Digital Media: Its Concept and Role in the Economy

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Abstract:

The issue of media has occupied an important place in societies throughout the ages, due to its great importance in providing individuals and groups with economic, social, and political information. However, the development of communication technology at the beginning of the twentieth century endowed the media with a set of technical and professional features, which helped and accelerated the delivery of information and the shaping of public opinion, especially in developed countries. With the emergence of the pivotal role played by the Internet at the beginning of the twenty-first century, especially with the appearance of social media, media has become closely linked to economics and politics, as the digital environment has played a major role in shaping public opinion and consumers in general through advertising programs spread across social media platforms. This has highlighted new concepts related to media, such as

media economics, digital media, media technology, etc. Through this paper, we will attempt to address these concepts and the role they play in today's media world.

Keywords: media, digital media, digital economy.

Firstly: General Concepts about Media

A- Concept of Media

1- Linguistically:

The word "media" is a term of Western origin (L'information), derived from a word originating from the verb "to inform." Its usage corresponds to other words that convey the same meaning, such as "to notify" and "to report," all of which aim at providing information and news to a person.

2- Terminologically:

Media refers to the process that results in the dissemination of news and accurate information based on truthfulness and frankness, addressing the minds of the masses and their noble emotions, and elevating the level of opinion. Media is based on enlightenment and education, using methods of explanation, interpretation, and logical argument. It also means providing the masses with the greatest possible amount of objective, correct, and clear information.

It is "that media process which begins with the journalist's knowledge of information of importance, that is, information worthy of publication and transmission, then proceeds through its stages: collecting information from its sources, transmitting it, dealing with it and editing it, then publishing it or broadcasting it through a newspaper, agency, radio, or television station to a concerned and interested party."

According to **Hamed Abdel Salam Zahran**, it is:

"the process of disseminating and presenting correct information, clear facts, truthful news, accurate topics, and specific, logical, and credible events to the public, with mention of their sources, in service of the public interest."

Dr. **Abdel Latif Hamza** defines it as providing people with correct news, sound information, and established facts.

Through this definition, media addresses people's minds and noble emotions based on the principle of discussion, dialogue, and persuasion with the aim of forming a sound opinion regarding an event or a problem. It is thus a social phenomenon through which interaction among people is organized.

It is therefore a process of investigating reality, analyzing it, and disseminating these facts through traditional and modern contemporary media, aiming to educate and enlighten the masses, and being influenced, in one way or another, by the prevailing social, economic, and political systems in society.

Media is the process of broadcasting factual realities or information to broad audiences through widely disseminated means such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, theatre, etc. It is the dissemination of facts, news, ideas, and opinions among audiences through various media, whether audible, visual, or written, with the aim of understanding, conviction, and gaining support.

Dr. **Mohamed Jamal Al-Far** points out in his book *Dictionary of Media Terminology* that the concept of media has two meanings: the first refers to the transmission of factual information without a prominent goal other than enriching the recipient's knowledge; the second refers to a broad meaning in Arabic that encompasses all types of communication.

Media (media):

The meaning of media is connected to news, reports, and incidental events, and linguistically it does not include more than informing, revealing, and highlighting; thus, it is more closely connected to events and more strongly associated with transient immediacy.

There is no single, fixed definition of the concept of media or "media work" due to the breadth of its concept and its overlap with many fields of human activity and human relations in their various forms. Therefore, it is difficult to define media because of the diversity of its approaches, the multiplicity of its roles, and the differences among researchers' schools of thought. Accordingly, definitions of media have varied, including the following:

- It is the art of investigating incoming news, processing it, and disseminating it to the widest audiences at the speed permitted by modern media.

- Media is the process that results in disseminating accurate news and information based on truthfulness and frankness, addressing the minds of the masses and their noble emotions, and elevating the level of opinion; it is based on enlightenment and education, using explanation, interpretation, and logical argument.

- Media means providing people with correct news, accurate information, and established facts that help them form a sound opinion about an event or a problem, and objectively expressing the mentality, tendencies, and inclinations of the masses.

- It is also the objective expression of the mentality, spirit, inclinations, and orientations of the masses at the same time.

B- Concept of Digital Media

"Bain" defines digital media as "the highest dynamic category of media that includes multimedia elements (such as visual images and sound)." "Kottrel" defines digital media as any element or set of elements that combine text, sound, video, or images for the purpose of conveying information that creates meaning in the user's mind. "Alvermann, Beach & Boggs" define digital media as "a term applied to communication tools that involve converting data into machine-readable formats within networks that people can access."

Digital media also refers to a set of new digital methods and activities that enable the production, dissemination, and consumption of media content in its various forms through electronic devices (media), whether connected or not connected to the Internet.

In Arabic scholarship, "Faqih" defines digital media as "the use of Internet technology to publish and exchange news and information and communicate through Internet-connected electronic devices, with the aim of social, cultural, political, and media communication." Mustafa and Nouchi define digital media as media that uses all electronic communication means available on the Internet to reach audiences wherever they are and however they wish.

B-1 Digital Media Tools

Digital media tools are numerous and advanced on the Internet, including but not limited to:

- Websites and electronic pages: some are news-related, such as newspaper websites, while others are commercial and economic for displaying and selling goods, as well as religious, entertainment, and educational pages, etc.
- Email correspondence: such as Yahoo and Hotmail, through which messages can be sent and replied to; it is a fast and low-cost means.
- Chat sites: through which calls and instant conversations can be conducted, such as Skype and Viber.
- Blogs: a means for writing and publishing ideas and personal opinions, using the Internet as a medium, with the possibility of receiving readers' comments.
- Social networking sites: widely used and widespread, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

B-2 Characteristics of Digital Media

- **Interactivity:** audiences can participate in content through comments and sharing.

- **Instant updating:** the ability to update news and information in real time.

- **Global access:** the Internet enables access to news and information from anywhere in the world.

- **Diversity and plurality:** digital media allows the emergence of multiple voices, enhancing freedom of expression.

Other characteristics include:

- Reliance on multimedia such as videos and interactive images.

- The emergence of social networks as influential media platforms.

- The spread of blogs and podcasts as new forms of independent media.

B-3 Types of Digital Media

1. **Electronic news websites:**

Electronic news websites are among the most important forms of digital media, providing news and reports online automatically. Their most prominent features include continuous updating and the possibility of interacting with content through comments and social media.

2. **Social media:**

Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become primary sources of news and digital content, allowing real-time information and interaction, which increases their media influence.

3. **Blogs and podcasts:**

Blogs and podcasts are modern forms of digital media, enabling individuals and companies to publish specialized content on various topics with the possibility of direct interaction with audiences.

4. **Interactive digital journalism:**

This includes news websites that use multimedia technologies, such as videos and interactive images, to present content in innovative ways.

5. **Video and live-stream media:**

Platforms such as YouTube have become among the most important tools of digital media, allowing individuals and institutions to produce and broadcast content directly to audiences worldwide.

Secondly: Digital Media Theories

A- Classical Traditional Theories

1) Agenda-Setting Theory

The beginnings of applying agenda-setting theory to new media date back to 1998, when Yun conducted a test of agenda-setting on the World Wide Web. Yun sought to determine whether Korean students at the University of Texas' use of Korean newspaper websites affected their ranking of Korean economic issues. Students were asked in a telephone survey about the most important economic issues facing their country, and Yun also analyzed the content of the economic sections of three of the largest Korean newspaper websites.

One of the problems of the agenda-setting hypothesis is that individuals who are more exposed to a particular medium should reflect that medium's agenda more than individuals with less exposure. However, this result has not been sufficiently tested, which prompted Yun to examine whether students who were more exposed to Internet newspapers were more likely to adopt their agendas than those with less exposure. The results showed a positive correlation between the level of exposure to newspaper websites and the degree of agreement with their agendas, revealing greater similarity between personal agendas and newspaper agendas among students more exposed to web newspapers.

New research in agenda-setting has focused on identifying the characteristics of media content on the web that make an issue salient or highly important, such as hyperlinks, which are considered framing mechanisms or indicators of importance. Wang conducted an experiment to measure the effect of hyperlinks on audience perceptions of issue importance by examining whether hyperlinks in an online newspaper story would increase the perceived importance of the issue of racism among readers.

In 2007, Yong examined the role of independent news websites in building the agenda of anti-American demonstrations in South Korea, which erupted following the death of two female students struck by a U.S. military vehicle in 2002. The researcher confirmed that news websites played an important role in shaping public agendas and escalating angry public reactions that turned into anti-American demonstrations.

2) Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Many researchers have addressed the concept of the diffusion of innovations, linking the process of change to the dissemination of new ideas in societies, and how the social system can change through the spread of innovations, given that communication is essential to social change.

Since social networking sites are among the outcomes of scientific discoveries in new media, the integration of traditional and new media has created a new philosophy for studying digital media. Accordingly, this theory has been adopted in digital media studies because it examines how new technologies and ideas are disseminated and evaluated. Three research trends have emerged guiding the use of diffusion of innovations theory in new media research:

- Individuals' adoption of new media at the expense of traditional media.
- Journalists' and media institutions' adoption of new innovations related to media convergence.
- Journalists' adoption of social networking sites as platforms for publishing, promoting journalistic stories, communicating with readers, and obtaining sources and information.

3) **Gatekeeping** **Theory**

Media is undergoing a phase of radical change and transformation in terms of roles and characteristics marked by plurality and interactivity. New media has greatly contributed to overcoming taboos and red lines drawn by societal institutions. These transformations, mainly linked to the Internet, have changed the nature of the gatekeeper. Studies addressing the concept of gatekeeping in the electronic environment have questioned its compatibility with the new environment.

Views have differed: some argue that the concept no longer exists in the context of new media, while others believe it remains applicable to the new media environment.

It has become possible for each individual to perform the gatekeeping function themselves, whether as a sender or receiver of information, determining their own media needs without the need for another party or a gatekeeper to decide, select, summarize, repackage, analyze, or interpret information and opinions.

This perspective holds that the constraints imposed by gatekeepers in traditional media environments have disappeared in the new environment, including political pressures or restrictions related to obtaining and broadcasting information. Therefore, there is no longer a need for gatekeepers whose functions have been surpassed by modern media. The new environment has also produced a new category of media professionals not subject to the traditional constraints and pressures faced by journalists in traditional media, particularly those related to working conditions such as time and space.

Another group, however, argues that gatekeepers still exist in the new media arena and perform the same tasks as in traditional environments. Despite the emergence of new types of gatekeepers, others continue to carry out the same functions as traditional gatekeepers, affirming that filtering or selection has not completely disappeared. These tasks are performed by individual gatekeepers, media outlets, and specialized programs. Thus, the gatekeeping function still exists in the electronic environment, albeit within a different context.

B- Modern Theories in Digital Media

1. Digital Transformation Theory

Digital transformation theory discusses the impact of technological development and digital technologies on societies and economies. It indicates that digital transformation represents a structural change in the way data and information are produced and exchanged. The theory aims to understand the impact of digital technology on societies and economies and to guide strategies and policies to benefit from its advantages and address its challenges. It refers to change associated with applying digital technology across all social and human fields. Examples include cloud computing, which significantly reduces reliance on user-owned devices and increases reliance on shared cloud-based services. Digital transformation is described as "the total and comprehensive societal impact of digitization." Digitization has enabled digital transformation, creating opportunities to transform and change existing business models, consumption patterns, socio-economic institutions, legal and political procedures, institutional patterns, and cultural barriers.

Digital transformation theory is based on the assumption that media evolves whenever a new medium emerges, with each medium operating in a manner similar to the components of any biological system. The history of communication media indicates the coexistence of old and new media, and media convergence is a form of intermarriage resulting from the transformation of each medium individually. Thus, modern media can be considered the product of small interactions that have continually and repeatedly occurred among media.

2. Digital Knowledge Gap Theory

The digital divide theory refers to a form of knowledge gap in cyberspace and is used to describe differences among individuals, groups, and countries in their ability to access and use modern information technology. Researchers view Internet access as one variable among others affecting the digital divide, such as the quality of Internet connectivity, the availability of supporting services, and affordable connection costs.

Van Dijk notes that researchers previously used concepts similar to the digital divide when studying disparities among individuals regarding ownership and use of media and information in general, such as information inequality, information gap, knowledge gap, and computer or media literacy. He adds that the concept of the digital divide has increasingly come to specifically denote disparities in individuals' ability to access and use the Internet, due to its gradual spread since the mid-1990s to the present.

The theory proposes five main assumptions, including:

- Social class disparity leads to unequal distribution of resources.
- Unequal resource distribution leads to unequal access to digital technologies among individuals.
- Differences in access to digital technologies are directly related to the characteristics of the technologies themselves.
- Differences in access to digital technologies lead to disparities in levels of social participation.
- Disparities in social participation further exacerbate social class inequality and unequal resource distribution.

Van Dijk emphasizes that the structure of the theory is highly dynamic and interactive. While independent variables related to social class inequality and unequal resource distribution affect dependent variables related to disparities in social participation, the latter, in turn, lead to further social inequality. This means that the relationship between the causes and consequences of the digital divide appears circular and reciprocal, ultimately leading to the widening of the digital divide over time rather than its reduction.

3. Network Theory

Network Theory (Network Theory and Growth of the Web) is also referred to as the network approach, social network analysis, or network actor theory. All of these are derived from computer science and have been employed in the field of new media to describe and diagnose forms of social networking on the internet, to identify the relationships linking citizens to new technologies, and to attempt to understand contemporary social and cultural changes in light of the concepts of individualism and decentralization.

The roots of network theory go back to the Swiss mathematician Leonhard Euler, who presented a study on graphs and networks in his work on a problem related to bridges and landmasses. The theory was later applied by Barabási and Réka in 1999. The theory holds that each web

page has a number of links connecting it to other pages; these links may be many or few. A single page may be linked to only one page, or it may be linked to dozens of pages. Accordingly, this theory focuses on the number of links present on a page and proposes formulations that clarify the relationship between topics and the number of links. On this basis, the theory is useful in determining appropriate links for each journalistic genre, enabling the identification of the number of links in local and international news, as well as in articles, interviews, investigations, short topics, and others. This is what Leonard referred to at the outset when he spoke about graphs, which apply to the World Wide Web.

Third: Economics of Digital Media

1. Concept of the Digital Economy

The concept of the digital economy refers to that part of the economy that relies on digital technologies such as the internet, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and big data to create economic value. The digital economy is characterized by rapid transformation, reliance on platforms, and dependence on data as a strategic resource.

2. Concept of Media Economics

In order to provide a definition of media economics, it is first necessary to define economics, which is understood as "a social science that deals with the analysis of material problems and determines the various means through which individuals can satisfy their desires for goods and services by using the limited resources available to them."

Media economics is defined by Robert Picard as "the study of how media institutions meet the informational and entertainment needs and desires of audiences, the needs of advertisers, and the needs of society in general, using the resources available to them." Based on this concept, media economics enables us to understand the following points:

- Understanding the nature of economic relationships between those working in the media industry and the audience on the one hand, and between them and advertisers on the other.
- Understanding the economic activities of media institutions and how the production process is managed within them.
- Identifying the resources that constitute media institutions' revenues and their profitability rates.
- Assisting in the study of competing institutions.

- Enabling the prediction of market behavior and developments.

3. Media as an Actor in the Digital Economy

In this context, media is no longer merely a channel for transmitting information but has become a digital product subject to the equations of the digital market. The relationship between media and the economy has evolved from traditional funding through advertising and subscriptions to models based on interaction, targeting, and value creation through data.

Among the most prominent manifestations of this interaction are:

- The transformation of content into a digital commodity that can be monitored and measured.

- Adapting media production to the requirements of algorithms and platforms (such as attractive headlines, short videos, and real-time interaction).

- The rise of platforms as both competitors and intermediaries, as technology companies have come to play a central role in regulating the flow of information and generating profit from it.

Digital media economics in general, and electronic journalism in particular, are characterized by what is known as the unlimited nature of the economics of abundance or large scale. As long as the increase in receiving media material does not entail additional costs, and most costs occur in the pre-production stage, these costs remain fixed; as consumption increases, costs decrease, and profits increase accordingly.

Effective investment in electronic journalism requires changing the view of media products from being commodities sold (such as newspapers and magazines) to being services that provide the recipient/consumer with information. Information has characteristics that distinguish it from other products, not only because it is intangible, but also because the way it is used differs from other products. Information—especially digital information—does not lose its value due to obsolescence or the emergence of newer information. When archived, it remains usable and accessible through search engines and may generate continuous income as long as there is demand for it. In contrast, the economic validity of printed newspapers or magazines ends after hours or days of their release to the market; with the appearance of new issues, they lose their value and become returns (often sold at very low prices).

4. Media Stakes in the Digital Environment

Despite the growth and dissemination opportunities offered by the digital economy, media outlets face structural challenges, the most important of which are:

- **Loss of control over value chains:** Media outlets no longer control the cycle of content production and distribution but instead depend on platform algorithms to reach audiences.

- **Widening the gap between small and large institutions:** Some institutions have the capacity to invest in technology and data analysis, while others suffer from limited resources and weak digital presence.

- **Reshaping the relationship with the audience:** Audience engagement is now measured numerically and targeted through advertising, which may affect the quality and ethics of the content presented.

5. Digital Advertising as a Source of Funding

Historically, advertising has played a major role in financing journalism in Northern Europe. Printed newspapers enjoyed a dominant market position with very limited competition and high levels of consumption, leading to an almost complete monopoly over local advertising. However, in the digital domain, newspaper institutions face intense competition for advertisers' investments from a wide range of players, including global platform companies that capture a large share of audience attention and can offer cheaper and more targeted advertising products. With the growth of big data and advances in computing systems, the creation, targeting, and delivery of advertising messages today take entirely new forms, and many new actors participate in the advertising ecosystem. This reduces the importance of the "paid" element and "mass media" in advertising, and these wide-ranging transformations have had a negative impact on advertising revenues in the newspaper industry.

In Norway, newspapers lost 31% of their advertising revenues between 2015 and 2019, mainly due to the decline in print advertising, while online advertising increased slightly (Norwegian Media Authority, 2020). In 2019, the newspaper industry attracted only 15% of total advertising spending in Norway, while Facebook and Google accounted for more than 50% of the country's advertising market. The decline in traditional advertising sales forced newspapers to develop other ways to attract advertisers' funds. Research studies have identified a wide range of advertising revenue sources in digital spaces, including content marketing, mobile and video advertising, and programmatic advertising. News media have been compelled to adapt to a data-

driven advertising logic rather than audience reach, where the prices they can charge for advertising products are much lower than those they could impose in the print era.

5.1. Development of the Digital Advertising Market

The practice of promotional activities for goods and services on the internet is relatively recent. Its true beginning dates back to 1994, when the first advertisement was sold and the first web browser was made commercially available.

Online advertising first appeared on October 27, 1994, on the website (www.hotwired.com), the electronic version of *High-Tech* magazine. That day marked the birth of internet advertising. Netscape is also considered the first web browser, released in November 1994.

Since 1995, the internet has effectively become a medium for advertising, publishing, and promotion. At that time, some companies tested the effectiveness of their online advertising campaigns before publishing them in other media. Advertising on the web initially entered as free classified listings on newsletters, broadcast in a traditional manner. Companies that created online stores provided them with a home page to serve as the storefront interface, displaying goods and services available inside, which users could explore by clicking.

Media pioneer Rupert Murdoch noted in a speech before the American Society of Newspaper Editors that global advertising spending would shrink in 2007 by 29.8%, compared to online advertising spending, which had risen to 3.8% and was expected to reach 4.4% two years later.

Today, electronic advertising has become a form of advertising that imposes itself on recipients, engaging them involuntarily as they browse various websites, and confronting them in online chat rooms or via email.

Moreover, the spread of the internet and social media has led to a radical change in content distribution methods. Instead of advertising to a general audience through newspapers or television, it has become possible to target specific users based on precise criteria such as:

- Age, gender, and geographic location
- Interests and browsing behavior
- Previous interactions with brands or content

This development has been characterized by:

1. **Increased spending on digital advertising:** According to recent reports, digital advertising has exceeded 60% of total global advertising spending, while the share of traditional media continues to decline.

2. **Changes in market structure:** Major technology companies such as Google and Meta dominate up to 70% of the digital advertising market in some countries, leaving limited space for independent media outlets.

5.2. Advantages of Digital Advertising for Media Outlets

Digital advertising offers several economic and technical advantages, most notably:

- **Precision targeting:** Digital media can display customized ads according to user profiles, increasing advertising effectiveness and achieving higher conversion rates for advertisers.

- **Measurement and analysis:** Advertising campaign performance can be measured in real time (such as number of clicks, duration of engagement, and conversion rates), contributing to continuous campaign improvement.

- **Flexibility in financial models:** Digital advertising allows multiple revenue models, such as:
  - Pay-per-click
  - Pay-per-impression
  - Marketing partnerships
  - Sponsored content

- **Data linkage:** The more a media outlet can collect and analyze user data, the greater its ability to attract advertisers and generate higher profits.

5.3. Challenges of Digital Advertising in Media Financing

Despite the availability of opportunities and advantages mentioned above, digital advertising faces several challenges, most notably:

i. Dominance and monopoly of major platforms:

- Companies such as Google and Meta control the largest share of revenues, using their platforms as intermediaries to reach audiences.

- This monopolistic structure reduces media institutions' share of revenues, even though they produce the content that attracts attention.

- Media outlets rely on these platforms to publish content, making them hostage to opaque algorithms.

ii. Decline of editorial values in favor of revenues:

- The pursuit of high traffic (clickbait) to attract advertising sometimes leads to prioritizing sensationalism over quality.
- This affects editorial independence and creates pressure to direct content toward profitability rather than public service or knowledge quality.

iii. Fragility of the financial model:

- Advertising alone is insufficient as a sustainable funding mechanism, especially in light of intense competition and declining click prices in some sectors.
- Changes in privacy policies (such as banning third-party cookies) affect targeting efficiency and thus revenues.

iv. Challenges of trust and credibility:

- Excessive advertising may create a sense of annoyance among audiences and affect the image of media institutions.
- Misleading or unregulated advertisements may harm the credibility of media platforms, especially in an open environment where ads are not always subject to oversight.

5.4. The Need for Balance Between Profit and Independence

The challenges facing advertising in the digital environment have produced a new equation for institutions, which are now required to rethink their relationship with digital advertising by seeking hybrid models that combine financial returns with editorial independence through:

- Developing parallel subscription channels (paid, exclusive).
- Transparency in advertising techniques used.
- Building trust with audiences by respecting privacy and avoiding excessive data exploitation.

Conclusion

Through this presentation, it is evident that media and communication have experienced an unprecedented technological leap with the development of communication technologies represented by the internet, computers, and accompanying applications such as social media (Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, WhatsApp, etc.). This has generated new ways of delivering information to recipients, whether economic information related to buying and selling, considering the recipient as a potential customer, or news or awareness-related information. These media are distinguished by their methods of targeting and reaching the intended audience, rather than the audience searching for information themselves, through advanced algorithms

and programs that have contributed to this media and economic transformation. This has led to fundamental changes in the concepts of economics, commerce, and media.

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