“Collaborative Contribution of News-related User-generated Content in Social Media: The Role and Impact of Gatekeepers”

by Ang Li

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Abstract:
Social media has become an important source where people gather and communicate news. Prior studies in conventional mass media suggest that gatekeepers play an important role in the production of news messages. Despite the initial claim of social media being a place of democratized participation, we now know, social media is not free of gatekeepers either. However, it is unclear who social media gatekeepers are, how to identify them, and most importantly how do they impact news content production and dissemination. Due to fundamental differences between the structure and workings of social media vs. traditional media, what we know from mass media cannot directly apply in the context of social media. My PhD dissertation aims to answer these questions, and I intend to uncover the gatekeeping process in social media around news events across two different social media platforms: Twitter and Wikipedia. Each of these platforms represent a different degree of collaboration process, moderation process, and different community norms. I first propose an actionable definition of social media gatekeepers backed by literature on news reporting in social media and traditional mass media. I then present two case studies of identifying and understanding gatekeepers on both Twitter and Wikipedia at scale. The results of my mixed research approach highlight that, unlike the general users, social media gatekeepers are often self-determining citizen journalists who manage their media presentation strategically. The results also demonstrate that gatekeepers tend to exhibit behavior mostly in accordance with the journalism norms: they contribute to and guard the quality of the user-generated content. Moreover, the results also highlight the role of collaboration in the gatekeeping process: gatekeepers' effects in improving the quality of user-generated content rely on the collaboration among gatekeepers themselves as well as other users. My dissertation presents the first piece of research on quantitatively identifying social media gatekeepers on a relatively large scale as well as examining their impact on news sharing and production.