



THE DISTANCE CREATED IN USERS BY INTERNATIONAL NEWS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

DİJİTAL ÇAĞDA ULUSLARARASI HABERLERİN KULLANICIDA YARATTIĞI MESAFE

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Abstract

Digital platforms have revolutionized the creation, dissemination, and delivery of international content, serving not only as a tool of dissemination but also as a tool of shaping the visibility of news narratives. This study examines the effect of algorithmic ranking, personalization, content recommendation, and moderation of news content on the perception of international news. It examines the role of digital media not only in the dissemination of news but also in the shaping of the visibility of news, the marginalization of news, and the emotional responses of the audience towards the news. Based on the platform studies literature and case study analysis, this study reveals that the technical infrastructures of digital platforms simultaneously influence journalistic and user practices and produce a new media regime. This study argues that the visibility of news is not arbitrary but rather follows the logics of the attention economy, aestheticization, and repetition. This process can lead to the normalization of international news in the daily digital stream, overexposure and emotional fatigue of the audience, and cognitive distance between the audience and international events.

Keywords: Communication, Media, Digital Communication, Journalism, Algorithmic Visibility.

Öz

Dijital platformlar, uluslararası içeriklerin üretimi, dolaşımı ve kullanıcıya ulaşma biçimlerini dönüştürerek yalnızca dağıtım kanalları olarak kalmayıp, haber anlatılarının görünürliğini aktif şekilde yapılandıran bilgi araçları hâline gelmiştir. Bu çalışma, platformların algoritmik sıralama, kişiselleştirme, içerik öneri sistemleri ve moderasyon politikalarının uluslararası haberlerin algılanma biçimleri üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektedir. Çalışmada, dijital medyanın yalnızca haberin iletiminde değil; hangi anlatıların görünür kıldığı, hangilerinin arka plana itildiği ve bu süreçlerin kullanıcıda duygusal tepkiler ve algısal mesafe oluşturduğu analiz edilmektedir. Platform araştırmaları literatürü ile örnek vaka incelemesi temelinde yürütülen çalışma, dijital platformların teknik altyapılarının gazetecilik pratikleri ve kullanıcı davranışlarını eş zamanlı olarak şekillendirdiğini ve bu etkileşim sonucunda yeni bir medya rejiminin ortaya çıktığını ortaya koymaktadır. Analiz, haber görünürlüğünün rastlantısal olmadığını; etkileşim ekonomisi, estetikleştirme pratikleri ve tekrar mekanizmaları doğrultusunda yapılandırıldığını göstermektedir. Bu süreç, uluslararası haberlerin gündelik dijital akış içinde sıradanlaşmasına, aşırı maruziyet yoluyla duygusal yorgunluk üretmesine ve kullanıcı ile uluslararası olaylar arasında bilişsel bir mesafenin oluşmasına zemin hazırlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İletişim, Medya, Dijital İletişim, Gazetecilik, Algoritmik Görünürlük.

INTRODUCTION

In this research, the ways in which speed, data intensity, and diversity produced through digitalisation shape perceptions of international news among users form the subject under analysis. News is now more than a one-way transmission process; it is now a process mediated and shaped by algorithmic ranking processes (Gillespie, 2014). In this context, online platforms now play a critical role as active intermediaries controlling the content that users access and interact with, the time at which they do so, the intensity with which they access this content, and finally the framing within which this content is placed (Napoli, 2019).

These functions of algorithmic visibility create significant differences for the representation of global events for the user. Some events come into the foreground by means of striking images and notifications, while other events fade out with respect to personalized logics irrespective of their actual position within the content flow and thus reform the user's cognitive and affective closeness with regard to global events (Bakshy, Messing & Adamic, 2015).

The intensity of images, posting frequency, tendency for content to be clustered along certain themes, and updates on international news platforms make international news a type of news subject to constant exposure. These conditions may lead to desensitisation through overstimulation and the use of distance strategies by viewers to maintain their cognitive bounds (Tufekci, 2015). It is under such conditions that the perception and positioning process associated with international news transforms from a news acquisition process to one that is subject to the logic of flow.

In this particular research, the process examined through which the perception among audiences about their distance from international news comes about within the emerging media structure under the context of the current digital age.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses an analytical approach based on a literature review and a case-based examination. It explores the perceptual distance users develop toward international news on digital platforms. The literature review evaluates recent scholarship on digital news consumption, flow experiences, algorithmic visibility, and user responses and these discussions show users' encounters with international content are shaped by both the news material and the influence of platform design.

Complementing the literature review, a case study was conducted focusing on platforms. Particular attention was given to how platforms frame content, which types of stories they prioritise, and how their recommendation mechanisms operate. These findings were interpreted in dialogue with existing research on algorithmic ranking and visibility.

Together, these two methodological components enabled a holistic evaluation of the structural and perceptual dimensions of the user-news platform relationship. This integrated approach provides a theoretical understanding of why the experience of international news increasingly takes on a more distant character in the digital age.

COGNITIVE LOAD AND EMOTIONAL FATIGUE IN THE DIGITAL NEWS ECOSYSTEM

In online media culture, the engagement with international news on the part of individuals is much more dynamic and complex compared to traditional media culture. With the necessity to be aware and updated about everything happening around them and the world, individuals simultaneously take cognizance of updates on social media platforms and at the same time receive notifications from news applications and online platforms available on the internet. This exposure turns the reading process into a form of cognitive load on the part of the individual.

News fatigue is a phenomenon that has been described widely within the literature and represents a complement to this process. Mental fatigue resulting from exposure to news narratives can occur when a person is repeatedly exposed to emotionally significant international news narratives until they reach a state of mental saturation, leading to withdrawal behaviors within the news environment.

Secondly, the element of emotional fatigue is created by content, as well as the style with which news is delivered within online platforms. Shocking images, images from crisis situations, video clips, and frames speedily processed induce substantial and immediate reactions. Nonetheless, with such stimuli being promoted on a continuous basis, users tend to adopt methods for distance and finally desensitize as a means for psychological self-preservation. This occurs when instead of being detached from information, users begin to process news superficially and with reduced emotional investment.

This reality emerging out of the age of digitization radically transforms the impact of international news on its consumers. News is no longer appreciated for its actual content alone; instead, the mental fatigue that comes with news is now a part and parcel of its consumption.

ALGORITHMIC FRAMING AND VISIBILITY POLICIES

The distribution of news content among followers on online platforms is driven by journalism ethics and principles as well as the decision-making processes achieved automatically within online platform architecture. As Napoli (2014) explains:

"In online media today, attention is no longer allocated and enumerated by media regulators and editors; instead, attention is produced through the construction of what might be termed the architecture of algorithmic choice."

This is achieved based on factors such as *"click-through rates, viewer browsing behavior and behavior on other platforms and on content and content-sharing behavior."* Similarly, Albarran (2010) asserts that *"online content distribution is closely tied to business goals on online platforms and that algorithms maximize for specific business goals: To be this invisible editor is thus to play a vital contextual role in the context of international news."*

This is the invisible editing process and is especially relevant with respect to international news. Research has found that the filter algorithms on platforms tend to give greater emphasis to content that is more emotionally charged and resonates with the behavior observed on the platform (Eslami et al., 2015; Tufekci, 2015). As such, international events come to the forefront for attention or can be pushed to the background based on the anticipated degree of interest on the platform. Importance is thereby judged on the basis of the interaction economy on the platform and unrelated to actual events.

The selectivity and policies on the criteria for being made visible impact the use dynamic with international news. As Gillespie (2018) asserts:

Platforms do not simply show content neutrally: they articulate the frames through which users should view the world. This means that while some international events recur across a variety of platforms and media types, others occur within the visible realm for very limited periods. Although this distinction may be outside users' conscious awareness, they come to regard more frequently recurring topics as matters that require greater attention and emphasis. Content with limited visibility slips increasingly into the 'cognitive background' within the user's mind. In addition, the cumulative impact created by repetition through algorithmic processes represents one of the core dynamic processes underpinning the creation and sustenance of distance within users' engagement with international news. As users are exposed to fairly similar content at a swiftly recurring rate, the ability to distinguish among events becomes clouded, and the content flow moves towards homogenization and thus creates a kind of 'emotional flattening.' As supported by Sunstein (2017), repetition creates greater predictability and normality within the theme and thus ideally decreases its ability to evoke emotions within users.

THE STRATEGIC AESTHETICISATION OF NEWS AND EMOTIONAL NEUTRALISATION

In today's online media environment, the representation and presentation of international news are trending towards more and more strategic aesthetic thinking. In this regard, the relevance and application of Sontag's (2003) analysis on the ways and means through which types of images involving the representation of international conflict and war come to be functionally shaped and parsed as

“*consumable narratives*” take on greater critical and strategic prominence. In this context, and given the fact that international social media platforms tend to privilege images and images-based representations with more aesthetically consistent and strategic narratives (Manovich, 2020), the ways and means through which international news is represented and strategic aesthetics come to play a far more significant role.

Although these aesthetic approaches may initially amplify the emotional impact of news at first, they can promote a neutralising effect with time. Oliver, Hartmann, and Woolley (2010) demonstrate that consistent exposure to extremely dramatic material can trigger a process of gradual emotional fatigue and desensitisation. This process referred to as the mechanism of ‘emotional neutralisation’ is especially important for international news broadcasting; given that audiences are consistently exposed to similar images and emotions, their ability to grasp the human aspect of events is reduced. Technological repetition and endless sensory activation form a filter that decreases the salience of reality-based events.

The aestheticized news experience thus creates a cultural distance as well. As Barthes (1981) argues, the image is at once imaged with the designation of reality and moves reality to representation. However, on online platforms, this representation is reinforced: with the necessity for the news to be “good-looking,” other aspects social and political and human can be less visible. The reader can perceive international occurrences as aesthetic narratives so that the spectacular aspect of occurrences is diminished and news becomes affectlessly flat and enter ordinaries merging with the normal.

This process is accelerated on social media platforms. A structure for the news content is created based on criteria such as aesthetics and “visual consistency,” which is programmed within the platform algorithms (Highfield and Leaver, 2016). The complex and layered nature of international news is simplified based on this logic and is delivered to the viewer with the sole intention of being consumable and quickly scanned. Despite the fact that the news content itself is grounded within reality, the agendas publishing companies must meet to maximise reach and awareness drive the production process to meet algorithmic criteria. As such, news content is mediated through a filter based on aesthetics that mitigates the impact of news content on reality and can impair the capacity for audiences to connect on an emotive level with the news.

THE NORMALIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL EVENTS WITHIN THE EVERYDAY FLOW

The acceleration and circulation typical for online platforms make international news a normal feature of the online activities of users on a day-to-day basis. This state of information glut and hyperflow creates a paradigm shift that diminishes the exceptional character traditionally granted to news (McNair, 2017; Chadwick, 2013). As people keep browsing online platforms such as social media several times a day, they sequentially pass through content such as personal and entertainment images within seconds to advertising and news on international crises. The rhythmic quality created by this process is referred to as affective flattening and ensures that all categories of news come across as normal portions of information (Scolari, 2018).

The international critic news normalisation process within the framework of normal information flows is more than just a loss of interest among users. It is a process of down-regulating emotions and a loss of the potential for events to take on a specific position within personal memories. Giddens’ (1991) ideas about distanced anxiety should be revisited within a more contemporary framework: while viewers do know what is happening globally, the endless repetition rate and the sudden switches between media content undermine the potential for this deeper personal investment to form. In this respect, normalisation should not be conceived as desensitisation; on the other hand, this particular normalisation should be understood as having a structural character through the equalisation process and integration within media rhythms.

This is particularly visible on platforms that host content centered on short-form videos. For instance, on TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts, the global crisis can proceed with a humorous clip; the inability to identify such events’ uniqueness is due to the algorithmically driven display that is



context-insensitive. The Conceptual Integrity (2020) framework is important here: Once content is context-abstracted and repaginated across the same interface and rhythm with similar character formatting, users find it hard to categorize such information as being from a different kind of information category.

In addition, this process of normalization changes the social effect of international news. In the traditional media environment, any significant international event would be associated with ritualistic behavior such as special coverage, updates, and analysis, while today this may be skipped with a simple scroll on the screen. This offers food for thought for re-evaluating Habermas '(1989) analysis of the public sphere under the conditions of the internet era: international news does not require a specific cognitive attitude from the audience anymore and is reduced to a background process of information flows. As a result, the normalization of international events within the framework of online flows can be seen as a key mechanism underpinning the production of distance within the current media environment. Although such events do not lose their quality of being unprecedented, their thematics come to be diminished within the tempo of flow media culture and result in more superficial and ephemeral types of emotional engagements unrelated to any specific context. This new media experience extremely turn into the perception of international events and fosters greater cognitive distance between audiences and international events.

FINDINGS

For a more technical and communication studies-focused examination of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal, this case study adopts a technical and media communication approach to the data lifecycle as a platform infrastructure. Rather than posing the incident as a single event in terms of a data breach, this examination adopts a three-fold structure in which the event is (a) analyzed in terms of the gathering and compilation of user data, (b) examined in terms of the ways in which the user data is utilized or distributed, and (c) analyzed in terms of the ways in which this usage is then represented in media communication.

The use of the "This Is Your Digital Life" application and the collection of the resulting information about users and their friend lists, including "likes," developed by Aleksandr Kogan, play a critical role. Based on the application's ability to obtain permission from its users and others on their friend lists for access to information such as "likes," "friends," and other network information available at the time through platform permissions, this enabled the developers to obtain access to millions of accounts, estimated at between 50-87 million users. It is important to state that this was accomplished to create a profile structure consistent with previous research studies (Kosinski et al.) indicating that digital behaviors can be predicted for high-dimensional personality characterization such as complex "psychographic properties," namely "likes."

From a technical viewpoint, the database was broken down into demographic and psychographic groups and then uploaded to the system as advertising sets targeting specific demographics through Facebook Ad Manager API. This process includes several tech steps:

- Creating lookalike audiences for targeting people similar to any previous audiences created through profiling,
- Performance optimization via A/B testing and message variations:
- Refined reach through micro-targeting parameters (geographic targeting and age and interest/behavioral categories)

This kind of technological process is interlinked with the delivery of the advertisements as well as the organic reach and economy of engagement. As a result of interaction with the content and targeting, the reach can be further promoted through the platform algorithms, so there is a loop between targeting and recognition on the platform. As such, particular trends can come to prominence on this platform while other trends can be regarded as marginal. This process is central to the presence of international events within the feeds on this platform.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal has been widely represented within media discourse by means such as “platform crisis,” “data misuse,” and so on, producing narratives within news discourse. Descriptions of the targeting and distribution mechanism (such as volume and model capabilities and ad optimization functions and so on.) explained the reason and mechanism for adopting a careful attitude on the part of the users. Studies have found that exposure to the misconduct involving huge amounts of user data triggers two significant responses among users:

- Trust-based withdrawal: fewer users wanting to share their information and more stringent privacy policies.
- A more analytical and distant form of media consumption: the beginning of media analysis not only for content but for the processes used on platforms.

These trends have led to a permanent paradigm shift with regard to information flow perception; news is increasingly assessed on the basis of content and the validity of the supporting structure for this content. Both the technical aspects and the media coverage raise the user's neurocognitive behavior of "distance production." Profiling through data provides a highly precise method for the delivery of messages, while media analysis and government inquiries circumscribe the transparency and legalities being made here.

Agenda-driven interventions apply pressure on platform companies to adapt platform management practices (such as limiting access to data, adjusting APIs and advertising transparency policies), and such resulting effects on platform visibility and content dissemination can be specifically quantified (limitations on APIs reducing the pull and use of third-party data by advertisers on one side and providing advertising archives and origin information for greater public transparency on the other). Research has shown the intricacies within the chain of information for this particular case and thereby criticized the assertion that such platforms function merely as ‘neutral intermediaries.’

In conclusion, based on the above technical analysis, the application of the Cambridge Analytica case can be seen as evidence for the process through which data was harvested and turned into psychographic models and then successfully distributed through platform-based tools and the impact of media framing on public perception. It must be said that this three-prong approach (data to model to dissemination and media framing) serves as one of the core methods within the current state-of-the-art for enhancing the reach and gap between international news and media platforms and users on a psychological level.

CONCLUSION

The contemporary electronic age means that the experiences of foreign news are no longer merely a function of journalism but are instead a complex phenomenon such that the user-news interaction is primarily determined by electronic platform logics. This conceptualization recognizes a multi-layered focus as a means for this research to explore foreign news visibility in the electronic flow. In addition, this paper recognizes specific processes concerning this visibility that lead to a special kind of user distance.

The results make clear that a content-based explanation for the generated distance is impossible. Unlikely, this distance stems from a complex of conditions inscribed in the very architecture of platforms such as news-ranking algorithms, personalized recommendation protocols, aestheticized visual news discourse definitions, and large-scale data processing. The case study of the Facebook and Cambridge Analytica scandal serves as a defining moment regarding how profoundly computational environments affect experiences of international news. This scandal affected a dramatic attenuation of user confidence in news sources.

As a consequence of data processing conditions and power relationships inscribed in algorithms, a more distanced user attitude toward news content evolved. This distanced attitude toward news content encompasses more than a simple lack of confidence. By this way, conditions of news embeddedness in a dense flow characteristic of this environment, a repetition of similar content with a focus on major themes via algorithmic reduplications of content critical for user interests, and a blunting of cognitive-

emotional relationships via content that adapts esthetically to platform-defined algorithms together establish novel definitions of ‘perceptual distances,’ again a defining feature of a computational environment.

Under this paradigm, technology platforms today are becoming more and more involved as collaborative producers of international journalism. The temporal ordering of news delivery to audiences, the emotional salience with which this delivery bears witness to a truth claim about the world, and ultimately the perceived association with which this claim may be linked for better comprehension are almost entirely determined by the technological processing involved in this delivery.

Thus, in regard to overcoming problems of distance in international news coverage today in a more transparent and equitable manner within a digital environment where information hierarchies are determined more by data structures than content structures understood in broadcasting theory, several other factors apart from content quality and fact verification need to be addressed.

Taken together, this research study illustrates that a comprehension of international news flow is no longer a purely mediastudies-related issue. Conversely, this matter requires a more inclusive paradigm that brings together platform studies, digital culture studies, and user psychology.

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