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Social Feed Comparison

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Reddit and Facebook; A Social Feed Comparison

Why is this important?

From print to radio, television to the Web, new media platforms can vary drastically between generations. With the advent of the Internet, America is transitioning from old platforms to novel one's through personal and mobile computing.

Since 2003, newspaper circulation has consistently dropped—most notably between 2009-10, where weekday and Sunday circulation fell by 19.5% and 14%, respectively. In the last 10 years alone, newsroom employment fell from 55,000 to 32,900 people (Barthel). Recently, prime time cable news experienced its first growth in three years, following a steady 2008 decline (Barthel). Though, this spike may be attributed to the 2016 Presidential election.

Conversely, web-based media is booming. A survey by the Pew Research Center discovered, “news use on social media revealed digital news sources to be second only to television as the most frequently accessed type of media source” (Lu). Another Pew Research Center study found 62% of American adults read news on social media, and 18% do so often (Gottfried). Another study of major digital news publishers found all 40 companies have accessory pages on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Lu). With the decline of print newspaper and television as news producers, digital outlets have begun to prosper.

The last statistic is particularly intriguing. Major media producers have begun pushing content onto social media as platforms. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have established themselves as dominant news carriers. These sites allow direct links and previews in posts which drives website traffic (Lu). This shift influences how and what content gets posted. Stories are often adapted to best fit a particular platform (Lu). Facebook added their Instant Articles format early in 2016, with other companies following. The mass consumer base of social media allows digital news to spread rapidly to the masses and generate significant advertisement revenue.

However, the change isn't all positive. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube lack a formal statement of journalistic integrity. In recent news, Google and Facebook were criticized for their contribution to false news. One man shared a false observation on his Twitter, eventually gaining millions of views and over 400,000 shares on Facebook. Later, the false topic becoming a talking point in the Presidential debate (Maheshwari). Another man made \$10,000 a month in ad revenue through creating and sharing false news (Ohlheiser). In the Internet's profit driven, advertisement oasis, consumers must be wary of these consequences. Stakeholders include users who read news on social media, owners of social media news platforms and news producers.

Thesis and Background:

Social media as news platforms may affect the discussion stemming from stories. This study focuses on comments from top stories on Facebook and Reddit. Reddit's "dumb" recommender algorithm and community standards facilitates an informative, detail driven discussion. Alternatively, Facebook's relevance algorithm and opinion culture provide a more emotion based conversation with polarizing aspects. Screenshots of stories provided were all captured in the same time.

Reddit:

Reddit is a thread based forum. It contains an immense variety of user created pages, also known as sub-Reddit's or threads. Each unique user has a homepage that sorts the most popular content across sub-Reddit's. Each thread is dedicated to a topic and follows a specific guideline for posting. In addition, a team of user moderators organize discussion and upholding community guidelines. Users can subscribe to certain threads that spark their interest. Subscribed threads will then appear on a user's personalized homepage, taking precedence over un-subscribed content.

Posted content receives upvotes or downvotes by users. Reddit's "dumb" algorithm sorts content based on these votes. Keep in mind, simple systems like these are subject to manipulation by "fake" upvotes (ex. pushing a story to top by paying for votes). We must assume this is not occurring. Another bias is Reddit's small population. 47% of Reddit news users consider themselves liberal, compared to 24% of all American adults (Barthel).

This study focuses on one sub-Reddit, /news, which is self-labeled as "All news, US and international". 4% of U.S. adults use Reddit, of which 70% use the platform for news (Barthel). /news is currently the fastest growing sub-Reddit with 11,499,846 subscriptions, ranking 15th in total subs among other threads (RedditMetrics). /news was chosen for its establishment of community guidelines (see in figure 1). As shown, moderators will remove comments if they are crude, racist, sexist, vitriolic, unnecessarily rude, spam, or distracting from discussion.

Facebook:

Facebook is a social medium that connects millions of people globally. Unlike Reddit which uses handles for account identification, Facebook contains personal names. The relevance algorithm compiles information on likes, location, gender, political ideology, and more to create a list of trending stories. This list is placed on the right corner of the homepage. In addition, the algorithm uses similar methods, not just popularity, to decide which stories will appear in a

Want to talk?

Follow **@rslashnews** on Twitter

See a post that violates the rules below? Had your post stuck in the spam filter? Have a question about policy? Just want to give feedback? **Send the mod team a message.**

Submit all self- & meta-posts to **/r/inthenews**

Your post will likely be removed if it:

- is not news
- is an opinion/analysis or advocacy piece.
- primarily concerns politics.
- has a title not taken from the article.
- has a pay wall or steals content.
- covers an already-submitted story.
- violates **reddit's site-wide rules**, especially regarding personal info.

Your comment will likely be removed if it:

- is racist, sexist, vitriolic, or overly crude.
- is unnecessarily rude or provocative.
- is a cheap and distracting joke or meme.
- is responding to spam.
- violates **reddit's site-wide rules**.

Extreme or repeat offenders will be banned.

>>>Expanded Rules<<<

If your post doesn't fit, consider **finding an appropriate news article on that story** to submit instead, or submitting yours to lower moderation subreddits:

/r/inthenews - all news-related content
/r/AnythingGoesNews - unrestricted news
/r/trueredit - insightful articles
/r/self - any self-post
/r/misc, **/r/reddidotcom** - anything

or other news subreddits:

/r/worldnews - from outside the USA only
/r/SyrianCivilWar - about the conflict in Syria
/r/MidEastRegionalWar - on MidEast conflict
/r/UpliftingNews - uplifting
/r/SavedYouAClick - making media more straightforward

or subreddits for other topics:

/r/FoodForThought - discussion-worthy long form articles about interesting subjects
/r/politics - for shouting about politics
/r/moderatepolitics - less shouting
/r/politicaldiscussion - even less shouting
/r/geopolitics - intl. politics and geography
/r/entertainment - Justin Bieber updates, etc.
/r/europe - news from Europe

or check out the **200 most active subreddits, categorized by content** and the **full list of subreddits by subscribers**.

Figure 1: Reddit community guidelines

user's regular feed. Facebook affords the ability to rapidly share stories among a massive population. The site does not have any rules on what users post, so content varies drastically.

Two-thirds of Facebook users read news on the site, almost doubling since 2011. The site reaches two-thirds of all U.S. adults, meaning 44% of the general population receives news from Facebook (Gottfried). Pew researcher Jeffery Gottfried mentions a key difference in content discovery, "Facebook news users are more likely to get their news online mostly by chance, when they are online doing other things. Alternatively, the portion of Reddit... news users who seek out news online is roughly similar to the proportion that happen upon it" (Gottfried). In general, those seeking news are searching for detailed information (i.e. Reddit's more informative platform). Those who stumble upon news can alter their conversation about a topic. A person emotionally triggered by a headline will comment differently from someone prepared.

Research:

The study spanned five days, compiling data and notes from 42 Reddit trending articles and 30 from Facebook. Only two stories, less than 3%, crossed-platforms to trend on both sites: the Ohio State incident and Mall of America hiring their first black Santa. This emphasizes the vast difference in what content is deemed important by platform users. Since Facebook is concerned with grabbing attention, a controversial headline trumps an informative one. Below, figures 2 and 3 show how Facebook and Reddit display their trending news.

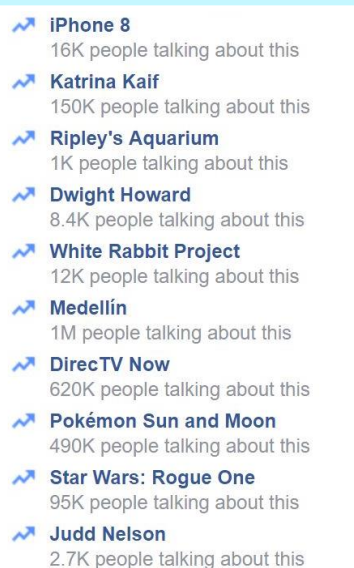


Figure 2: Facebook Trending Stories

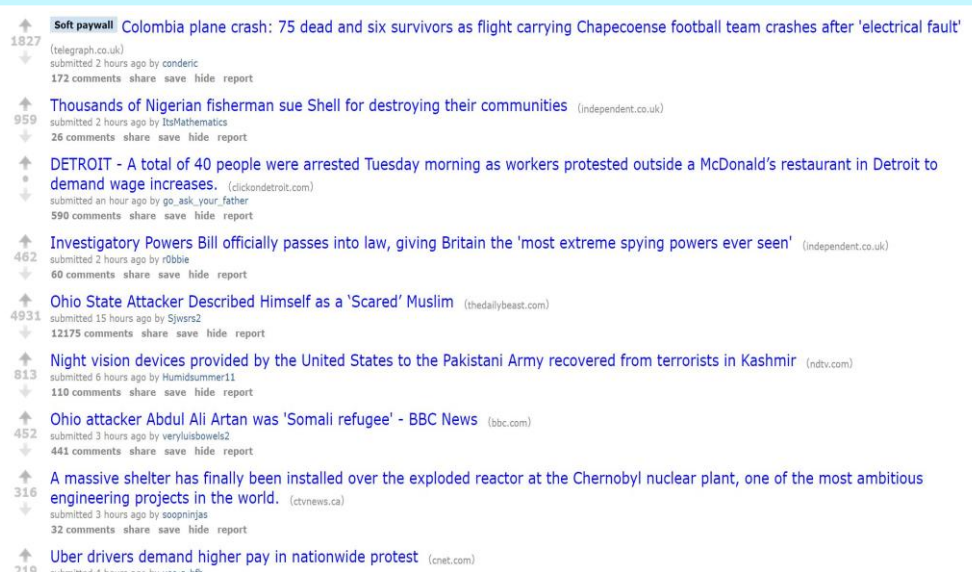


Figure 3: Reddit Trending Stories

Facebook has short, ambiguous headlines. Click-bait is a type of article with proactive nature and intent to elicit an emotional or intentional response. Yahoo! Labs defines ambiguous headlines as a form of click-bait (Biyani). Even if a user is not seeking news, their attention is stolen through curiosity. As mentioned earlier, much of Facebook's news is stumbled upon, creating a distracting and/or emotionally prompted viewership. While this lacks some concrete evidence, those who comment on Facebook stories are likely triggered, encouraging emotion

based comments. If a user only reads an ambiguous headline, but decides to comment on a story, the lack of information degrades an informative discussion.

Ohio State Article:

Recently, the Ohio State incident, which later turned out to be a stabbing, trended on both sites. Utilizing a word database from enchantedlearning.com, words from comments were cross-referenced for emotion/provocation. Comments were chosen for analysis based on their popularity. Reddit allows upvotes and downvotes for comments, while Facebook affords likes (equal to an upvote) but no dislike.

The atmosphere around discussion varies by social media. Of the 95 words that comprised the top two Facebook comments, 20 (or 15.7%) included emotion and/or provocation. In total, these two comments amassed 513 likes and 135 responses in two hours. To comprise a similar word count, Reddit's top five comments were chosen, made up of 69 words. Of these, six (or 8%) were emotion based or provocative. The five comments generated 3945 upvotes and 106 replies. To help visualize the difference in atmosphere, both discussions are pictured below (see figure 4 and 5).

Reddit comments center around informing. In fact, while most initial headlines portrayed a shooting, the second top Reddit comment contained valid information. Most articles obsessed over the aspect of a gun, while the comment addresses the use of a vehicle (a missing piece from other articles). Although it lacked information on the stabbing, it didn't perpetuate a




false story. In a response to that comment, the words “primary source” are used to validate following information. Pictures were linked from witnesses at the scene, authenticating the story. Other discussion celebrates the actions of the police officer.

Facebook facilitates a divergent environment based on opinion. The second comment contains “My thoughts on Ohio today”, which sums Facebook’s discourse. The top comment, rather than informing, discusses an idea lacking factual support. At the time, the suspect was unnamed. The commenter has no information on his religion or connection with terrorism. Yet, it was the most liked. The comment hinges on the larger notion, although lacking information, of xenophobic biases in America. The following three popular comments make statements about the conversation as a whole. The first woman calls out other users, going so far as to shame them. The comment generated 37 responses in two hours. The next reads, “I pray for mankind at this point, as this race is failing”. Such a charged statement is in response to a heavily emotion based structure.

Active shooter reported at Ohio State University


Just before 10am, Ohio State University officials ordered students to shelter in place over reports of an active shooter at the Columbus campus.


DAILYMAIL.CO.UK



1.1K

257 Comments 1K Shares 

 Like

 Comment

 Share

Top Comments ▾



Write a comment... 



Bu Abdulla Must be a terrorist,,,, but wait, he aint muslim so he must have "mental issues",,,, if he was a muslim, the terrorist label would be directly stuck to him, even he came running out of a psychiatric clinic

Like · Reply ·  302 · 3 hrs

 98 Replies · Just now



Reagen Danielle Barnes Gray So much nastiness on this thread. What's wrong with you all? Someone's kid/family member has just been brutally attacked for just being in the wrong place at the wrong time and all you guys can do is rant and hate. Shame on all of you. You are part of the problem. My thoughts are in Ohio today.

Like · Reply ·  211 · 2 hrs

 37 Replies · 5 mins



Figure 5: Facebook Ohio comments

Black Santa:

The second cross-platform trending story was about Mall of America's first black Santa. Both sites followed a similar style of discussion with users sharing opinions. Figures 5 and 6 below display the popular replies.

Reddit's top four comments generated 670 upvotes and 62 replies in six hours. Note the blue box above the comment; A clear statement of community guidelines encourages a thoughtful discussion. The last comment provides an alternate news source to better understand the story. Comments like this shape an informative feed.

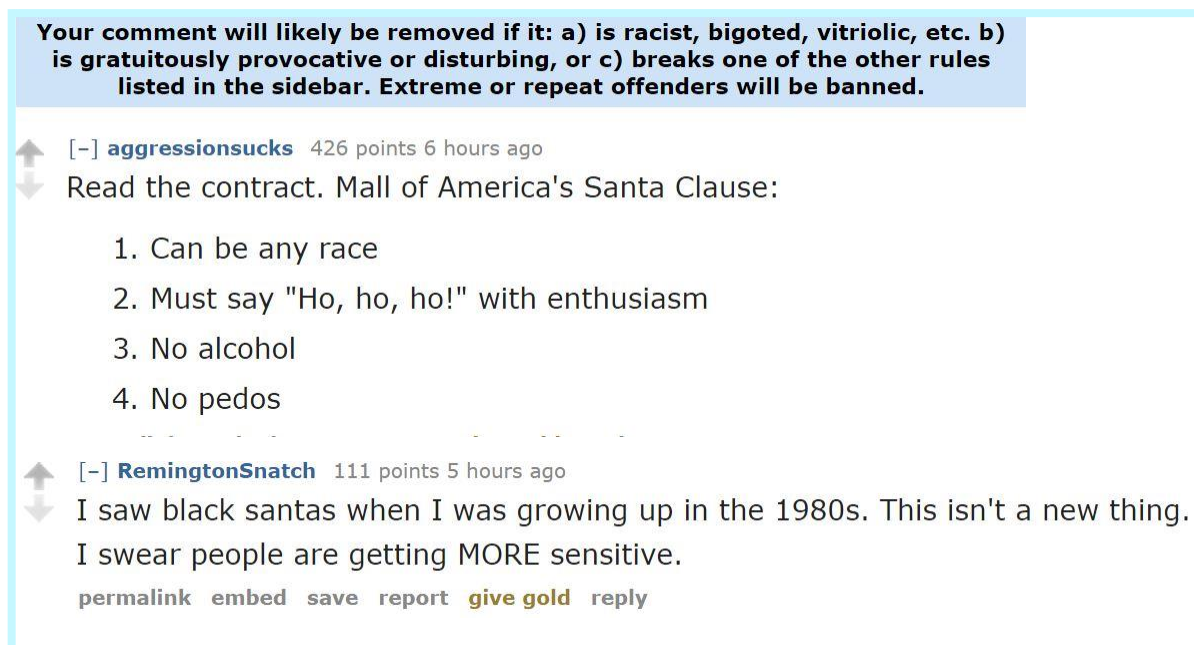




Figure 6: Reddit Santa comments

The Facebook story generated 1399 likes and 461 replies in two hours. Comparatively, the Reddit story sparked 111 upvotes an hour versus Facebook's 699. The Santa story produced more interest on Facebook than on Reddit.

Algorithmic influence:

As mentioned, both sites utilize different algorithms to sort what news gets presented. Definitive research is necessary to fault algorithms for altering discussions, nevertheless, there is evidence that suggests it. Facebook's algorithm displays a 1-5-word headline to grab attention. Of Facebook's 30 trends analyzed, half of them contained a headline with only a name. Reddit's headlines are longer; however, some contain names. Of Reddit's 39 headlines, four contained a name. Facebook prioritizes grabbing attention by prompting readers with recognizable names, unlike Reddit's value of an

Nation's Largest Mall Hires First Black Santa



Figure 7: Facebook Santa comments

informative title. Favoring shorter headlines also removes information from a story.

Facebook's relevance algorithm utilizes numerous factors to decide what content gets posted on a feed. The goal is to retain user attention and engagement. Humans respond more to content that elicits a feeling. A relevance algorithm will play on this concept by pushing more emotionally driven content onto a feed. A major story on Reddit about America's low unemployment rate got veiled under Facebook's news about Kanye West and Dolly Parton. Both are news, however there's a cost to hiding mundane news. Also, international news gets filtered as most users don't relate to worldly topics. 20% of Reddit's trending news pertained to another country against Facebook's 6%. This hinders American discussion on international topics.

Social Capital:

Additionally, social capital influences conversation. Facebook, being a personal account, attaches more value to a comment. Reddit's handles don't readily connect a statement to a person. A comment on Facebook can be seen by friends, family, and strangers. Good comments can boost social capital or uncover aspects of a personality. Also, posting on Facebook rewards users with a sense of voice. Their opinion or idea is easily attributed and can be heard (even liked) by their social network. This encourages sharing of viewpoints on Facebook over accurate information.

Conclusion:

The tech revolution is rapidly changing infrastructure and American discourse. With the fall of print and weakening of television, the Internet has adopted to spread news media. Although a wide audience is reached, the change in platform is affecting how people discuss topics online. News producers have begun shifting to social media to better share stories and generate ad revenue.

Facebook and Reddit utilize two different approaches to display news. Reddit's "dumb" recommender algorithm and integrous community facilitates an informative, detail driven discussion, while Facebook's relevance algorithm provides an emotion based conversation with polarizing aspects.

As news platforms transition, it's important to research effects on interpretation. There is a tendency to reduce a platform's responsivity by blaming algorithms. Instead, studying these effects can improve news quality. Facebook's relevance algorithm *thinks* it knows you; but, if it gets this wrong, the news you discuss is shaped. If relevant content you see only supports reinforcement of opinion, you miss conversations that challenge viewpoints (a healthy practice). A downvote system on news articles may improve Facebook's feed to provide a more virtuous discussion. Americans must be aware of the transitional effects with digital media consumption.

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