Politics and the media

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**Change in Media and Politics Since 1990**

Since the early days of print and television media speed has been the key to success. Whomever could report the news the fastest, with the most accuracy was the most successful.In the last two decades this axiom has changed, now the most important thing in media is quantity, and brand penetration. In this age of new media, companies have to compete for the attention of their viewers

The early days of new media came about with the advent of cable Television. By the early 1990’s 24 hour news media was beginning to become a reality. CNN would be the first all-news network and would lead to a culture of new now. Today CNN, MSNBC,FOX NEWS, HLN, Headline prime and a dozen other news channel run around the clock constantly piping news to a hungry populous. These networks are capable of taking video from halfway around the world and putting it on TV just moments later. In contrast when the Watergate scandal broke, it took weeks for all of the facts to be collected and for major news networks to air stories. When revolution happened overnight it Tunisia, the next morning’s news carried live images of the revolution. The speed of politics has also grown as have the strategies that politicians use to connect to people. The internet has become a powerful vessel for change, and as the 2008 presidential election showed a grass roots campaign can be run extremely successfully on the internet.

Americans love of having its media served up quickly and with a side of opinion began when CNN was founded 1980. CNN was the first ever 24 hour news network. Ted Turner gambled on the idea that people would want to tune in to news at all times during the day and not just for the evening news. (historyofmedia) His gamble was successful, as the first major incident for CNN occurred in 1986, when CNN was able to cover the Challenger disaster exclusively while other news station waited to push out special broadcasts. CNN was covering the launch live, as it happened and was carrying the live feed when the challenger exploded. This was not the first incidence of a live broadcast of a national tragedy as it happened (Kennedy assassination) but it was the first time that a dedicated news network had carried such story live as it was happening. The iconic line delivered live on CNN by NASA controllers “Flight controllers here looking very carefully at the situation, obviously a major malfunction” signaled that the age of live digital media events had begun. This was the beginning of the age of 24/7 media. CNN had the broadcast as it happened but local news station was able to pick up the feed quickly. Six minutes later CBS aired a special report on the shuttle disaster. Even that 6 minute delay by today’s standard was too long. Today we would expect that coverage would happen as it happened.

Another incident, the 2003 Columbia space shuttle exploded upon reentry to the atmosphere. Within minutes, video that had been shot by the public was sent in to MSNBC, processed and received, and was put on air. Fox affiliate KXAX confirmed within two minutes of the loss of contact with the shuttle at 8am that several dozen people had heard large explosions and by 8:20 CST the feed had been picked up and the news channels were airing live reports on the disaster.

In 1996 Fox News launched as the second 24 hour news network. This network was less successful than Ted Turner’s CNN, but meant that the 24 hour news media was growing and not just a passing fad.

Seeing the success of CNN, Rupert Murdock, then CEO of an Australian media conglomerate, thought that he would also try his hand at the 24 hour TV news game. (Wikipedia) Incidents like the shuttle explosion, terror attacks and various other incidents have given significant responsibility to these media outlets as a public warning system. These incidents caused a skyrocket in cable news viewership, and cemented the idea of 24 hour news.

As a result of the demands of the media now culture media delivery has escalated on a never before seen scale. It comes faster and there is more of it. This speed makes the world into a constantly connected media centric place. Now any person that has a camera phone can take video of news as it happens and then feed it to a network. That video can then be processed and streamed live on the Internet for everyone to see, either as it happens or shortly after the event. In the past a camera crew would have had to be dispatched and then arrive on the scene, take the video, then return to the studio to edit that tape, which would then be placed on the news that evening or the next morning.

Blogs and the internet are ad supported and dominate the media scene today. The primary motive for these sites is just to gain as much money and publicity as possible and as fast as possible. Politics too has been affected. Most recently social media has been a catalyst for revolution in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.

Has this great increase in speed made things better or worse? In order to answer that we must weigh several factors. First news is no longer delivered by trained experienced news people, but rather it is delivered by the person on the street. This speedy delivery has greatly increased the quantity of media that is available to be consumed, but has it consequently has decreased quality. Blogs are unedited and may in the general public fail to realize this.

The primary malfeasant in this world of unchecked media is the internet. But to understand the internet first a brief history of it must be recounted. The internet was created in the early 1980’s but was not popularized until the middle 1990’s. The internet began as a series of computers sharing research data, but in the early 1990’s it began to expand. In 1993 CERN hosted the world’s first web server, and by 1995 the first home computers had web browsers. (wikipedia) By the year 2000, many newspapers had begun to see a shift where more of their revenue was based on ad-supported web content then their daily subscribers. As the next decade dawned, mobile computing devices like the I-pad, and other tablets made the delivery of digital media portable and fast. With the advent of mobile broadband services in the US, the revolution to mobile media would seem to be complete.

Most of the publications that have found success on the internet already have an established print presence. Some that have been successful online ventures of existing media include the Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition, a subscription-based version of the leading business newspaper and ESPN.com, an extension of the sports cable channel. There are also examples of online only publications that have found success with niche markets, such as CNET and Patch.com. CNET is dedicated to electronics and Patch.com is dedicated to local news. Thousands of daily newspapers put all or part of their content on the web. (Advertising age)

The effect is so severe that journalism schools have begun in the new millennium to teach programs in convergence journalism, which is a program that teaches that media can go to more than one medium, like the web and a print source. Traditional print journalism programs are essentially extinct in the new media. (wikipeida)

Almost all print media now has a significant web presence and many print two or three times more stories on their websites than in their physical editions. Again since access to the web site is almost always free, the tradeoff is the necessary support of ads and sponsors. As usage of wireless devices like cellphones and Tablet PCs continues to rise and mobile broadband reaches more people, the logical conclusion would seem to be that eventually everyone, everywhere, will be connected wirelessly to everyone and everything else. This idea is taken to the extreme in cities like Chicago which blanket the entire city with broadband wireless signals for access to the public. (Clearchannel)

One example of how far this has penetrated in to the daily papers is a small paper like the Times Leader from eastern Pennsylvania, which is a part of three paper media group that are composed of small local papers that have a large online presence and an app for mobile phones (timesleader)

In this new delivery model, profit from ads replaces the motivation of providing news to the consumer. In the blogosphere, a collective of thousands of blogs on the World Wide Web, there is no moderation and editors are a thing of the past. On a recent Dateline NBC report about Eric Schmidt, the CEO of Google, stepping down, the only quote was gleaned from his blog. (Dateline) This is no isolated incident; increasingly media is relying upon Twitter, Facebook and bogs to get information for their stories.

Sites like the Gawker Media Group are written by a large number of contributors and have no overarching editorial authority. Major media conglomerates like Gawker.com have created an environment where individuals create the news. There is no second voice to moderate or slant the work in one direction or another. This causes far left and far right opinions to slip by far more often and create an “anything goes” atmosphere that is a far cry from the days of angry editors reaming out a staff writer for too much opinion in a news piece.

Another aspect of the new media world is the ability of people to remain connected. With wireless phones connected to the internet and able to stream and upload, most people are never without the ability to produce at least still images of news as it happens. This has created a great gulf between the old news (papers, local broadcasts) and the new news (CNN and Blogs). This gulf is more one of ideology than anything else. Twitter is an excellent example of this new versus old mentality. It has no filter at all, and is commonly cited as news, when in reality it is just the opinion of some one that is ranting on a blog.

Politics too has seen a great revolution via social media. The first recorded incident of this is in 2001 when during the trial of Philippine president Joseph Estrada protestors against him received a mass text telling them to gather in the square wearing black. (Clay) there were over one million responses to this text. Now this has evolved even further, twitter and other social media have allowed likeminded people to unite over long distances and garner support from across the globe. Social media unites people in their causes, and expedites their process of their unification and gives them a platform on which to present their goals. In the past massive amounts of logistical data were needed to get one million people to arrive at one place in one time for one cause. In Tahir square in Egypt, it took less than a day. These people had been brought together by a cause, and unified by the quickness of modern mass communication. This was seen before then in 2009, in Moldova, a corrupt election put the communist party back in to power. Through Twitter, Facebook and text messaging, massive protests were organized and in just one week pressure from citizens forced a new election. (Clay) CNN made an argument that we should not call what has happened in Egypt and Tunisia a revolution. “Yes of course technology doesn’t make revolution…but that doesn’t mean that social media cannot provide wavering revolutionaries with vital aid and comfort.” (CNN) This argument shows that the social media has accelerated the progress of revolution and made it easier for disunified, disenchanted persons to unite and form a unified front that can actuate change.

Facebook has even provided tools to aid in revolution, for example in Egypt protestors were told via Facebook by Tunisians to put vinegar or onions under their masks to ward off tear gas. Spreading this type of data can both help and damage the revolution, providing dangerous information to dissidents.

Politics at home too has been affected. Obama for example ran an immensely successful grass roots campaign to raise awareness and funds for his election in 2008. This effort was incredibly successful. This was accomplished largely through the internet and Facebook, connecting the young people of America to what they perceived as their candidate. This connection to the younger hipper generation carried Obama in to the White House in 2008 on a wave of “Change we can believe in”. Obama also ran a massively successful grassroots funding campaign. He was able, through millions of small donations; gather hundreds of millions of dollars from private individuals. Though online donations to politicians is not a new tactic, in the past it has not been as successful as it was for the 2008 campaign.

In the past donations were collected via private fundraising, telephone banking, and other methods where in they were solicited rather than provided by free will on an individual basis. Having people provide the donation of free will rather than in a solicited manner generates an immense amount of good will for the candidate. Most politicians don’t think that you can fund an election campaign one dollar at a time, but Obama has proved that you can.

Both the Obama campaign and the so called Facebook and Twitter revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Lybia, have shown the speed of new media, and the impact that it has had on the world today. Media delivery time has been cut down, and the amount of content has exploded. This had caused what could effetely be called a glut of media, where media is always on all the time. The result is that the media is forced to stretch the available news and degrade its content to fill up the time.