

Mobile social media and media organizations, 2012-2015

Project summary

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The aim in the research project was to examine the role of social media in media organizations' operations, particularly in a situation where the consumption and production of social media is becoming increasingly mobile. The projects consisted of two work packages.

The first work package focused on the utilization of social media by media organizations. In the work package, it was studied how Finnish and foreign media organizations take advantage of social media in the production and distribution of their content, as well as in engaging the audience, in both their own online services and popular social media sites. A second theme in the work package concentrated on the changes that the emergence of social media presents to media organizations' operational practices.

The second work package looked at digital and mobile media from the perspective of media organizations. The first part in the work package focused on how smart phones and other mobile media devices are used for consuming and producing media content. For studying this, an extensive quantitative survey was conducted in Finland. The other part of the work package consisted of a study on how Japanese newspaper organizations have engaged in the digital transition toward mobile, online platforms.

Theoretically the project was based on concepts describing the active role of the audience. The main concept was user-distributed content (UDC), which describes the role of horizontal, intra-audience connections in disseminating media content; the audience takes part in the distribution processes by enclosing the content with social relations.

Results of the project

1. The Convergence of News Media and Social Networks

The focus of the subproject was both on the news media's internal use (social plugins) and external use (Facebook pages, Twitter accounts) of social media tools and platforms in content distribution. The subproject drew on the examination of twenty news media in eight countries. The data consisted of almost 84,000 news items and the communicative activity surrounding them. The three main findings of the study were the following: (1) the audience shares online news content actively by using social plugins, (2) the activity of the news media in social media (especially on Facebook and Twitter) impacts the activity of the audience, and (3) the news media

are more active on Twitter than on Facebook, despite the fact that the audience is often more active on Facebook. The study suggests that practices related to UDC should be more strongly incorporated into the management strategies of news media as peer-communication among the audience has a growing significance in the consumption and distribution of online media content.

2. The use of social media and mobile devices, and sharing of media contents

The aim of this subproject was to analyze the use of social media and mobile devices, and the sharing of media contents. A survey was implemented that focused on the use of social media platforms and mobile devices in the consumption, production and distribution of online media content. The survey was carried out in Finland with 1081 respondents in 2012.

According to survey, Internet use in Finland is still largely based on laptop and desktop computers. A little less than half of the respondents indicated that they use the Internet with a mobile device (smartphone or tablet). Most distributed content types are online news, photographs and newspaper content. There are no major differences in the Internet use between mobile internet users and non-mobile users. The main difference is that mobile Internet users are more active in UDC than non-users of mobile Internet. The respondents' attitudes also show that they are not very eager to participate in news media practices. Young respondents are more ready to participate and share media contents.

3. The role of the social media in editorial practices

In the subproject, a strong focus was on the role of audience communities in media work. In studying this, collaboration was made with the project "Creative leadership in media management: Rethinking organizational creativity in media firms from communicative and collaborative perspectives", directed by Nando Malmelin and funded by the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation. The conclusion was that the audience community can have wide-ranging strategic significance and implications for media work and media brands. In particular, observing and connecting with the audience community can help journalists acquire deeper knowledge and understanding of the audience, as well as strengthen commitment and engagement among the audience with the media brand. As a consequence of collaborating with the audience community, new journalistic roles and tasks are emerging.

4. The digital transition in Japanese newspapers

Mikko Villi worked for a period of nine months as an international fellow at the University of Tokyo in 2012-13. In the subproject, the main interest was on the digital transition in Japanese

newspapers. It was examined by analyzing results from a qualitative in-depth interview study with representatives from the Japanese national newspapers. By digital transition we refer to the shift to publishing content on digital platforms – in this case the shift from print to online and mobile media. The conclusion based on the empirical analysis was that for the Japanese newspapers the most essential approach in coping with the digital transition is protecting the printed paper and treating the digital platforms as supplementary.