

Social Media Mania and the Professional Gratification: An Investigation on the Social Media Exposure and Use of Social Media for News Makeup among the Polish Journalists

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Traditional and social media interplay in setting media agenda. Intermedial agenda is still in the nascent state and is one of the most dynamic and uncontrolled phenomenon on the border between professional, staff-produced media and the mostly grassroots, user-generated content of social media. One of the crucial roles in the process of media agenda setting and intermedia agenda setting is played by key TV news producers and popular anchors. Our goal in this paper was to study the range of use of social media by top Polish television journalists in their everyday work. Furthermore, we wanted to get a bigger picture of how social media's use of key TV anchors and editors influence their gatekeeping and frame the content they produce. Our research was placed within the paradigm of agenda-setting theory and was conducted in the first half of 2015 with the use of a questionnaire dedicated to the selected group of top Polish mainstream TV journalists.

Keywords: TV journalism, social media, mainstream media, agenda setting, inter-media agenda

Undoubtedly, great numbers of people get their information from the media. One of the main sources of information is television. It constitutes is a major, or even constant element of everyday life. The idea is that information and television information services have become a source of knowledge about the world. In this context, an interesting issue is the selection of information done by television journalists, and its impact on society. Additionally, some of them are regular users of social media. Is, for journalists, the information contained in social media crucial for their selection of information served by TV stations? Taking into consideration the question asked, this study will present the theory of agenda setting and its general characteristics, the concept of intermedial agenda setting, the phenomenon of the increasing role of social media in media coverage, examples of current research findings on the impact of social media on establishing media agendas, defining detailed research problems, characteristics of the test method, the presentation of a research sample consisting of 9 journalists, and the justification for their selection, presentation of the survey results and their interpretation, accompanied by conclusions.

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Agenda Setting Theory and its General Characteristics

Undoubtedly, the theory of agenda setting describes a specified arrangement of information in the media. It means assigning ranks and importance, or prioritization of information. In addition, agenda setting is assumed to influence the public agenda. In other words, the theory of media agenda establishment includes, on the one hand, a method of creating a hierarchy of issues and their attributes appearing in the media, and on the other, it draws attention to how to transfer the validity of these issues and their attributes onto the public sphere. Thus, this theory is one of the most important and best-documented theories concerning media influence on the audience¹. Therefore, there is no doubt that since the daily news last approximately 25 minutes, then the selection of materials, subjects and events is readily discernible. What's more, on average, in Polish TV news, there are approximately six separate information topics. This means that selection of information is highly relevant, because the information, before it reaches the recipient, is the resultant of a series of individual choices. Even the sequence is determined beforehand, as well as emphasis laid on scheduled information pieces².

What is worth mentioning in passing is that the selection of information had also an ethical dimension. What is, therefore, information in this context? That was the question that Benedict XVI asked. First, a lot of information from around the world arrives at the bank of information. To be able to present it in a news broadcast, one needs to make a choice, as everything cannot be shown. In this way, each piece of information to be presented constitutes a specific choice made by a particular person. In turn, each choice means assessment, which leads us to the domain of ethical impact. The point is that an individual determines whether the message will support a cause or harm it. Evaluation is only responsible when it is based on common values (Benedict XVI, 2008). It's not difficult to notice that such as description of information is directly linked with the moral backbone of the person preparing the information strategy (Nêcek, 2012). Therefore, it should be noticed that there is no objective method for the evaluation of information served by the media. It depends only on the standards adapted in the press-room, and the intuition of editors and publishers. In this perspective, a unique responsibility of editors-publishers appears. According to the theory of gate-keeping, at the forefront of the editorial section, there is the editor responsible for the rejection or acceptance of the presented material. Publishers are responsible for issuing of news, and are the first that are obliged to respond to situations arising from emergencies (Sztajdel, 2013).

Establishing of the media agenda takes place in five phases – the appearance of an issue in the public space, its selection from among many others, according to certain selection criteria, selecting the appropriate medium, selecting the form of its presentation in the selected medium, and finally, the determination of the frequency and intensity with which this issue is to appear in publications.³

The authors of the theory quickly learned that apart from the first level of the agenda establishment, the second one should be distinguished as well. The first level relates to the transfer of the validity of public issues, perceived as a whole. The impact of the agenda media on the audience is then about indicating the object of interest (the media tell recipients what to think). At the second level, the interaction affects the approach to issue, because it is what is transferred is the validity of qualities and attributes, and not only the importance of the issue (the media tell recipients how to think)⁴. Finally, the third level of agenda setting goes beyond the framework of traditional research of *“prioritization of messages (objects) on the first level and interpretation of attributes on the second level.”*⁵

For this reason, agenda setting is a multifaceted phenomenon and contains a method of prioritization of events into those more and less important. Although behaviors of the public opinion it should not automatically be equated to what is proposed by the media, however, it is the news media that play a major role in bringing specific topics into the public agenda. It should also be noted that the discussed theory is gradually, albeit belatedly, finding its place also in Polish media studies. The basic work of McCombs, summarizing the first thirty years of studies on the agenda-setting theory was published in Poland in 2008, and a great contribution to the development of reception of this theory on the Polish soil was made by Boguslawa Dobek-Ostrowska and her colleagues.⁶

Concept of Intermedial Agenda Setting

One of the pathways along which the validity of issues appearing in bottom-up messages is transferred is the strengthening of the intermedial agenda. In practical terms, this phenomenon is about civil broadcasters becoming independent and becoming part of the mainstream media coverage, or instrumental use of bottom-up broadcasters upon their consent, or without such consent, on the basis of acceptable citations of published opinions. In order for the impact of bottom-up social media to do its job, to become noticeable and effective, a certain, appropriate level of distribution and availability of this type of messages for recipients must be exceeded. What influences this is both the popularity of the authors themselves, and thus their propagation and promotion through multiplied recommendations on the Net, as well as a high Net ranking occupied by news portals, profiles, sites, newsletters, hobby sites, and other functions increasing the positioning. It would be interesting to investigate which of the sources helping gain the authority of the sender is more important to recipients, and which more effective in the acquisition of recipients⁷.

Phenomenon of Increasing Role of Social Media in Media Coverage

The phenomenon of social media is growing at a rapid pace. First, there was blogging (1997), followed by Wikipedia (2001), Second Life (June 2003), My Space (August 2003), Facebook (February 2004), podcasts (2004), Digg (December 2004), and finally YouTube (February 2005) and Twitter (March 2006)⁸. Undoubtedly, social media are the main places where viewers publish their reviews of television programs. What is more, they are free to initiate conversations on topics that they have watched on television. It is therefore clear that it is the social media that have changed the nature of television. The same media have changed the style and way of the presidential campaign in Poland, as was recently witnessed in the victorious battle of Polish President Andrzej Duda.

The growing importance of social media, either as an entire site, or as a place of publication for known and respected social authors is not always the intended effect. An opinion-forming position, which is measured, for example, by the number of citations in large media, or number of sharings by readers is often decided by coincidence. In general, instantaneous, even unintentional popularity of a text gained through accessibility to certain information, thanks to a spot-on formulation of an idea, citation of a “word of mouth” piece of news, and sometimes only to a catchy phrase, or play on words, fades away after a short time. But there are longer careers of authors who, through social media, became popular in the media agenda unintentionally. An interesting issue, requiring systematic analysis, would be the determination of circumstances conducive to maintaining

the sustainability of the high position held by the author, or a social medium in the domain of social media. Social media are gaining more and more influence in shaping of the medial agenda. They deserve even more to be called the fifth estate, being even more important as they put to scrutiny not only politicians and other public figures, but also journalists themselves. At the same time, they themselves can hardly be subject to inspections, with all positive and negative consequences of this phenomenon. The increasing participation of the social media agenda in the shaping of the media agenda takes place before our very eyes, and is still waiting to be explored. The research matter is in fact complex and variable, culturally relativized and hardly predictable. But thereby, it is even more interesting for future researcher and analysts.⁹

Examples of Research Findings: Impact of Social Media on Media Agenda Setting

Major media, including news television stations around the world are increasingly relying on information provided by social networking sites. In a well-known analysis of 2009, Nic Newman of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism reports the results of research on ways in which CNN journalists referred to broadcasts directly from the place of events, mostly during street protests accompanying the elections in Iran (Newman, 2009). Newman draws attention to the surge, or even the explosion of participation among Internet users in the transmission of information from their locations, which *de facto* has become sort of news. At the same time, the role of social media becomes noticeable in the creation of the so-called “breaking news”, which simultaneously forces a faster response on journalists from the traditional media. This reaction is not an attempt to take part in a “race for news,” because in most cases, Twitter and Facebook will be faster than television anyway, but rather on the use of information from social media and civil journalists in the creation of a credible, proven and in-depth message.

Newman research also shows that journalists assimilate the new media, but use them after their fashion, according to their journalistic standards. This approach is called “same values, new tools” and is today the leading axis with respect to rules applying to the use, by major media journalists, of the social media agenda. As Newman writes, social media “are not replacing journalism, but they are creating an important extra layer of information and diverse opinion”. This extra level is used on both sides, i.e. both as a resource for television newsrooms, and as a tool for promoting news and television reports through recommendations in social media. And thus, even in 2009, the symbiosis of social media and traditional mainstream media could look. Currently, the power to create the media agenda on the part of social media has increased significantly, and they, both in terms of speed, which is obvious, and the degree of trust from the users, prevail over traditional media in many countries, including the USA. The undoubted advantage from the point of view of media recipients is the possibility of unmediated access to news, access to first-hand sources. And so writes Emily Banks, showing her approval of this advantage, and appreciating the value of the possibility of such easy, universal, free, and immediate access to primary sources¹⁰.

Undoubtedly, the years 2007-2009 were a turning point in the influence of the social media agenda on the work of large traditional media editors, but the following years significantly shifted the role of social media from the position of an auxiliary tool to the position of equivalent, alternative media coverage. What is changing, however, is the role of traditional media employees, who are becoming responsible for the processing, acquisition and explanation of bottom-up news coming from social media. As Mark Little wrote in Nieman Report, founder and CEO of social news agency Storyful:

“Not too long ago, reporters were the guardians of scarce facts delivered at an appointed time to a passive audience. Today we are the managers of an overabundance of information and content, discovered, verified and delivered in partnership with active communities.”

Some even define the task of creating the media agenda by mainstream media journalists in place of gate-keeping as the role of “curator”. In 2011, Storify founder Burt Herman wrote in an article for The New York Times: “A new class of gatekeepers has arisen, people whose reputations are built on their ability to highlight relevant information is their audiences. We are still looking for the right word to call these new gatekeepers, but so far ‘curator’ is what appears most appropriate.”

Definition of Specific Research Problems

In the establishment of the media and intermedial agenda, an important role is played by the publisher of information programs in mainstream television channels, hosts of news and political commentary programs. They are an important part of the group containing opinion leaders and regulators of the information flow from and to social media. Editors of traditional media, including heads of major TV stations are aware of the power of parallel interaction, which is demonstrated by the presence of flagship journalists in social media. They also know that free flow of information in the Net does not allow absolute regulation of how social media are used by employees, especially those most important and best known to spectators. However, in 2012 and 2013, the largest Polish TV stations set a framework of action for news journalists in social media. TVN and TVN24 created 10 principles and imposed them on its employees, which was received the as a kind of limiting censorship. Journalists were ordered to maintain standards in representing their station, also on their own profiles in social media. They were ordered not to publish anything that could not be aired on television, or anything that could undermine the credibility and authority of their station (Wirtualnemedi, 2012). In 2013, a regulation similar in spirit was introduced by the public television, TVP. Another large commercial TV station, Polsat does not apply similar rules, treating the most obvious rules as self-evident (journalistic integrity, impartiality, independence) and even considering that any formal regulation would constitute interference in the privacy of journalists and their right to freedom of expression.

In practice, the activity of television journalists in social media is rather casual, and its degree of reliability does not differ from the average of among commonplace users. Clearly, however, publicly known and popular television journalists are also recognizable in the Net, and thereby they influence the shape of the media agenda on the Internet, and especially in social media. On the other hand, from social media they draw content and attitudes that they use in their television programs. Bottom-up impact from the social media on the content selection, its putting in the framework of context, the methods of presentation and argumentation are part of the intermedial agenda, and affect both the media agenda at television stations, and, in consequence, the public agenda.

Characteristics of Test Method

The study undertaken by us aimed at the identification of the way in which the group of the most influential news journalists at Polish TV stations use social media. In particular, the analysis concerned the features of style, when being a user of social media, the degree to

which the message is changed, as assessed by themselves, through support with the use of social media, and an assessment of credibility of the social media agenda.

Hypotheses

We posed the following hypotheses:

- (i) Top Polish television journalists use social media extensively, with a moderate level of sophistication with respect to support tools, but often with great commitment.
- (ii) They are skeptical about the credibility of the message from the social media agenda, and do not perceive it as a threat to the trustworthiness of large traditional media (although polls concerning trust in this respect seem to deny this).
- (iii) They do not fear any threat to traditional media, and even have a sense of superiority, or even a mission in relation to social media.

Method

The study applied a survey questionnaire, consisting of 19 questions, some of which (13) were closed questions and 6 remaining ones were open questions. A quantitative analysis of questions applied to the first type, while the others were subjected to a qualitative content analysis.

Research Sample

The researched group consisted of 9 TV journalists, selected from among top media individuals. All of them are or have been the key anchors at seven major TV stations in Poland: two public stations: the main channel, TVP1 and the 24-hour news channel TVPInfo, four mainstream commercial television channels: the leading TVN and Polsat, and respectively managed by them twenty-four hour news channels: TVN24, and PolsatNews, as well as a private independent television channel: TV Republika. All journalists selected for the survey sample are the “faces” of their stations, and, as editors, can influence the form of news programs on their televisions; they are gate-keepers. Usually, they also host programs on current political affairs, which increases their impact on shaping the media agenda. They select topics covered in the news and current affairs programs, are leaders of public opinion and content curators. The group selected can most certainly exert influence on the form of the media agenda, and indirectly on the establishment of the public agenda. Some members of the research group are very active users of social media. Their activity rankings in social media as journalists are high. E.g. in 2013, they occupied places 1, 12, 81, and 91 in a ranking published by portal Wirtualnemedi.pl (Wirtualnemedi, 2013). The sample was supplemented also by journalists whose activity on the Internet is less known.

Analysis of Results, interpretation and Conclusions

The respondents are very active users of the Internet, almost everyone is constantly present in the Net, for at least 3 hours a day, and only two people spend on the internet less than 3 hours per day, but they are online every day.

However, only half of the respondents spend a significant portion of the time online on using social media. The duration of their presence in social media varies greatly, from 1 to 15 years. Interestingly, with the exception of two people, journalists with a long tenure in the media, respondents are long-time users of social media. It is not surprising that almost all (7 of 9) respondents recognized Twitter as the most important and most useful social medium in their work. In addition to Twitter, they indicated Facebook (5 persons), YouTube (6 persons), Periscope (3 persons) and Google+. However, the service used by the respondents in their work as a source of information and a place for acquiring content is most frequently YouTube and Wikipedia (8 and 6 people). Apart from these two sources, Instagram, Twitter and Vimeo were mentioned, each of them once. This surprisingly small selection of journalistic sources among top media professionals, being also frequent (as declared by themselves) users of social media corresponds to the very low level of using tools assisting them in the organization and filtration of data shared on the Net. Among tools supporting social media functionalities by indexation, tagging, and monitoring only Google Alerts is used (2 persons). One person mentioned Buffer, which is, however, used only to plan publications in the social media.

Among numerous programs that aggregate content on the Internet (Digg, Reddit, BuzzFeed) one person pointed out at the latter, while the others declared that they do not use such services. News aggregators are used only by two journalists surveyed (Google News), and tools to analyze the presence and popularity in social media are used by three respondents (only Google Analytics). None of the respondents pointed to the statistics tool, specialized in analyzing social media. None of the journalists use tools for journalism crowdsourcing. The situation looks better with the use of blog aggregators, which in Poland replace the often inefficient and tabloid-like news portals. Nearly all respondents use these content resources, mainly in the form of comments, but also with a certain addition of news material. They point to the national blog platforms such as wPolityce, NaTemat, Salon24, 300polityka; only one person uses The Huffington Post¹¹.

A very interesting factor is the self-assessment of their role in social media by surveyed television journalists. Three people recognized that they are passive receptors of content found in the Net (lurkers), but the two stated that they are “missionaries”, or people having a mission to fulfill in social networks. Two respondents identified their place in social media as apprentices; one person each time awarded themselves the title of “tourist”, “expert” and “laborer”¹²

From this part of the survey, containing questionnaire questions of single and multiple choice, a picture of Polish TV news journalists emerges, who often and willingly use social media, but in a manner and at a rate only slightly deviating in the way they are used from that practiced by regular users. The support tools used, or specialized applications are not widely known, and do not improve functionalities of social media for mainstream journalists. This confirms the first of our research hypotheses.

To verify other hypotheses, we shall use an analysis of responses to open questions in the survey.

The majority of respondents (6 of 9 people) recognizes social media as useful or very useful in their work, three other people describe their usefulness as sporadic, but one of the respondents added a reservation that are as often helpful, as they disturb the daily work of a TV journalist. The respondents said that on social media (especially Twitter) one will find all the key issues and news topics news that appear on a regular basis in the media. They provide instant information about decisions and opinions of politicians. They

respondents also point out at the extension of the platform of contact with the audience. Particularly emphasized is the pace at which information on the Web appears. Social media are rated as even faster than news agencies. Expanding their answers to these questions, the respondents pointed to usefulness areas of social media: drawing information, confronting opinions, uploading one's own content, and contact with recipients. In addition to these four dimensions, framing the context was indicated, with respect to communicating important issues, the form in which the content is received by potential viewers before it is shown on television, how topics "resound" in the realm of social media users. As one of the surveyed journalists put it: "I mostly use social media as a secondary source of information, and a barometer of public sentiment and "relevance" of topics. They help to verify one's own feeling of the subject, to monitor what the society lives with, observe moods and attitudes towards different phenomena". Those are very important statements and evidence of deliberate use of the bottom-up agenda of social media during subsequent creation of one's own media agenda in television programs and in journalism.

Some respondents expressed their reservations as to the future of social media, but at the same time, they recognize the inevitability of their growing influence on the media and public agenda. If they are not a fully-fledged alternative to traditional media, it is mainly because they lack a systematic and in-depth information structure, and also because in them, there is an uncontrollable dose of emotions, blurring a clear transfer of information. Moreover, excessive building upon disordered, fragmentary, and emotional social transmission may also reduce the standards of traditional journalism.

The respondents evaluate the credibility of the message carried by social media as rapidly growing, but still lower than the credibility of professional media communication. Respondents assume a large margin of mistrust, they treat information from social media merely as part of the transfer, one of its sources, requiring verification, or double checking. As one of the journalists surveyed pointed out, social media are an unreliable source also from the ethical point of view, because "using them is a high-risk activity. The contents are often put together by anonymous authors, at an unknown level of professional background and professional ethics. Typical examples are blogs, which anyone can publish, and in which valuable texts are simply neighbored by intellectual waste. No substantive or editorial verification takes place prior to their publication." Several of those interviewed also pointed out at the positive role of social media as a kind of trigger of topics, and appreciate the active role of some people active in those media, who are called whistleblowers. Respondents also recognize the intermedial interdependence between social and traditional media, causing the opinions and content appearing on the Net to often be a reflection of messages contained in large media.

The majority of respondents agree with the thesis that social media is not so much a threat as they are a challenge to traditional media, including large television stations. Respondents see the possibility of symbiosis between these two spheres shaping the media agenda. "One complements the other. In the future, traditional media will be able to be selected by those recipients who seek a more comprehensive picture of events, or problems, who want to get in-depth and proven information" – as one of the study participants put it. Another one put it more bluntly: "[The availability of information in social media] threatens [traditional media]. But social media without traditional media are nothing".

Opinions among respondents as to the key issue of trust to the traditional media vs. social media are divided. The majority are convinced that traditional media, especially television, will continue to enjoy more confidence among recipients, and the cause of falling confidence levels lies not in social media intercepting the audience, but in the loss of political neutrality on the part of major media, including TV stations. Respondents note,

however, a change in the assessment of social media, which is reflected by an increase in their popularity and confidence in them among the group of the youngest recipients.

Analysis of responses in the second part of the survey indicates a strong confirmation of the second and third hypothesis. Top, major-media journalists are indeed skeptical about the credibility of the social media message, and for this reason, they do not perceive them as a threat to traditional media. They do not see a significant impact on the reduced degree of confidence in large, traditional media, and they take the growing popularity of social media among young viewers as a challenge.

Questionnaire questions

1. How often do you use the Internet?

Several times a week for a few minutes
 Several times a week, totaling several hours
 On some days, a total of a dozen-odd hours
 Every day, but not more than an hour
 Every day, but not more than 3 hours
 Every day, more than 3 hours
 I am actually always online
 Hard to tell

2. What part of time do you spend on the Internet using social media?

I do not use social media
 A small part
 A significant part
 Almost all of it
 Hard to tell

3. How long have you been a user of social media?
 Quote years, months.

4. Which services are useful in your work as a journalist? Highlight them, and underline the most useful service twice.

4.1. Basic services:

Facebook
 Twitter
 YouTube
 LinkedIn
 Instagram
 Google+
 Vine
 Periscope
 Other, which?

4.2. Are you using any of the sites as a source of information or even as a source of content?

Vine or YouTube or Vimeo - as a film source
 Audioboom or Soundcloud - as an audio source
 Instagram, Flickr, or Tumblr - as a source of photography
 Foursquare - as a source of location information
 LinkedIn, Golden Line, Pipl, or WebMii - as a source

of information about individuals
 Wikipedia or Mediawiki - as a source of information about everything

4.3. Do you use tools to support functionalities of social media (by indexing, tagging, monitoring activity):

Netvibes
 Google Alerts
 Tweetdeck
 HootSuite or Trendsmap
 Twitterfall
 Other, what?....

4.4. Do you use content aggregators (including memes) in the network?

Wykop
 Reddit
 BuzzFeed
 Kwejk
 Other, what?....

4.5. Do you use any tools to analyze the presence and popularity in social media?

Bitly.com
 Facebook Insights
 Tweetreach
 Topsy
 Social Bro
 Google Analytics
 Sotrender
 Other, what?....

4.6. Are you using news aggregators?

Newsfeed
 Reader
 Pocket
 Google News
 Feedly
 Other, what?....

4.7. Do you use blog aggregators?

Huffington Post
Salon24
NaTemat
wPolityce
Other, what?....

4.8. Do you use tools for journalistic crowdsourcing (extraction and editing content generated on social media platforms)

Crowdmap
Storify.com
Scoop.it
Other, what?....

5. How would you describe your style of presence in social media?

Missionary
Expert
Laborer
Apprentice
Gossiper

Intruder/Troll

Observer/Lurker

6. Do you think that social media help you in your daily work as a journalist? What kind of help is this?

Yes, very often

Yes, often

Yes, it happens

Happens to others, not to me

Never, I find them actually disturbing

Hard to tell

7. (set of open-ended questions) How do you use social media in your work as a journalist? Do you think that this is the direction in which the future of large-media journalism is going? How would you rate the level of credibility of news obtained from the Net? What is the advantage of social media in this regard? Is the easy accessibility (for the recipient) of information through social media a threat to traditional media? In your opinion, do media recipients tend to trust large media more than social media?

Notes

¹ See (Gurba 2012).

² Cf. (Sztajdel 2013), p. 69.

³ Cf. (Gurba 2012).

⁴ Cf. Ibid.

⁵ Cf. (Sztajdel 2013).

⁶Cf. (Gurba 2012).

⁷ Cf. (Gurba 2012).

⁸ Cf. (Levinson 2010). p. 26

⁹ Cf. (Gurba 2012).

¹⁰See (Banks 2013).

¹¹It should be noted that there is no Polish edition of this medium.

¹²A typology proposed by K. Gurba in (Gurba 2011).

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