

The inclusion of those under 18 in the framework

When looking at different demographics, the under 18s should be actively considered.

The year on year growth in the use of online sources for news is a huge increase, particularly among the younger demographics. Where survey data is used, the inclusion of a robust sample of under-18s would have the benefit of acting as a barometer, acting as due diligence and providing future proofing.

If under 18s are not included and measured in the framework, then policy developed by government in this area may not fully comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Young people are citizens. If plurality in media is to contribute to a well-functioning democratic society through informed citizens, then the citizenship of young people should be considered. Citizenship extends further than just democratic engagement/voting.

For young people, it is their peer group that is the most important source of news.

News that young people share, either through social media or other channels, is aggregated, editorialised and may not always include or quote the source of the news. This will have an effect on the ability to name an important source, and affect how effective importance is as a proxy for impact.

Social media and other digital intermediaries

The filtering effects of social networks should be captured. This includes the algorithmic effect of intermediaries and social networks serving content which has been determined as relevant to the user or recommended to them by others. This has the potential to limit the range of sources that a user would experience. A specific example of search-engine's delivering very different results for the same search term, depending on the user was discussed.

Twitter in particular is geared toward social groups and personalisation. Social network mapping by Israeli data scientist Gilad Lotan¹ suggests that social networks are more likely to lead users to sources that reinforce rather than challenge views.

'Unconsciously' delivered news should also be measured. People are not always looking for news – news finds them. Links on Facebook or Twitter, where news stories are repeated, absent of the original source, should be included in the framework.

The ownership of aggregators should be considered. The consultation document as drafted seems to exclude them from the retail / wholesale distinction and therefore also from the analysis on ownership. The use of online news sources is rapidly increasing and the ownership of intermediaries used to access them should absolutely be considered. A retail / wholesale / intermediary distinction in the analysis would be more appropriate.

Measuring online news

The framework needs to be able to measure the current, near-future and changing world. In light of rapidly changing consumption and developments in measurement and

¹ <https://citizenmediamanchester.wordpress.com/2014/09/01/mapping-twitter-coverage-of-the-conflict-in-gaza/>

analytical systems, it is absolutely essential to review the metrics used to measure the use of news. A review of the tools used to carry out the measurement needs to be part and parcel of the proposed measurement framework.

A cross-industry authority in online measurement would be a useful asset for the industry. With the multitude of online measurement systems and ongoing developments in this area, a piece of work bringing all of this together and identifying gaps, perhaps led by government working with NESTA and Nominet, would be valuable. “Big data” analysis has a role to play.

Measuring impact

The additional research set out at paragraph 4.55 is essential not desirable. This includes analysis of online sharing via social media, content analysis showing the extent of original material and analysis of specific time periods or news events to calibrate content analysis with consumption and attitudes. Furthermore, all of this could have a useful demographic component which could help understand future patterns of use.

When looking at how people’s opinions are formed it is important to gain a greater understanding of how opinions are developed for the under 18s.

Conclusion

Digital technologies represent an unprecedented opportunity to access multiple news sources. An opportunity that if understood properly could help deliver a robust media plurality framework. However we have a deficit of understanding of online and digital media, how it is distributed, and what forces impact on it and how to measure it.

It is imperative that this deficit is addressed before putting any framework in place. It is also imperative in order to build an accurate picture of consumption that demographics are given more weight. In particular, by establishing much narrower age bands among the young in order to capture the rapid rate of change.