

# Credibility and Freedom of Choice in Social Media in Relation with Traditional Media

**Ionuț SUCIU, PhD**

Department of Philosophy and Communication Studies  
Faculty of Political Sciences, Philosophy and Communication Studies  
West University of Timisoara, Romania  
E-mail: ionut.suciu@e-uvt.ro

**Abstract.** *The emergence of social networks and their development as sources of information gave the general feeling of greater freedom of expression. Canceling the dependence on print or transmission licenses has created the right space for free and unallocated distribution of information. There is a judgment that journalists are finally free because they no longer depend on media owners and the public has new options generated by these networks - the ability to select information from a much wider range of offers; and the opportunity to make its voice heard by broad masses of people without the mediation of traditional media sources. However, despite the seemingly free choice in terms of choosing the news it sees, the friends or the pages it is watching, the audience is subject to social network control, which selects the content displayed in the feed according to its own algorithms. This poses the matter of a debate and, of course, of some questions. To what extent does social networks influence our choices between what is genuine and what is not, between real and false information, between public posts and sponsored posts? How has the traditional media reacted to the changes made with the development of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.? There are questions this present paper tries to answer to. The research was carried out following the pursuit of the evolution of trends in the field for several years, both as a journalist and as an observer.*

**Keywords:** Social media; Journalism; New media; Digitalization; Facebook.

## Introduction

The liberalization of the access of information to the general public has reduced the control exercised by politicians and authorities on the media. There is a judgment that journalists are finally free because they no longer depend on media owners and the public has new options generated by these networks - the possibility of selecting information from a much wider range of offers and especially the opportunity to make its voice heard by broad masses of people without the mediation of traditional media sources. In addition, the development of social networks has come up with a new advantage - the proximity to a category of audience otherwise not much interested in the traditional media - the young.

But all these seemingly free benefits also come with a price for users. The use of these services also brings with them supervision from the giants who own the social networks. Every article read (and even unread) by a user says something about his profile, becomes a source of information. The location and time of the network connection are relevant, such as any movement made on these platforms, from a newsfeed scroll to posting a text, photo, or article.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal once again proved that our personal data is just exchange money. The political consultancy company has processed personal data collected through Facebook and has sent sponsored posts to users, in order to appeal to emotions and to convince them, by using their interests and needs. The services have been used in campaigns such as the presidential elections in the US and Nigeria or the Brexit referendum. But it is only the most famous case of using personal data by social networks, and the present research does not aim to provide a view of its impact on the population. Its purpose is to analyze how algorithms used by social networks allow different forms of informational intrusion, both in the form of generating content for newsfeeds and as sponsored posts, begeted precisely by public behavior in the online environment. The paper will analyze the understanding of the term "freedom of choice" and to what extent it maintains its basic meaning, given that the person holding the information can distribute it to a desired number of users, precisely to a targeted audience, paying an amount money. In relation to the media, the paper aims to analyze the reactions of journalists and editors to the changes brought about by the development and popularization of social networks and their adaptation.

## Theoretical Framework

Social networks provide journalists with freedom of expression and free access to information for the public, as noted by Ginny Whitehouse, in a study published in the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*: "Facebook provides an excellent opportunity for triangulating sources and should be considered as publicly available information as are all sites not encrypted" (Whitehouse 2010, 317). But this freedom can