

# *Impact of Journalists' Reliance on Social Media for News Writing and Reporting*

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**Abstract:** The journalism professionals are being required to adjust their information sources to include the social media platform as a source of information. However, there have been observed changes in the news quality due to the issues of reliability and authenticity of information displayed on the social media channel. Fake news makes journalists in general prone to poor performance. Journalists have, thus been in a fix on whether to use the information gathered in the internet, particularly social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, among others. Lack of proper proof is thus an issue of concern to the training journalists and those already in the field. This research project aims at pointing out the impact of journalist's students' reliance on social media for news writing and reporting.

## **1. Introduction**

The 'Social Media' phenomenon has become a widespread application in the internet use over the last decades. The primary contribution of the increased social media growth is the increased access of smart phones, tablets, PCs, and the internet. In the media world, the wave of social media has been felt with the billions of sources of information applied to relay information among acquaintances with the following in the complex cyberspace. Social media and user-generated content (UGC) information platforms are not replacing journalism but has become essential in creating an extra layer of information and diverse opinion thus creating a two-way and interactive communication platform. With the new culture of connection and relationship online, the traditional journalism has been impacted with changes in attitudes among consumers. The increased support of democratization of knowledge and information in the twenty first century has changes the audience liberty from the hegemony of traditional media.

## **2. Research Question & Research Objectives**

The main research question that will drive in studying the research objectives is:

*What is the impact of Journalists reliance on the social media on news reporting and writing?*

The research objectives for the study are:

- (1) To analyze the effects of social media content on journalism students in news writing
- (2) To review the impact of social media manipulation on the social, psychological and emotional performance of journalism students.

### 3. Literature Review

With the increasing building and destructive forces that the internet has contributed, scholars have intensely concentrated on the use of social media as a communication channel. However, there are a few research studies that have particularly focused on how journalism students are held in a dilemma on what type of information to use from the social media platform and what not to include in their news reporting and writing. In a research by Fitzpatrick [1], fake news have largely affected journalism field making journalism becoming highly associated with mistrust and inaccuracies issues. The most prevalent platforms in spreading fake news are Facebook and Twitter which have the largest number of subscribers in the social media platform. Students doing journalism are not inevitable manipulation of information. In a research focusing on students, Kaya and Bicen[2] report that self-confidence and reporting techniques have been influenced by the social media wave which creates a chance of consultancy. However, with the increasing rate of fake news, the research has not provided the impacts presented by the issue. To address to the issue of fake news on social media, Marchi [3], and Lai et al. [4] points out that the exceeding fake news spread on social media has increased the existential challenge to journalists and journalism students dealing with their audience losing faith in the quality of news delivered.

According to a review by Herrera-Damas [5], there have been major mainstreams media from all over the world resulting to regulating the behavior of journalists as far as reliance on social media concerns. Journalism schools are cautiously integrating social media reporting in to their journalism curriculum due to its high prevalence and uncontrollable aspect of gathering, receiving, and reporting information. According to Bor[6]. there are both opportunities and challenges for learning engagement of social media in career development of journalists. The emerging forms of communication on social media have threatened to damage credibility of the journalism institutions due to lack of proper guidelines on the social media policies. Recurring policies and guidelines are highlighted by some of the leading media houses such as the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, The Guardian among others indicate that there are yet standardized procedures to protect journalists from being exposed to fake and inaccurate news on the social media platform.

Researchers have indulged in studies to identify why the social media has become highly prevalent is it's the instant sharing of news among friends and followers on a media platform [7]. According to Newman [8], social media is being preferred to other forms of traditional news organizations. With the ability of social media to break the time limit for breaking news, it has outperformed news sites in terms of audience engagement thus creating an environment that constitutes a free communication platform. In a similar discovery by Sacco and Bossio[9], journalists have faced several challenges on filtering what to include and present in newsroom. As students training to be in future newsroom, the issue of

whether there is a reviewed system to monitor the type of content used in news writing has been challenged by social media interference. A social-media enabled newsroom has the potential of causing conflicts due to regulation of social media use in newsrooms and how various personnel respond to them. The journalism culture is thus being slowly eroded by the social media and without

proper regulations, it is expected that there will be tensions on the role students pursuing journalism on the quality of information published or anchored[10]. From the literature review, there is need for further analysis on how journalists, particularly those who are still on training perceive the role of social media in the quality of information. The research gap is thus attempted to be filled in this research by trying to answer the research question in the most relevant way

#### **4. Method**

The research study adopts a qualitative research method to collect data from the participants. The participants in this study are students in journalism profession who act as a sample of the entire journalism population, thus are used to give information in line with the study objectives.

Qualitative research study is primarily interested on comprehending the meaning people have constructed based on their personal views on a given concept. To collect data, in-depth interviewing technique will be used. The method is chosen because it provides more elaborated answers and honest opinions of the participants. Also, it allows a researcher to explore the opinions of others beyond the point of confinement of the researcher allowing a more conclusive feedback to be given on the results. A semi-structured interview is conducted among the participants pursuing journalism. The semi-structured interview provides the participants with more freedom to the participants to express their views based on their true feelings thus eliminating chances of biasness.

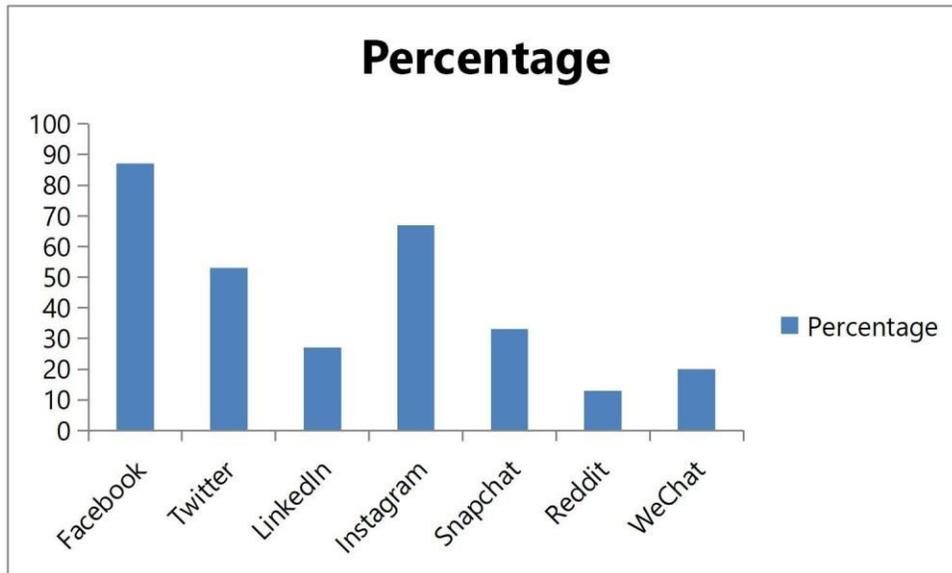
To complete the study, 15 journalism students at Monash University, School of Media Studies are randomly selected to participate in the interview process. All these students are at least in their third year of study thus have exposure to field work on how social media operates and influences the kind of stories to be included in the traditional form of communications. As a result, the participants act as perfect representatives of journalists in a real world scenario thus helping in answering the research question of ‘What is the impact of Journalists reliance on the social media on news reporting and writing?’

#### **5. Findings**

The following is the data collected from the questionnaires from the 15 participants engaged in the research study. From the questionnaire, a set of 8 questions were asked to seek participants’ opinions on their perception of social media usage in news writing and reporting in their journalism careers.

##### **5.1 Question (1): Do You Have Any Social Media Account (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, Wechat Etc.)? If Yes, List in Which Platforms You Are Active.**

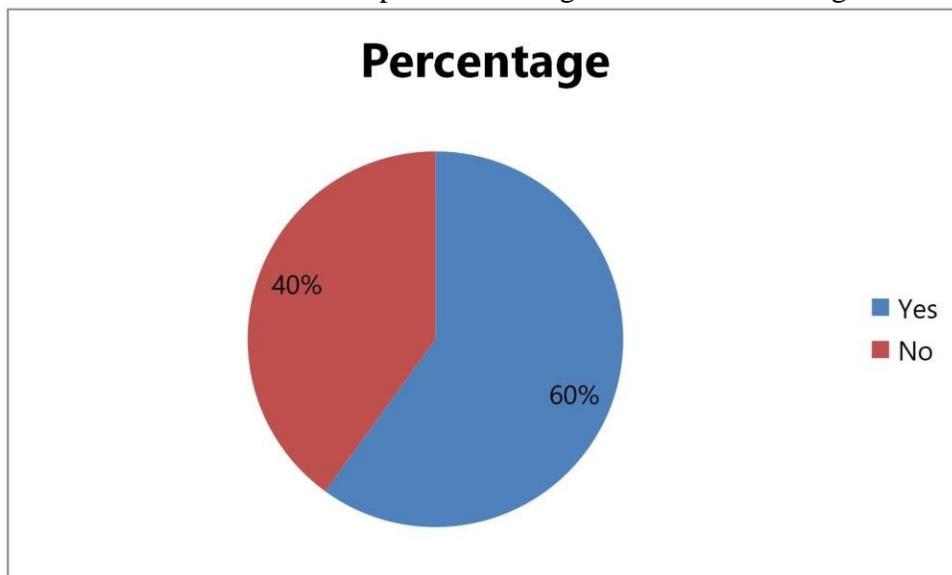
From the responses, all the participants have at least are active in one of the listed social media accounts. 13 out of the 15 respondents are active users of Facebook, 8 are active in Twitter, 4 at LinkedIn, 10 in Instagram, 5 in Snapchat, 2 on Reddit, and 3 in WeChat. The graph below summarizes the active rate in percentage in the main social media platforms for the participants.



*Fig.1 1: Percentage of Journalism Students Active in Different Social Media Platform*

## 5.2 Question (2): Do You Use Social Media Platforms to Search for Information? Do You Trust the Information That You Gather from Social Media?

All of the respondents acknowledge using social media platforms to gather information. Based on their trust on the information they gather, 6 out of 15 respondents say that they trust the information gathered on social media. However, majority of the respondents (60%) do not fully trust the information gathered on their social media platforms. have similar opinions on the question. Therefore, with 40% acknowledging that they can use information from social media as a primary source of information makes them prone to falling victims of anchoring fake news.



*Fig.2 : Respondents Who Trust Social Media as Primary Source of Information*

**5.3 Question (3): in Which Situations Do You Use the Information Gathered from Social Media Platforms to Write Inclusive News?**

As potential journalists in the media, all of the respondents admit unanimously that they have used social media for particular information to write content in their Journalism club publications. A group of 12 respondents have used information when there are multiple sources of information on the same content. If information has been released on public figures multiple accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, then these 12 respondents agree to be convinced on validity of the information for publication. However, 3 respondents have quit using the information for publication if they have no adequate proof of the occurrence of the information. Table 1 illustrates the responses given.

*Table 1 : Responses On Respondents Use of Social Media for Writing News*

Using Social media platforms to write inclusive news (12 respondents)	Do not use social media to write inclusive news (3 respondents)
<input type="checkbox"/> If there are more than two similar reporting in different social media channels <input type="checkbox"/> If there is some form of proof that the situation is real <input type="checkbox"/> If the parties concerned responds to claims <input type="checkbox"/> When public images attest to the situation <input type="checkbox"/> If information is rendered by a trusted mutual friend <input type="checkbox"/> If the information is given by a whistleblower who wants to meet <input type="checkbox"/> If I have virtual mutual connection with the source of information <input type="checkbox"/> When a friend shares the information <input type="checkbox"/> If I find the information in more than one social media sites <input type="checkbox"/> If it is about a celeb who has a high social media follower <input type="checkbox"/> If personal information is given by the actual victim <input type="checkbox"/> If other media houses are covering on the topic	<input type="checkbox"/> I once wrote a story based on fake news from Facebook that I wouldn't repeat that again <input type="checkbox"/> I fear being under scrutiny for ruining someone's life based on unreliable source of information from social media <input type="checkbox"/> I do not fully trust social media for genuine and reliable news.

**5.4 Question(4): Have You Ever Reported or Written News by Using Information from a Social Media and Then It Turned out to Be Fake News? What Was the Reaction of the Audience?**

Only 7 participants responded to this question. Out of the 7, 6 respondents (86%) acknowledged having ever used fake information in their journalism roles. From their different responses, their uniting point is that there was decrease in trust with several audiences recognizing on the unreliability of social media information for news writing in the traditional journalism settings. The other one respondent admits to great intimidation she faced after audiences knew that the information was fake.

**5.5 Question (5): Are You Aware of Any Social Media Policies Governing Publication of Information Gathered on Social Media?**

Only 8 of the respondents admit of their awareness of the several policies that are universally used to govern the extent of using social media information for news writing and reporting. 7 out of 15

respondents (47%) are not aware of even one policy that applies when using social media intelligence in formal news reporting.

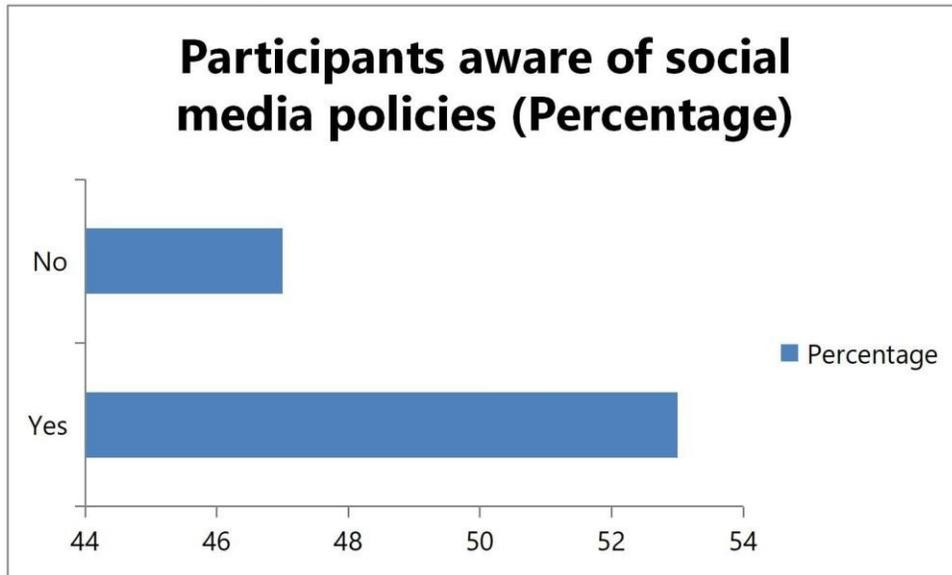


Fig.3 : Participants Aware of Social Media Policie

### 5.6 Question (6): Are You Trained on What Strategies to Use to Scrutinize Whether the Information in Social Media is Genuine?

According to 11 of the 15 participants, they have been prepared on approaches to take to scrutinize on the strengths and weaknesses of using social media news for news reporting. However, 4 of the respondents says that their journalism training has not exposed them to strategic measures to deal with fake news on social media in their news reporting thus feel that they are likely to fall victims of using fake news in reporting news.

### 5.7 Question(7): in Your Opinion, How Do Social Media Impact the Way You Receive, Gather and Distribute News?

From the results of the questionnaire, three out of the fifteen respondents gave contradicting opinions as compared to others. The three acknowledges that social media impacts their journalism careers by increasing their area of focus to receive, gather, and distribute news. One respondent responds that social media does reduce cost and time for gathering data. However, the other 12 associates social media with a disruptive and unreliable platform of receiving, gathering, and distributing news.

### 5.8 Question (8): Do You Think Social Media Has Affected the Ethics of Journalism?

10 of the respondents feel that social media has miserably changed the news gathering and reporting processing making many journalists prone to unethical practices. However, 5 respondents feel that social media is an enlightening platform giving journalists a chance to use their ethical principles in gathering, and reporting news.

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1 Prevalence of Social Media among Journalism Students Interaction**

The prevalence of social media as a platform of gathering, receiving and reporting news is undeniably high. From the findings, all of the respondents have at least one social media channel where they gather information. Just like addressed by Bor[6], it is impossible for journalism institutions to ignore social media as an important source of information that their students are applying. Finding ways to integrate social media reporting is thus considered an essential part of journalism curriculum.

### **6.2 Effect of Social Media on Journalism Students News Writing**

#### **6.2.1 Trust Issues**

Reliability of the information gathered on social media is considered as a major factor influencing on which content a journalist use in news reporting. From question 2, the responses reflect that there are trust issues resulting from use of social media information. With recent cases of fake news as reported by Fitzpatrick [1], journalism students are aware of the mistrust issues that can result from excessive reliance on social media. Despite being a fast information gathering machine, social media is spreading all kinds of news without policies present to distinguish between fake and real news in the short span of time the information takes to spread. This asserts to Marchi [3]and Lai et al. [4] claims that the increasing spread of fake news has affected journalists' career development due to audiences continuously losing faith on journalists that over depend on social media for news reporting.

#### **6.2.2 Viral News Accuracy**

Most of the participants engaged in the study indicate that the extent of information being viral as a key factor influencing decision in using social media content in news reporting and writing. Social media news are associated with a faster spread and with a viral share, journalists who want to reach more audience use this information to get greater attention. However, there are challenges of assessing on whether the news are valid and can be relied upon. Most of the respondents use social media information if it has been used by several other platforms and has been used by public figures. Just like asserted by Kaya and Bicen[2], the self-reliance and consultancy aspects determine the extent of using social media information for most of the students that are aware of the policies surrounding social media use. The social media users are becoming aware that the social media platform is not the most appropriate channel to gain and find news on some sensitive issues due to the likelihood of information being distorted.

#### **6.2.3 Awareness of Policies**

Journalism institutions are held responsible of being the foundation of making journalists aware of the existing policies and guidelines on the use of social media content for news reporting. According to the results of the study, it is clear that journalism students are yet to have a full disclosure of the policies that determine the extent of social media news reporting. Ellonen et

al.[10]and Bor [6] major concerns on tensions created by unlawful use of policies and guidelines of social media content reporting is considered to be a major barrier to news reporting for the analyzed group. As a result, this is considered to have a major impact on the ways information is gathered, disseminated, and addressed in journalism profession. It is for this reason that many journalists find themselves intertwined in certain ethical dilemmas which are likely to affect their contributions in the media industry. From the results of the study, it is evident that journalism schools have to improve on their efforts in making sure that the policies are adjusted to reduce tensions involved in social media reporting as addressed by Sacco and Bossio [9].

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been established that there are both positive and negative impacts of using social media on the quality of news reported. All of the respondents, who represent journalism students, are users of social media and have relied on the platforms to access information. As part of their career development, only a few are aware of the existing policies and guidelines on how to use social media content in news reporting. It is for this reason that there have been widespread of fake news reducing the trustworthiness of journalists by their audiences. Also, there have been issues of inaccuracies impacting on the provided ethical principles in journalism. As a way of controlling the widespread of fake news, it is increasingly becoming important for journalism institutions to be actively involved in educating their students on the issues of social media reliance on news reporting. Another factor to consider is education of journalism students to balance the social media news gathering platform with the traditional journalism channels. This will help students to take responsibility in spreading authentic information as well as build the correct perception on social media news.

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