
Project Concept
FPCJ 45th Anniversary Webinar (International Symposium)
**The Future of Media: Competition and Coexistence Between Social Media
and News Organizations**
–What Issues Has the Pandemic Brought to the Forefront?

Issues

In addition to news organizations, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have grown to fill a major role as a source of information and communication for the public.

With the spread of social media, governments, businesses, and individuals can present their viewpoints and the information they want to communicate in real time, without using news organizations as a middleman. Social media has also become an indispensable tool for social movements fighting against racism or for gender equality, calling for action on climate change, or for grassroots democracy movements in authoritarian countries where there are limits on freedom of speech and of the press.

Social media has also become indispensable to news organizations. They act as secondary sources reporting information appearing on social media, and cover trends on social media as “public opinion.” Video and images captured by members of the public are also used for reporting on disasters, accidents, and crimes. The news released by media organizations is also constantly being watched by social media users, including experts and people who that news is about, and if any mistakes are made there are calls for corrections and retractions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also presented a number of challenges to news organizations. It has been extremely difficult for news organizations to constantly be accurate in reporting on the nature of this novel virus which continues to mutate, on the effectiveness and safety of newly developed vaccines, and on what is true and what is misinformation. In an emergency situation such as this, it only makes sense to prioritize quickly communicating information and messages from the government and public agencies. When faced with a pandemic, the media’s role as a watchdog monitoring the government and ensuring accountability for the information the government is releasing can become difficult, with a tendency to be compliant with the government. This can become a factor in people distrusting the media, and criticism of news organizations can also be seen on social media. There are those who are questioning the reliability of the information released by news organizations.

At the same time, on social media, where there is a lack of factchecking or self-restraint, there are countless opinions from various experts along with blunt statements from the public. The lack of checking has led to social media becoming a hotbed for anonymous irresponsible extreme arguments, abuse, lies, and fake news. When it comes to vaccines, there are unsubstantiated claims about everything from family members dying immediately after getting vaccinated, to side effects such as becoming sterile or having your genome rewritten. It has been suggested that these claims on social media are one reason behind anti-vax sentiment, and their influence cannot be ignored.

Objective

What role should traditional news organizations (groups of professional journalists) play with governments, businesses, specialists and individuals able to express themselves on social media, in what is becoming a transparent fashion? By reexamining the differences between the role of news organizations and social media through the lens of issues brought to the forefront by the pandemic, the strengths of news organizations and the path they should take moving forward may become clear.

This symposium, with the issues mentioned above as a foundation along with the keynote speeches made by experts in journalism and social media, will look to the future of the news media through discussions between journalists from Europe, the US, and Asia.

Points of Discussion

First Session

(Discussion with everyone, based off the keynote speech by the journalism researcher at the beginning)

What issues and challenges are traditional news organizations facing with the rise of social media? How can they improve themselves in response? In particular, how can news organizations respond to people's distrust of the media, and criticisms from social media regarding their reporting on measures to deal with COVID-19 (such as claims that they are reporting information from the government uncritically, without examining what is true and what is false regarding the effectiveness and safety of newly developed vaccines)? Trust in the information released by news organizations has been brought into question.

Second Session

(Discussion with everyone, based off the keynote speech by the social media researcher at the beginning)

Problems with social media—Anonymity allowing for the spread of irresponsible extreme arguments, abuse, unconfirmed information, lies, and fake news, and how social media has become a hotbed for these issues. In particular, during the pandemic it has been noted that baseless claims about vaccine side effects on social media has led to increased anti-vax sentiment. Is there anything news organizations can do about this situation?

Concluding Session

What role should traditional news organizations (groups of professional journalists) play, and what capabilities should they be expected to have, with governments, businesses, specialists and individuals able to express themselves on social media, in what is becoming a transparent fashion? By reexamining the differences between the role of news organizations and social media through the lens of issues brought to the forefront by the pandemic, the strengths of news organizations and the path they should take moving forward may become clear.

(What improvements should news organizations make in how they communicate information, considering the psychology that has led people under the stress of the pandemic, faced with uncertainty and loneliness, to believe extreme claims without question?)