A Pew Research Center report says the internet is over three times more important as a news-learning platform for young adults than traditional media. USHA M. RODRIGUES portrays the changing media landscape in a media research review.

The rise of social media as a significant source of news at the expense of mainstream news media continues to be reinforced by recent trends. According to a Pew Research Center report, “those aged 18-29 are much more likely than older adults to have heard a lot about the “Kony 2012” video and to have learned about it through social media than traditional news sources” (Pew Internet 2012). The internet is over three times more important as a news-learning platform for young adults than traditional media such as television, newspapers, and radio. The Pew Research Center’s research, based on phone (landline and mobile) interviews conducted between March 9 and 11, 2012, with 487 respondents in the USA, shows that younger adults were more than twice as likely as older adults to have watched the video itself on YouTube or Vimeo.

This trend continues to emphasise a need to understand how the new media ecology is working, and how mainstream (public and commercial) news media can incorporate, adapt, and renovate themselves to survive a little more than as “a secondary source” of information and communication in today’s networked world. This research review provides a glimpse of scholarly work in this area with a view to lay a foundation for further empirical research.

A dictionary entry defines social media as forms of electronic communication (as web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, messages, and other content such as videos. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.” Here, Web 2.0 is defined as the platform for the evolution of social media, whereas the user-generated content is seen as the sum of all different ways in which people make use of social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) use theories in the field of media research and social processes to isolate two main features in social media sites to categorise them according to their degree of “social presence”, which can be defined as the acoustic, visual and physical contact that can be achieved between two communication partners; and as the degree of media richness they possess (the amount of information they allow to be transmitted in a given time interval). Thus, collaborative projects such as Wikipedia are classified lower on the scale of social presence and media richness, than Facebook and
content communities such as YouTube which allow for sharing of text, pictures, videos, and other forms of media. The Virtual game and social worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft, Second Life), which try to replicate all dimensions of face-to-face interactions in a virtual environment are on the highest scale of media richness (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

According to Flew (2008, p. 17), social networking media is a commonly used alternative term to Web 2.0. He says Web 2.0 has embedded within it a range of the features including a scope for participation, interactivity, collaborative learning, and social networking. Some of the fastest growing Web 2.0 websites include Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, and aggregated weblog sites such as Blogger and Technocrati. The core principles of these sites and programmes include many-to-many connectivity; simple and easy-to-use design; and decentralised control; supporting harnessing of collective intelligence – that is the quality of participation increases as the number of people participating in the network increases (Flew 2008, p. 17).

The role of technology or the medium in social media participation can be traced back to Marshall McLuhan’s thesis (Understanding Media 1964), where he stresses how media influence not only what participants think but how they think. McLuhan’s theory of communications media - described in a phrase “the medium is the message” – says that technologies extend human capacities. “The personal and social consequences of any medium – that is of any extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology” (McLuhan 1964, p. 23). Flew (2008, p. 47) says for McLuhan, the key to understanding electronic culture is not the technologies themselves, nor is their content or alleged “effects”, but rather in the ways in which they change the environment in which humans act or interact with each other. McLuhan’s technological determinism is criticised by Raymond Williams and others, who believe that social, cultural, economic, and political forces (Williams 1974, p. 131) shape technologies.

Meanwhile, Henry Jenkins in Convergence Culture – Where Old and New Media Collide (2006, 2008) explores the relationship between three concepts: media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence. According to him, media convergence is “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experience they want” (Jenkins 2008, p. 2). To Jenkins, “convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content” (2008, p. 3). He describes the term participatory culture as: “rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to new set of rules that none of us fully understand” (Jenkins 2008, p. 3).

According to Mark Deuze (2008: 78) in Media Work, “the emerging new media ecosystem inspires and is inspired by networks of more or less collaborative end-users – what Von Hippel (2005) calls “user-innovation communities” operating in a media ecosystem that Benkler (2006) describes as “commons-based peer production.” Deuze says:
Indeed, the social trends and developments emerging in the second half of the 20th century as outlined earlier – individualisation, globalisation, hypercapitalism, and the rise of the network society – are implicated in people's increasingly participatory media use, as well in the gradual embrace of the consumer as co-creator of content by media firms. (2008, p. 79-80)

John Hartley notes how news must be seen as “the primary sense-making practice of modernity” (1996, p. 32), contributing to a view of journalism as essential to constituting and maintaining social order and democracy itself. Modern journalism has consistently defined and legitimized itself as such, claiming to adhere to a social responsibility of public service regarding the democratic state, “informing citizens in a way that enables them to act as citizens” (Costera Meijer 2001, p. 13).

Therefore, for a profession so central to society’s sense of itself, it is of crucial importance to understand the influences of changing labour conditions, professional cultures, and the appropriation of technologies on the nature of work in journalism (Deuze 2008, p. 142). In the Project for Excellence in Journalism's *State of the Media 2006* report researchers signalled “a seismic transformation in what and how people learn about the world around them. Power is moving away from journalists as gatekeepers over what the public knows. Citizens are assuming a more active role as assemblers, editors, and even creators of their own news” (Journalism.org 2005).

World Association of Newspapers, in a strategy report entitled *New Editorial Concepts*, explores ways in which affiliated news companies are coming to terms with the changing media landscape. The report notes these trends:

- Explosion of participative journalism or community generated content;
- The rise of audience research by media companies to learn new patterns of media usage;
- The proliferation of personalized news delivered online and on mobile devices;
- The reorganisation of newsrooms optimized for audience focus;
- The development of new forms of storytelling geared toward new audiences and new channels;
- The growth of audience-focused news judgement and multimedia news judgement.

Deuze notes that “Journalists today enter a workforce that is built on the heyday of the 20th century era of omnipresent mass media, but that is expected to perform in a contemporary news ecology where individualisation, globalisation, and the pervasive role of corresponding networked technologies challenge all the assumptions traditional newsmaking is based upon” (2008, p. 170).

According to Nico Carpentier in *Media and Participation: A Site of Ideological Democratic Struggle* (2011), the debates in new media and participation contain a wide variety of articulations of the key concepts of access, interaction, and participation.
Ordinary users are seen to be enabled (or empowered) to avoid the mediating role of the “old” media organisations, and publish their material (almost) directly on the web. These novel practices have affected discussions over access and participation in the fundamental way. In a first (pre-web 2.0) phase, the two key signifiers of access and interaction gained dominance, although participation did not (completely) vanish from the theoretical scene. Later, the concept of participation made a remarkable comeback to reach a prominent position in the 2000s. (Carpentier 2011, p. 113)

In the early phase of pre-web 2.0, participation was often articulated within institutionalised politics. “Participation and institutionalised politics were frequently seen as unidirectional instruments for increasing civil participation in the latter, which placed them more closely to the minimalist models.” At the end of the 1990s, as web 2.0 technologies came into existence, the concepts of participation and democracy became more explicitly articulated within the realm of new media, allowing for more discursive space for the maximalist versions of participation (Carpentier 2011, p. 118).

In the ensuing future, there is a need to examine how civil society is using new media technologies to advance its issues and movements via participatory journalism activities, and understand how mainstream news media can survive and thrive in this shift towards many-to-many communication.

References:


