

How should journalists face social media platforms: The fallacy of numbers in SNS

Paulo Frias (pfrias@letras.up.pt)

(University of Porto)

PORTUGAL

Abstract:

The most recent and relevant changes in the newsrooms content production are necessarily related with social media, and, particularly, with Social Networks Systems (SNS). The massive use of those platforms and related with news consumption is accepted by several authors and recent reports as an important shift in terms of media consumption habits.

Due to SNS new role in the newsrooms, seen by many authors as the contemporary model of media distribution, the importance of this distribution results analysis seems to be the most remarkable task in order to understand users habits and profiles.

But, and by the other side, SNS usually provides generic stats and accordingly to their own conceptual frameworks. The possibility to use SNS indexes is, very often, useless and doesn't match editorial concerns about consumption.

In this paper we'll try to compare some numbers coming from SNS algorithms and from other tracking tools like Facebook Stats, FanPageKarma, Quintly, Google Analytics, among others, assuming that the stats provided by SNS are, usually, a fallacy.

Nowadays, the use of SNS in newsrooms is not anymore a special task performed by talented 'social community managers' but is much more a decisive skill of each journalist. Editorial decisions are coming from the contents published both in the newspaper, TV channel, or online journalistic project but also in the SNS or Social Media Platforms (SMP). Each editor or journalist directly responsible for the contents published in Facebook, in Twitter, in YouTube, in Instagram or any other SMP. We will try to show, within this paper, that the specific production and tracking of journalistic contents in SMP is not anymore compatible with a systematic follow-up based in 'black' algorithms. This paper aims to discuss the described situation in order to find a 'richer data' to understand correctly news consumption in SMP.

During the work in the online platform P3, we have the opportunity to check these mixed strategies comparing statistics coming from several analytic sources. In P3, the production of journalistic contents is always adapted to different SMP following the idiosyncrasies of each platform, in order to produce the right type of communication for each support. With such a broad sample, we strongly believe that P3 online journalistic platform could be a very useful case to study the described questions.

Through the numbers collected in P3, we aim to discuss the reliability and accuracy of the feedbacks coming from SMP algorithms, and try to suggest new ways to understand these data.

Keywords: Online journalism, social media platforms, social networks systems, new media, convergence culture.