

Social media users don't always agree with newspapers about which topics are the most important

April 4 2014

Research suggests social media users don't always agree with newspaper editors about which topics are the most important, an article in the academic journal *Journalism Studies* reveals.

Duke University academic Marco Toledo Bastos examined the output of the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* over a two-week period in October 2012. He determined how much content appeared under 19 broad section headings (world news, sport, opinion and so on), and then analysed how that distribution compared to what was shared on [social media](#).

His results show significant differences in the topics emphasised by newspaper editors and social media users. While users of social media platforms favour sharing opinion pieces, along with national, local and world news, the editors themselves emphasised sport, the economy, entertainment and celebrity stories.

"The results show that social [media users](#) express a preference for a subset of content and information that is at odds with the decisions of [newspaper editors](#) regarding which topic to emphasise," Bastos observes.

In particular, the sport sections of both papers "fail to actively engage the social media audience", despite their significant size. Only a quarter of sport pieces published by the *New York Times* make an appearance on

Facebook or Twitter; from the Guardian, only half make it to Twitter and one third to Facebook. Articles on the economy also suffer a similar fate, with all social media streaming relatively few on the subject.

The study also reveals significant differences between the social media presence of both papers, with the Guardian collecting by far the most retweets and shares, possibly related to its news being free online. An astonishing 86% of Guardian articles surfaced on Facebook (and 96% on Twitter) during the study as opposed to 40% (and 36%) for the New York Times.

Bastos' research also confirms Twitter's reputation among the social media as "a preferred channel to stream a wide variety of news content". It was the only one to reflect accurately the distribution of news included in the papers themselves: "a good indication that Twitter reproduces the diversity of topics covered by newspapers". Other social media tend to reflect specialist interests.

This article is a fascinating insight into one of the consequences of our gradual transition from print to online news. It also shows how technology has changed, and will continue to change, how we consume, comment on and share news. Editors now have in social media platforms an effective way to learn what types of stories interest their readers, and can craft their papers accordingly.

Sports and economics writers: watch your backs.

More information: "Shares, Pins, and Tweets: News readership from daily papers to social media," Marco Toledo Bastos, *Journalism Studies*, [DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2014.891857](https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.891857).

Provided by Taylor & Francis

Citation: Social media users don't always agree with newspapers about which topics are the most important (2014, April 4) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-04-social-media-users-dont-newspapers.html>

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