake news. Media literacy programs should be integrated into school curriculums and public campaigns to teach individuals how to critically evaluate information, differentiate between credible and false sources, and understand how media influences public opinion.

Regulation and Accountability for Social Media Platforms: As social media becomes a key source of news, platforms must be held accountable for the content they host, especially when it comes to misinformation and harmful content. Governments should introduce regulations that require platforms to take more responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of the information shared on their platforms while respecting freedom of speech.

Supporting Quality Journalism: To counter the decline in revenue for traditional media, which has affected the quality of journalism, there must be reforms to support investigative reporting and ensure that media organizations can continue to operate sustainably. Governments, philanthropic organizations, and private companies should collaborate to support quality journalism.

Developing Misinformation and Disinformation Laws: Governments should consider adopting or updating laws to address the specific threat of misinformation and disinformation, especially during elections and other critical democratic processes. While these laws should be crafted carefully to avoid infringing on free speech, they are necessary to protect public discourse from harmful falsehoods.

Promoting Diversity of Voices in Media: Both social media and traditional media need to promote diversity in the voices they amplify. The rise of social media has led to echo chambers, where users are often exposed to a narrow range of perspectives. Traditional media, historically controlled by a few large corporations, can also fail to represent diverse voices. Ensuring a plurality of perspectives is essential to a healthy public discourse.

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Enhancing Collaboration Between Traditional and social media: Collaboration between traditional and social media platforms could enhance the quality and reach of news reporting. Traditional media organizations should embrace social media as a means of distribution, while social media platforms should actively partner with credible news organizations to combat misinformation and promote high-quality journalism.

Conclusion:

The media landscape today is a complex mix of traditional and digital platforms, each with distinct strengths and weaknesses. The shift from traditional media to social media between 2008 and 2023 has transformed how people consume news, shaping public opinion, journalism, and democratic processes. Social media's democratization of information has empowered citizen journalists and made news more accessible, but it has also introduced challenges like misinformation and the decline of investigative journalism. Understanding these key principles and facts is crucial for navigating the future of news consumption and ensuring that the media continues to serve as a reliable pillar of democracy. Traditional media offers reliability, professionalism, and controlled content, while modern digital media provides speed, interactivity, and democratized content creation. Together, they shape public discourse and influence the flow of information in unprecedented ways. A balanced media ecosystem draws on the strengths of both to inform and engage audiences effectively. The shift from traditional media to social media has brought about significant challenges that affect journalism, public trust, and the integrity of democratic processes. These reforms will help ensure that media continues to serve as a reliable pillar of democracy, enabling citizens to access accurate, diverse, and trustworthy information. By balancing freedom of speech with the need for responsible media practices, these reforms can help shape a healthier media landscape for the future.

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