Interface Technology Trends Implications for News and Information Services

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INTRODUCTION

The web has become a primary vehicle for news and information dissemination. In 2008, Kohut, (2008, p. 21) reported that, “Thirty-seven percent of people today, including more than half of Internet users, obtain news online whereas ten years ago only 13% of the public and 35% of Internet users went online for news.” More recently, in a survey of Internet use, it was found that 61% of respondents obtained news daily online, 71% reported getting news occasionally online and most people reported using between two and five online news sources and that they did not have a favorite news website (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Olmstead, 2010). Major transformations are taking place in news and information services, which magnify questions regarding the influence the web has on newsreaders (Santana, Livingstone, & Cho, 2011). As noted by many researchers, media are not solely transmitters of information, but they influence the process of thought (Carr, 2008; Purcell et al., 2010).

The web is represented to users as a highly dynamic interface characterized by a proliferation of media and interactivity that supersedes what is found in traditional informational sources such as newsprint or television news. Increasingly, people get news and information in multiple formats on the web using an array of computational devices such as phones and tablets. In 2011, there were roughly 6 billion mobile-cellular subscriptions (ICT, 2011). Many people access the web wirelessly on laptops or mobile devices, making news and information services portable, personalized, and participatory (Purcell et al., 2010). People can obtain news or be aware of worldwide events at any time of day or in any location around the world.

Digital interfaces or points-of-contact through which people experience news and information services have never been so diverse or transformative. They present complex visual landscapes comprised of and supported by multimedia, communications, and networking technologies. Pervasive worldwide, they afford people an unprecedented degree of functionality and access to news, information services, and other people. Interfaces are a foundational technology that has helped instigate tectonic shifts in news and information consuming behavior, journalistic reporting, and news preparation and distribution, the impact of which is not fully understood.

In this article, I examine trends in today’s news-orientated interfaces and the impact of digital interfaces on news consumption. Digital interfaces will be differentiated from traditional informational sources such as newspapers and television news. Additionally, I will explore the following six major characteristics or trends germane to today’s news interfaces and their implications for how people consume news and, more generally, for how they transform information services: a) rapid innovation, b) interactivity, c) social, d) standardization, e) scale, and f) media convergence.

BACKGROUND: TRADITIONAL MEDIA SERVICES

Newspaper and television news organizations have long-established traditions for distributing news in their respective media (print or television). The inherent attributes of these media greatly influence how people access and comprehend news as well as how news is reported. Pipp, Walter, Endres, and Tabatcher (2009), for example, report on research showing that content recall for television and radio news was lower than recall of textual information. Access to a news story and learning from it is directly affected by many contextual features or interferences that make up the social and behavioral state of the environment in which a person acquires news (DeFletr, Davenport, Cronin, & DeFleur, 1992, p. 1011). Television broadcasts
Digital Interface Issues

The interfaces or points-of-contact in the digital realm are fundamentally different from those of traditional newspaper and television. Now, between the user of a device and the information or service he/she seeks is a computational or digital interface encompassing the hardware and software components that users see, hear, touch, or talk to as they interact. Digital interfaces are becoming a dominant means of access as people retrieve news on websites, news feeds, or podcasts using computers, phones, or a host of other devices. Correspondingly, broadband, broadcasting,
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