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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ONLINE NEWSPAPER IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTIMEDIA SYSTEMS: THEORETICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the characteristics of online newspapers within the context of multimedia systems through a theoretical perspective. Drawing upon existing literature, it delves into seven key characteristics: interactivity, hypertextuality, multimodality, instantaneity, ubiquity, memory, and personalization. Interactivity, marked by reader participation, is crucial in electronic publications, offering options like chats, forums, voting systems, and guest books. Hypertextuality enables non-linear navigation through interconnected texts, expanding the depth and context of information. Multimodality allows for the integration of various media forms like text, audio, video, and graphics, enriching the storytelling experience. Instantaneity permits real-time updates, distinguishing online newspapers from their print counterparts, while ubiquity ensures information access anytime, anywhere. Memory ensures the archival and retrieval of vast amounts of data, facilitating historical context and analysis. Personalization empowers users to tailor their news consumption, albeit posing challenges in curating relevant content amidst information overloads. The interplay of these characteristics reshapes traditional notions of news dissemination, transforming the online newspaper into a dynamic, interactive, and personalized medium. As the digital landscape evolves, understanding these characteristics

becomes imperative for effective online journalism. The paper underscores the interconnectedness of these traits, highlighting their collective contribution to the evolving nature of news consumption in the digital age.

Keywords: Multimedia, Online Newspaper, Cyberjournalism

INTRODUCTION

In the literature it is possible to find different authors who deal with the characteristics and potential of online journalism. Without pretending to define the professional discipline inherent to online journalism, it is important to take advantage of these contributions to draw the necessary parallels with the characteristics of online journalism. The starting point for presenting the characteristics and potentialities of online journalism will be the model drawn up by Zamith (2011) when he identifies the potentialities of the Internet that are relevant to online journalism. These potentialities are interactivity, hypertextuality, multimodality, instantaneity, ubiquity, memory, and personalisation (Zamith, 2011). Each of these potentialities is analysed below.

Interactivity

Interactivity on the Internet represents the user's ability to act on the multimedia product presented to them. The traditional

one-way communication between the media and the reader is beginning to lose ground. With interactivity, the reader is constantly encouraged to participate. Nowadays, interactivity is essential in electronic publications, especially newspapers, as it is necessary for the user to select, within the structure of the information, the content that most interests them. Despite the current tendency to reward interactive performances, anything that is unnecessarily interactive should be avoided.

Interactivity is characterised by reader participation and sharing.

According to Rost (2006), interactivity has two dimensions: selective interactivity, which is the ability of the medium to allow the reader to select content; and communicative interactivity, which allows the reader to express themselves. Online communication tends to organise its content into blocks where the user encounters different levels of information and interaction. This interactivity is maximised through interactive channels such as chat, forums, voting and guest books. In this way, the user feels much more involved in the process because they have an active voice and can collect and give opinions. Briefly, we can say that chat is characterised by written conversation areas on the internet and is one of the most popular services offered by the web, as well as being a service that is completed almost in real time. It is precisely this elimination of time gaps in interaction that users appreciate most today. Chats on online media are currently a widely used means of conducting interviews, with multiple questions from different users that sometimes have a moderator among the users who can play a more active or passive role (López García et al., 2002).

Forums, on the other hand, are distinguished from chats above all by the time that marks the course of action. Forums make it possible to have a wide-

ranging discussion between users/readers on a given topic. In the digital world, forums are very attractive to the user because they encourage readers to participate and to see the newspaper as a public space that gives them a sense of belonging.

The traffic of accesses to the website enhances this process because to follow the evolution of a debate in the forum, the user must continually access the forum. It should be emphasised that a forum is undoubtedly one of the most attractive opinion channels for the Internet media. Another feature to emphasise is that forums are designed to remain on the web for long periods of time so that the user can follow the evolution of the discussion. Attention must be paid to the frequent saturation of content, so the key to the success of forums lies in choosing the most representative content after a period of publication (López García et al., 2002).

Voting systems are also very common in electronic media. This is a fast interactive system that mobilises the user around a topical issue and allows them to see the results of that vote in real time. This medium differs from chat in that it does not require moderation and therefore has fewer specific human resources. In order to emphasise the risks of this channel, it should be noted that when voting results are visible in real time, i.e. when it is possible to see the evolution of the voting results, we can often face the problem of manipulation of the results, since the same user can vote from different computers and be influenced by the partial results that are being released.

Finally, guest books are a way for users to leave their messages, which are then visualised according to pre-defined time parameters. In this context, multimedia systems are particularly important. When we talk about multimedia systems, we are also referring to the use of windows within the screen to access another level of information by association or

magnification compared to what is initially presented (Cebrián Herreros, 2005). Thus, a multimedia screen presents a set of textual or iconic points through which information can be accessed directly or indirectly. The user has a great deal of freedom to manage their tasks in relation to the information presented to them in each window.

However, there are codes that can guide the user through the system. It's not about giving them the result, but rather providing them with instructions to guide them through the process so that they can achieve the desired result. It's about guided navigation with the aim of obtaining certain information. Iconic, written, and sound codes are important in this task of guiding the user. It is intended that these codes should only play a guiding role without taking centre stage, and that they should be as universal as possible so that they can be understood by the greatest number of users. Therefore, the characteristic of universality must be applied in this field. The architecture of the information in the different windows must correspond to a coherent composition, for example: that the elements are organised according to the reading order, i.e. arranged from top to bottom and from left to right.

In multimedia systems, the use of colour in their representations has a differentiating role, with a certain coding value, according to the values present in the system. For example, the colour green indicates continuity, the colour red is associated with danger or stoppage. Different colours can be used to differentiate the different windows, also considering the rules of colour and brightness that can be adjusted according to the discrimination of planes. In multimedia systems, colour is also used to emphasise links, words, graphics, retain the user's attention and even to alert them to the possibility of opening a new window and accessing a new set of information.

We can also mention that organisations can present their multimedia content with reference to a colour pattern that corresponds to their logo and visual image to ensure coherence in communication. It will be easier for the reader to associate certain information, words, or graphics if the predominant colours can establish a strong association with the corporate identity.

The entire multimedia system brings together a varied set of visual symbols and codes, such as arrows to indicate that the user can move forwards or backwards or stop signs to indicate that the user should stop. In fact, the presentation of information in an electronic format allows for a multitude of visual variants that cannot be achieved on paper, such as variations in intensity, flashing light, differences in brightness, etc. (Cebrián Herreros, 2005). This whole multimedia system makes it possible to classify the information presented as dynamic information. The specificities of multimedia are what best characterise the information potential of the Internet, especially when text is combined with images, video, and sound.

We are seeing a growing increase in the presence of images, especially videos, in digital media, which is greatly facilitated by the increased speed of internet connections. In the field of film promotion, the role of video is fundamental to the convergence of information for readers, since access to the film trailer is very close to what the reader wants. Despite the development of multimedia on the web, the static image continues to play a major role, albeit without the same degree of interactivity as video. The web has become a huge container of images, a constantly updated portfolio of graphic styles, trends, fashions, and visual expressions (Baule, 2005). The image should not fulfil a merely decorative function but should

facilitate understanding of the information.

On the other hand, animated images are considered distracting elements that detract from the seriousness of the information or are confused with advertising (Palomo Torres, 2007). Images are also often used to occupy the reader and reduce the mental waiting time before new information appears. Another way of presenting images that is gaining more and more visibility and giving the image itself greater prominence is the construction of image galleries. These can be grouped according to a specific piece of news, a person, an event, or other aggregating element. The concept of interactivity does not concern the relationship between man and machine, but rather human interaction enhanced by the machine. It concerns the user's reaction to what they are shown. Interactivity is perhaps the characteristic that most differentiates online news. Interactivity is related to the medium's ability to give readers greater autonomy, offering them the chance to select content and express their opinions.

Hypertextuality

Hypertextuality is centred on the possibility of interconnecting a certain piece of information with other informative texts through multiple connections. The most widespread use of the concept of hypertext was due to Theodor (Ted) Nelson, who used the term for the first time in 1962, based on the idea of hyperspace, influenced by the mathematical concept that defines the prefix "hyper" as extended and generalised (Bardini, 1997). Although we associate hypertext with the Internet, when the concept emerged it was thought of as a network of information associated with a type of electronic text that was not necessarily the Internet. Already strongly associated with the Internet, Lévy (1993) defines hypertext as a set of nodes linked

by connections. The nodes can be words, pages, images, graphics or parts of graphics, sound sequences, complex documents that can themselves be hypertexts.

For Díaz Noci and Salaverría (2003), hypertext is seen as a form of discourse that is constructed from the combination of various texts. Hypertextuality allows navigation to be carried out through links, enabling access to information in a non-linear or multi-directional way. It allows for the interconnection of texts that give rise to countless reading routes, abandoning the idea of predefined sequential reading. According to Flores Vivar (2017), describing a broad concept, hypertextuality is defined as the ability to connect some information elements with others. Looking at the potential of online journalism, hypertextuality stands out as the ability to interconnect digital texts with each other (Salaverría, 2005, p. 30). Today it seems clear that hypertextuality cannot be disconnected from the Internet; it has its support on the web, connecting pages and information in a non-linear logic. Hypertextuality encompasses connections, links, and connections between content. It is the web that is built and travelled through as you move through information. This characteristic makes it possible to work with content in terms of context and depth, i.e. unfolding information in other information structures to delve deeper into subjects, approaches, and points of view (Schwingel, 2008). Hypertextuality is not restricted to text strictu sensu, i.e. hypertextuality may not be textual. Graphics, audio, animations, and videos can all be hypertextual elements, so there is no single morphology. Hypertext can have multimedia characteristics (Flores Vivar, 2017).

Multimediality

Multimediality allows facts to be narrated using a wide convergence of media: text, audio, video, photography, graphics, infographics, drawings, etc. It makes it possible to integrate various media on the same platform. If we think about all these elements in isolation, it's clear that multimedia tools predate the Internet, but are now the target of more far-reaching potential. The transposition of multimedia into online news, often with the help of hypertext links, provides a multidirectional experience that is very close to a direct experience of the facts being told. Multimedia resources offer various possibilities for developing journalistic expression, since there is a whole multimedia interactive panoply that allows, for example, dynamic icons, graphics, or images that only appear when the mouse hovers over a word or captions that only appear when the mouse is over that image. Multimedia can also involve active participation by the reader when they are allowed to explore the multimedia content in an informative but also playful way, motivating them to continue with the interaction. More specifically, Palacios et al. (2002) indicate that multimediality refers to the convergence of traditional media formats (image, text, and sound) in the narration of the journalistic fact. This process of integrating content in a coordinated and harmonious way gives rise to a new language (Salaverría, 2010).

Instantaneity

Instantaneity means that content can be permanently published and updated. In effect, information can be published at any time without having to wait for the next edition, as is the case with a paper newspaper. Online editions are not subject to the limits of a periodicity - which is no longer the case with paper editions - because they are constantly being updated. The ability to constantly update the online newspaper is seen as one of the most

distinctive characteristics of the online newspaper, especially when compared to the printed newspaper (Torres & Américo, 2003). Cyberjournalism still has enormous growth potential because its evolution is always linked to the technology that supports it. The speed of technology is the speed of online news. This accelerated pace marks new forms of relationship with the reader. All these characteristics pose permanent challenges to the design of the online newspaper, as the user is constantly called upon to interact in new ways. In this era marked by the ephemeral due to the speed at which technology is updated, online newspaper design must always have usability as a reference.

Ubiquity

Ubiquity means that all the information available on the web can be consulted at any time and in any place. There is a certain association with omnipresence. This is only possible through computer systems, more specifically, ubiquitous computing refers to the use of technology to create a point of confluence between the physical and the virtual, which gives rise to social and public spaces through mobile or portable devices (Flores Vivar, 2017). Technological information processing devices make it possible to have ubiquitous information, which has been worked on by cyberjournalists by interpreting data and information through these devices. In this way, information is being represented through digitalised means to an increasingly demanding audience that is, of course, also ubiquitous (Flores Vivar, 2017).

Memory

Associated with the idea that information is transported from the past to the present, memory is essential for the functioning of any collective, as each group needs a conscience to serve as a reference (Jerónimo, 2014, p. 38).

Memory is related to the idea that the information available on the Internet, with its virtually unlimited storage capacity, is archived and can be consulted at any time. It offers the possibility for both professionals and readers to access, send and archive information whenever they want. Search engines that allow information to be retrieved are therefore useful for both users and online journalists. The online newspaper doesn't have the space limitations that the printed newspaper has, it is possible to store all the information. Because there are almost no archive limits, the online newspaper can make an endless amount of information available to the reader, usually through hypertext links. It is possible to provide links to previous news items, to databases, to other media, etc. In this way, readers can create their own news without rigid cycles based on the periodicity of the newspaper. The reader can go back to a certain reality and interpret it or link it to a current reality. The existence of search engines to retrieve information is one of the features that has added the most value to the online newspaper. This is because it allows access to information that is not currently available quickly and easily.

Personalisation

Personalisation refers to the possibility for the user to make settings according to their interests. This feature allows both the presentation of online media and the configuration of information to correspond to their preferences (Zamith, 2008). In this way, readers can access a newspaper in a way that fulfils their interests and expectations. The reader has numerous decision-making possibilities at their disposal, both in terms of the content they consult and the way they configure it, all enabled by the versatility of the digital newspaper. But this feature, which demands individualised information, poses a huge challenge: "turning the ocean of information stored digitally into

something interesting and relevant for readers" (Bastos, 2000, p. 119).

FINAL REFLECTION

In view of the characteristics indicated, it seems clear that the online newspaper is dissociated from any temporal or spatial limits. The dynamic of access to information is always pursued and from anywhere. On the other hand, the user has a huge responsibility in the way they organise access to information using hypertext. The user can follow the trail of a news item that they haven't been following and, in the present moment, access content from the past. All these possibilities cannot be dissociated from memory and personalisation, which allow the user to build their own model for accessing information, leveraging their interests and the almost unlimited storage of information. The online newspaper has undoubtedly reconfigured the space of the newspaper in today's communication context. The existence of linear communication no longer makes sense and there is now multidirectional navigation with strong consequences for the graphic structure.

Of the available resources that distinguish the online newspaper, the following stand out: hypertext resources; interactivity; personalisation when consulting information; easy access to archived information due to the memory that allows almost unlimited storage; permanent updating; exploitation of the potential of multimedia resources. In order to characterise the online newspaper, it may be useful to use the distinction between the print edition and the online edition made by Canavilhas (2001). There are four structural characteristics that make it possible to individualise the online newspaper: access, personalisation, periodicity, and useful information. According to Palacios et al. (2002) there are six specific elements of online

publishing: multimedia / convergence, interactivity, hypertextuality, personalisation, memory, and continuous updating.

All these distinctive elements are based on the medium itself and its tools. The characteristics listed are interdependent because they complement each other and are presented in a harmonised way. Access to hypertext requires the user to draw a particular path due to personalisation, which is only possible because the information is stored in memory. Interactivity facilitates linked navigation based on the hypertextuality present in both texts and multimedia resources. This navigation is possible at any time and in any place, which is enhanced by constant updating.

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