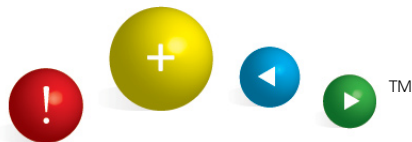


A New Model for News

Studying the
Deep Structure
of Young-Adult
News Consumption

**A Research Report
from The Associated Press
and the Context-Based
Research Group**

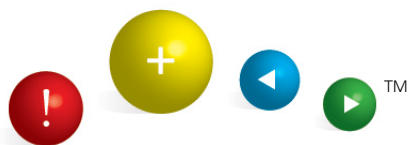
June 2008



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P R O L O G U E

In the spring of 2007,

The Associated Press embarked on some business research that began quite routinely but would end up reshaping our thinking about journalism in the digital age.

As part of our strategic planning process, we sought to understand news consumption patterns beyond what traditional market data and consumer surveys could tell us. We had a senior management retreat coming up, and we needed something more exciting than regional growth rates to stimulate discussion.

An analyst on the planning staff suggested doing an “ethnography” of young adult consumers, and after a quick Google search to understand exactly what that meant, we decided to give it a try.

To be frank, our expectations were modest. We sought some real people to put a human face on the accelerating shift to online and mobile consumption of news around the world. We knew young people were at the leading edge of that movement and a cultural science study of their media habits sounded like fun.

In the end, it proved to be as transformative as it was fun. The human stories were only the start. From there, the professional anthropologists we commissioned to conduct the research created a model for news delivery that distilled the challenge to its essential elements.

Based on the observed behavior of the subjects in the study, four basic news entry points were identified as the main components of the subjects’ news diets: Facts, Updates, Back Story and Future Stories. The essential finding: The subjects were overloaded with facts and updates and were having trouble moving more deeply into the background and resolution of news stories.

That model, illustrated in a couple of interesting ways in this report, helped validate the mission we had been charting for the digital marketplace:

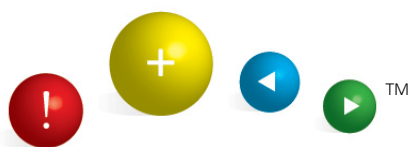
Create content that will satisfy a full range of consumers' news needs and then build the links that will connect people to the relevant news they seek.

Easy to say and harder to accomplish, in a news environment characterized by fragmented interests and mostly passive consumption patterns across online and offline news venues. The research demonstrated quite convincingly that the old models for packaging and delivering news were not connecting with the audience now coming of age around the world. The habits of these young consumers are radically different from those that have characterized news consumption for generations. Newspapers, scheduled broadcasts and even Web sites are giving way to a chaotic system of self-aggregation that is producing disappointing results not only for news producers, but – as this research shows – for consumers as well.

For the World Editors Forum, our initial research has been expanded in two important ways. First, the basic model of consumer behavior that emerged from the original project became the foundation for a broader set of findings and recommendations designed exclusively for release at the forum. Second, we have provided a summary of AP's own analysis of the model and the practical work that has taken shape in response to these and other digital trends. As further grounding for the findings, a brief case study of The Telegraph of London is included to illustrate how one well-known newspaper has dealt with the kind of challenges the model highlights.

Special thanks go to our partners in this research, the Context-Based Research Group of Baltimore, Maryland.

– AP Strategic Planning | June 2008



News Consumption Behaviors of Young Adults

An Anthropological Study

Overview and Study Objectives

The Associated Press commissioned Baltimore-based Context-Based Research Group to conduct a cultural science study – in the parlance of the discipline, an “ethnography” – focusing on the news consumption habits of young digital consumers in six cities around the world. The drive for this research came from the recognition that a significant shift in news consumption behavior is taking place among younger generations.

The trends had surfaced clearly across any number of quantitative measures

of media usage and were even clearer in everyday life. Younger consumers, ages 18-34, have adopted ways of getting their news that are much different from those of past generations. Younger consumers are not only less reliant on the newspaper to get their news; they also consume news across a multitude of platforms and sources, all day, constantly. Among the key touch points in the new environment are online video, blogs, online social networks, mobile devices, RSS, word of mouth, Web portals and search engines.

This shift is triggering

adjustments, even revolutions, at media companies in every part of the world. Amid its own revolution from predominantly print-based services, AP sought Context’s help in gaining a deeper and more holistic understanding of young consumers. How is news read, viewed and used by this generation—throughout a typical day?

The project’s original objectives included documenting the frequency with which participants searched for or consumed news; identifying the news sources that young

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consumers turned to most commonly, as well as those sources that they avoided; identifying the means they used to access these sources; examining preferred platforms for news consumption, especially new and/or nontraditional channels and devices; and expanding AP's understanding of

what constitutes news for young consumers. In short, the project sought to put a human face on 21st century news consumption. What is the "new face of news?"

The original research was completed in the summer of 2007 and produced a model for digital news consumption that AP integrated into its strategic

planning process.

In 2008, AP and Context re-engaged to analyze the field data further and extract findings and recommendations that could be shared with all those interested in pursuing new approaches to news gathering and delivery.

Why Ethnography and Anthropology: Getting to the Deep Structure

To achieve its objectives, the AP understood the need to take a look at consumers from a holistic perspective, to delve into their lifestyles and how their current attitudes and beliefs tie into larger cultural news consumption constructs on a global scale. To accomplish this goal, the AP turned to the discipline of anthropology, enlisting Context to perform an ethnography of contemporary news consumption behaviors.

Ethnography is a research tool that comes from the discipline of cultural anthropology and is based

on the simple, yet profound, premise that to truly understand human behavior you need to witness it first hand. Anthropologists understand that to uncover the deeper structures that guide a culture it is necessary to “live among the natives.” By living among the natives you come to learn

- 1) what people do versus they say they do and
- 2) the why, or underlying motivation, behind people’s actual behavior.

Ethnographic field work, therefore, involves going into people’s natural settings versus studying people in a controlled environment.

But ethnography alone is just a technique, a process by which thick and rich descriptions are provided that illustrate people’s lives, emotions, social relationships, decision-making processes and more. The secret to ethnography lies in anthropological analysis. Anthropologists conducting ethnographic research and analysis get to what Context calls people’s “Deep Structure” – the place beneath the surface of easily observed behaviors where cultural values and individual motivations are produced and supported. One value for understanding cultural Deep

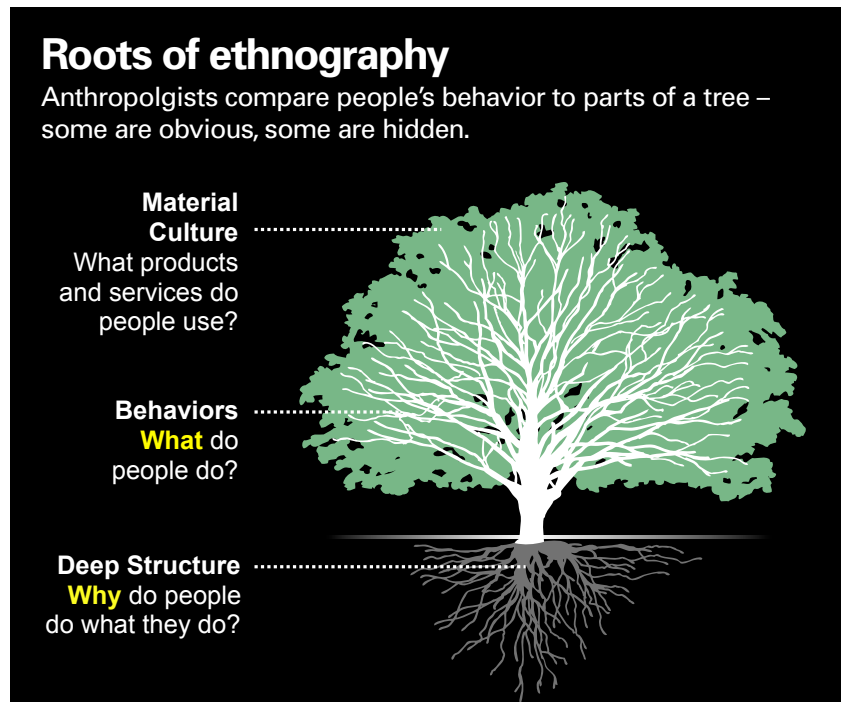
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Structures is to connect behaviors with their underlying motivations, thereby providing a useful framework for creating products and services that reach people on a truly deeper plane of unmet needs.

To fully comprehend the ethnographic and anthropological research process, it is helpful to use the metaphor of a tree [right]. The goal is to unearth the tree's roots. The roots in this analogy represent the Deep Structure that supports the culture under study.

Anthropologists rely on the ethnographic method to identify, describe and iteratively interpret behavior – the trunk of the tree and the material culture that comprises the limbs and the leaves. Material culture in an ethnographic study is the “stuff” people use. In consumer anthropology, most of the stuff equals products and services at



Above the surface, anthropologists observe people's behavior. Below the surface, insights are drawn on underlying motivations.

people's disposal.

Unlike the roots of the tree, the trunk and the limbs and leaves are the part of the tree you can walk around, touch and see and describe in close detail. As anthropologists begin to see more and more

behaviors and examples of material culture, patterns begin to emerge. The patterns that emerge from the ethnographic investigation are the manifestation of Deep Structure or in this analogy, the tree's roots.

The ethnographic approach is deductive and

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iterative. As the patterns from the research start to take shape and suggest a certain structure, then anthropological and social theory guides the explanatory models that emerge. Simply put, the resulting models from ethnographic

and anthropological studies suggest:

1) the underlying deep structure for why people do what they do and

2) what in people's lives – be it products, services, institutions (e.g., education, government, religion,

economies) are working or not working.

Most important, anthropological investigations provide a platform to create change, grounded in a truly deep understanding of human behavior.

Methodology

To get at the Deep Structure behind news consumption, an ethnographic project was designed to explore a diverse group of participants, using a range of methodologies including self-reported real-time behaviors, direct observation and, to complete the process, in-depth anthropological analysis.

To gather as broad a group of participants as possible, 18 participants were recruited between the ages of 18-34 (with an emphasis on the 18-24 age

group), representing a mix of ethnicities and gender. Each participant had to have access to the Internet and in addition to checking the news at least once a day, participants had to report accessing news through means other than print, television and radio. This bias was assumed to capture young people who were both connected and digital consumers of news.

The participants were recruited in three countries – United States, United Kingdom and India and six metropolitan areas. Hous-

ton, Silicon Valley, Philadelphia and Kansas City were chosen in the United States to provide a broad geographical sweep while staying away from cities where the influence of major media might be more prominent. Brighton, England was selected because the city is quickly attracting a young new population with its universities and established cultural life. In India, Hyderabad was a natural choice, as the influx of technology companies has brought extensive urbanization.

'My News' Send-Ahead Behavioral Journaling Exercise

To gather a foundation of information about the participants' lives, particularly their behaviors, values, news sources and news consumption habits, all the participants in the study received a Send-Ahead Behavioral Journaling Exercise entitled "My News." To complete the journal, participants received a Polaroid camera and set of instructions on taking pictures of their daily lives over the course of three to five days.

Participants completed the behavioral journal by addressing a series of questions both visually and textually. The journal began by asking them

how they would represent themselves, focusing on what was important to them, their likes/dislikes, values and philosophies, as well as who and what made up their social networks. Moving more directly into the news realm, participants also represented what they considered to be news, how they defined newsworthiness, the influence of platform and channel on their personal definitions of news, their preferred means for accessing the news and how and when they themselves disseminated, or shared, news. Finally, participants were asked to choose a story that they would typically follow and then track this

story over a full news cycle, making note visually and textually of when, how and why they searched for and accessed updates on the story.

The exercise, followed by a home visit from a Context anthropologist, was intended to prompt participants to begin thinking about their news consumption behaviors, motivations and habits, as well as their perceptions of what constitutes the news. The images and the description provided by the participants yielded rich data about who they were and the role that news consumption was playing in their lives.

News Consumption Mobile Blog and News Diary

To capture behaviors and motivations while consumers were away from home and in the varied and different environments they visit in their daily lives, Context had participants complete a mobile blog and news diary. For this structured assignment, participants were asked to capture moments of news consumption behavior, in real time, over the course of one weekday and one weekend day, from start to finish.

Context anthropologists directed all participants to take pictures that captured how they search for or consumed news during the

day. Participants took pictures to record their ideas of what news is and why; how, when and for how long they accessed news sources; what news channels they typically utilized; their level of engagements with different channels, platforms and devices; and the impact this news had on them, including how they decided whether to further disseminate a piece of news. By including a diary of news collection pages, participants were able to textually document these news consumption moments and motivations as well.

Participants in the United States were provided with

a discreet camera phone to capture these moments visually as they happened, while internationally based participants completed the assignment by taking pictures to accompany their news diary using Polaroid cameras. U.S. participants uploaded their pictures to a secure Web site at the end of each day, providing contextual details on the behavior they captured, using their news diary pages to ensure that they included all the details.

For the international participants, the Context anthropologist brought this exercise to life during the in-home, in-depth interview.

Day-in-the-Life Immersion and Observation

Day-in-the-life immersions were also conducted to obtain first-hand information about news consumption, as it actually happened and to put in perspective the information gathered in each participant's self-reported journal and diary. In these sessions, an anthropologist spent part of the day shadowing and observing participants through their activities.

Context anthropologists scheduled the observation period during the times that participants said they consumed the news most frequently. To gain a deeper understanding of participants' lives and how they interface with news, the immersion encompassed a broad sampling of their daily activities, including work, school, leisure or entertainment activities, interactions with family and/or friends and more.

Immersion and observation are at the core of ethnography and the primary technique for anthropologists. In anthropology, the method is called participant observation. In addition to undertaking direct observation, Context anthropologists were able to engage with the participant's social life and participate in collective discussions with members of his or her wider social network. Spending much of a day with each participant meant the anthropologist was able to obtain more detailed and accurate information, including both observable details (how much time they spent on each Web site, for example) and more hidden details (such as how interaction with different news media affected their consumption behavior) that are more easily observed and understandable over a longer period of time.

A major strength from observation and interaction over the full day is that researchers uncovered discrepancies between what participants said and what they actually did.

A structured observation guide was created to cover a series of specific issues and questions. Topics in the observation guide included exploring people's daily schedules and how they moved throughout their day; what constituted news throughout their day; their preferred or primary news sources; the platforms and devices they actually used for consuming their news; the times and frequencies of their news consumption; the level of engagement with news sources including their interaction and involvement with these sources; and their reasons for the sources and mediums they used and their overall behavioral preferences.

In-home In-depth Interview

After participants completed their journal and diary exercises, Context anthropologists went to their homes, debriefed these exercises and conducted in-depth interviews. Debriefing the journals and diaries provided a launching pad to conduct a conversational interview designed to uncover further details about how partici-

pants consumed or otherwise received news. The interview was structured using the same themes as those directing the immersion observation, although questions were introduced as open-ended to assist participants in providing vivid and self-directed descriptions of their life experiences. The interview also provided the participants

with a chance to explain in greater depth the behavior observed by the anthropologist during the immersion period and to discuss the relationship between real-time behaviors and what participants recorded in their journals and through their blogs and news diaries.

Ethnography Participants

The following pages summarize the observations of the subjects in the study by geographic location. The names have been changed to pseudonyms for the purposes of this report.

News was very important to Riya, a 22-year-old woman, who, together with her sisters, moved out of her village to live in Hyderabad. Riya was employed as a software engineer and, on a macro level, symbolizes the changing Indian woman, who has “come out of her kitchen,” venturing into the larger, urban world on her own, far from her parents.

Information helped Riya achieve parity with her male colleagues and urban counterparts. Riya also said she dreamed of becoming a politician or a great leader someday. She felt

Riya
22
Software engineer

that “knowing the news,” or staying up to date on current affairs, would help her pursue and achieve her

Hyderabad, India



goals.

Riya had a regular routine of reading the morning newspaper before work. She also watched television in her office cafeteria during breaks and discussed the news with her colleagues. Back at home, she watched the evening local news with her sisters. She had Internet access at work and home and usually checked the news online three times a day.

In news, Riya was looking for motivation and inspiration: Reading about successful women in politics motivated Riya toward her own goals and gave her hope that it was possible for her to be somebody someday. She also looked for news to relax. Reading

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about entertainment and film news was an indulgence that she enjoyed. “Film news relaxes me. I love to read about gossip in the film industry.”

Raj, a 22-year-old man, just received his bachelor’s degree and was enrolled already in a master’s of science program in the United States.

Raj browsed the Internet for news to improve his communications skills and keep himself ahead of his friends. Raj said he normally checked the news eight to 10 times a day when he was busy and up to 20 times a day when he had more free time. Raj’s preferred sites were NDTV and Yahoo. He was also very familiar with The As-

Raj
22
Master’s student

sociated Press.

Raj mostly accessed the Internet via his personal computer. Before graduating, he had Internet access at college and he would check news at school as well. Television was not his primary source to stay abreast of current events, as he preferred the Internet for news. To Raj, knowing the news was a social skill because it helped him communicate and raise his social standing.

To hone his communication skills, Raj charted the development of news on a whiteboard. In fact, he chose a news topic, wrote it out on a whiteboard in his room and then practiced presenting it to others, either alone or before friends. By working on the way he communicated news, Raj believed he could not only impress others, but also overcome Indian socio-cultural barriers.

Vijay, a 26-year-old man, was an owner of an interior design store, which he ran from his home, located in a fairly wealthy area in the heart of Hyderabad. Technologically, Vijay was well “wired,” with cable television and continuous access to the

Vijay
26
Store owner

Internet.

Vijay came from a large family with a fairly traditional upbringing. He felt connected to these roots but was also intrigued by the changes he saw occurring around him as a result of globalization. He relied on being up to date on the news as a way of keeping up with his friends and his wider social network.

Vijay began the day by reading the newspaper

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and watching television with his morning coffee. It was at this time that he was most engaged with the news. This was the time that Vijay used to prepare himself for his day – engaging with the top news stories and social events before meeting clients and friends alike. Aside from the morning hours, Vijay would return to the television or Internet during the lunch hour and before going to sleep to check on information regarding the stock market or a news

story that he was following because it was important for his social circle.

Vijay was mostly interested in global business and political news. During the time of this study he was actively following several stories pertaining to car and bike companies that had begun investing in India. The impact this new business could potentially have on the Indian economy was important to him as he had some investments in the Indian stock market.

His choice of news

sources was quite interesting. One of the first sites he went to for news was the television news channel NDTV, an authoritative and well-respected news channel. In particular, he enjoyed the show “The World This Week,” which NDTV has been broadcasting for the last two decades. His secondary source was Eeandu, a well-regarded local newspaper, written in the local language of Telegu. His online sources included NDTV.com and Yahoo.com.

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Jill, a 28-year-old woman, was working as an online insurance broker.

**Jill
28
Insurance
broker**

She lived with her partner, Kathryn, in a small apartment overlooking the English Channel. Jill

was very technologically oriented: She accessed news stories online any-time of day. She saw news as constantly moving, “It’s a non-stop machine, just churning information out. It doesn’t matter what it’s about ... it’s just churning.” She engaged with the news approximately six to eight hours a day. She checked her e-mail on Yahoo every hour and thus saw Yahoo headlines up to 10 times a day. She was primarily attracted to stories that piqued her curiosity.

Jill’s news consumption routine during the day followed a pattern: She started her day by watching BBC

Brighton, United Kingdom



News 24 — BBC’s round-the-clock all-news channel. She then listened to headlines on the radio in her car as she drove to work. Her commute could last 10 to 30 minutes. Jill felt that radio news was much softer and more humorous than BBC News 24. In the car, she listened to BBC Radio One and the local radio station

for the southern British counties.

When Jill arrived at work she immediately logged on to her e-mail, another exposure to Yahoo news headlines. Occasionally, she would follow up with additional searches on some of these headlines. She logged in and out of her Yahoo account about once every hour during the day and saw Yahoo News’s headlines several times. At work, Jill received text messages and e-mail alerts about other news as well. During the Wimbledon tennis tournament, Jill kept a live scoreboard on her desktop to follow the matches.

Driving back home, Jill listened to news on the radio. When she got home, she logged into her Yahoo and Facebook accounts to get personal news and e-mail, while she watched news and chatted with her partner about the day’s events.

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Mark, a 28-year-old man, was employed as a project manager for

Mark
28
Project manager

an online travel agency. Mark started in this company's call center and was proud of the way he

had moved up the ladder. Part of Mark's job included overseeing a group of 10 to 15 people.

Mark moved to Brighton, a more cosmopolitan and liberal city, from a northern English town with a more conservative bent. In part, Mark made the move to distance himself from his old life and embrace a higher standard of living.

Together with a couple of friends two years ago, Mark purchased a house as an investment and put £26,000 into refurbishing it while they lived in it. The project took 18 months to finish and they are proud of the

final result. The house also appreciated in value and is now worth £100,000 more.

The main room of the house was a lounge that featured a very large flat-screen TV with a Sky Digital set-top box. Each member of the household (and their respective partners) had a laptop, which meant that sometimes there were five laptops on the wireless broadband network in the lounge at the same time.

Mark was constantly using his PDA and mobile phone to receive alerts and feeds as well as up-to-the-minute scores for football. He even took his PDA to the lavatory and read the BBC headlines in the way that he used to read the newspaper.

Mark's news cycle was continuous and he spent up to six hours a day searching for and receiving information. Mark was on the Internet most of the day and used that time to keep

up to date on news coverage and sports-related information.

Mark liked his news to be "punchy" and point-focused. He read the headlines in the Times and followed up on BBC online to "find out what's happening" with stories that he wanted to track. Mark said he trusts the BBC and Sky Radio (for sports), followed by the Times and the Guardian.

Mark's news consumption was related to other activities that he was engaged in and although he was actively consuming the news, it was almost always in tandem with other activities such as driving or working.

(At the time of the study, Mark was spending a majority of his time away from Brighton, in Peterborough, to help launch a new product his company charged him to manage. The commute would take

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three to seven hours in one direction depending on traffic and he spent a lot of time in his car and on the phone.)

When he was home in Brighton, he would wake up to his mobile phone alarm and put on Sky sports first thing in the morning. He would putter around and have a cup of tea while he listened to the latest sports news and then switch over to BBC news. Mark then drove himself and his two housemates, who also work with him, to work and they listened to BBC Radio One's Chris Moyles Breakfast Show.

Once at work, Mark checked BBC News online and a few select sports sites. He followed this news and sports pattern throughout the day. Mark did not use MSN or Yahoo and did not look at other news sites.

(If Mark was in Peterborough, his routine was much the same, except that he re-

ceived a copy of the Times newspaper delivered to his hotel room.)

Mark also mentioned Facebook as a source for news. He recently had a friend die and found out about it from another friend who used e-mail via Facebook to let everyone know about the death. Mark admitted to this being a difficult and potentially unfair way to tell people about the death. He questioned the use of Facebook for certain types of "news."

Angela, a 28-year-old woman from Hove, nearby Brighton, was a sales and booking agent for a travel company, specializing in snowboarding and skiing holidays. Angela got discounts on trips for

Angela
28
Booking agent

others and her own trips were free; she said goes on two holidays a year.

Angela worked in a largely female work force and her male colleagues were mainly in managerial roles. When she discussed news consumption at work, she mentioned that all the girls were interested in gossip, fashion and celebrity stuff, while the managers were all interested in football and more hard-hitting news.

She lived with her boyfriend in his apartment on a quiet residential street. They had a big-screen TV but no computer or laptop at home. Usually, Angela woke up to her mobile phone alarm and her partner put on Sky News, which she watched before she went to work. On her drive to work, she would listen to both local radio and BBC Radio One, and was a fan of the Chris Moyles Breakfast Show.

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At work, she would log on to her PC and check the BBC News Web site for the day's headlines. Before checking the stories, she looked at the five-day forecast to see if she would be able to take her horse out that week. From there, she would look for other stories that she was interested in (such as the flooding in England or the Madeline McCann kidnapping story at the time of the field study).

At lunch she would buy a celebrity/fashion/gossip magazine, known in the U.K. as women's weeklies.

She and her colleagues would read it at lunch and then discard it or pass it on to someone else.

After work, Angela liked to take her horse for a ride. On her way back, she didn't listen to the radio as she preferred the quiet. At home she would watch the TV newscast with Sir Trevor McDonald before going to bed.

Angela's Internet use was surprisingly limited. She accessed news first thing in the morning and then glanced at the news on her Yahoo e-mail account but never read it. She did not

subscribe to RSS feeds or any live reports or scoreboards, as her work environment was somewhat monitored, though she had freedom to use the Internet at work and no sites were blocked.

Overall, Angela was not very engaged with the news. She listened to and read about the news in the morning and was typically interested in human-interest stories or headline news that had a British focus. She had lost interest in anything in the Middle East and did not follow much in politics.

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Allen, a 20-year-old man, was pursuing his graduate degree at the Art Institute of Philadelphia; he studied graphic design largely because these skills would help him earn a higher salary than his true passion, zoology.

Allen
20
Graduate student

Allen's curiosity and need to know drove his news consumption. Allen enjoyed keeping up with what was new in the war in Iraq, politics and science. He did not check news on the go. He did not have and did not want a PDA, "Sure, if I had an iPhone, I'd check the news on the way to school. But it is more of a novelty. I doubt between here and school there is going to be some breaking update on something."

Allen consumed news online for about an hour in the morning after he woke up. He and his roommate

Philadelphia | U.S.



would banter back and forth about different headlines, articles or videos. In the evening, he would spend about two hours checking the news.

Allen's news consumption at school was shaped by his other activities. "If I have time in class I might check for breaking news.

But usually, I will check at home because I am working on other stuff at school and do not have time to browse the Internet." He checked the news three to four hours throughout the day, "one hour in the morning and usually more when I get back from school."

Allen had several RSS feeds that allowed him to exclude news that he considered "filler." He was primarily interested in environmental news, global news, technology news and some entertainment (about movies, not about the personal lives of celebrities).

Allen thought of himself as the face of news because "I choose what I read" on the Internet.

Lisa, a 27-year-old woman, was working in account management in the telecommunications industry.

Lisa got her news

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through TV and the Internet. She engaged with the news in the morning when she was getting ready for

Lisa
27
Accountant

work. She said that once at work she would visit hard-news Web sites when she was not busy.

However, she mentioned visiting soft-news Web sites often during work as well.

In the evening, Lisa turned on the television from the time she got home until she went to bed. Her news consumption clustered around the hours of 4 to 6 p.m. and then from 10 to 11 p.m. She had her PDA with her all the time, checking e-mail and taking calls. If she checked e-mail on her laptop, she might browse Yahoo's latest news headlines and peruse some stories that appealed to her. She preferred to go

online from work because the connection was faster and she could watch videos more easily. Lisa said that the content of the story determined whether she actively sought more information.

Lisa primarily followed mainstream sources from television, radio and the Internet. She also got information regularly through text messages and phone calls on her PDA. Lisa got her news from NBC (TV), CNN.com, MSNBC.com, Yahoo, the Philadelphia Daily News (print) and WKYW (radio). She also went to YouTube to get videos about celebrities and other celebrity-focused Web sites, such as perezhilton.com. In addition, she occasionally watched Univision, a Spanish-language TV channel, because she wanted to learn Spanish.

Lisa's preferred source and platform was NBC-TV.

She preferred NBC's Live at Five newscast, because she liked local news and liked watching it on TV when she was at home. CNN.com and MSNBC.com were her next preferred sites for news because she felt they were credible news sites. She checked those sites at work when she was bored or when a conversation with a co-worker prompted her. She preferred news Web sites so her boss would not think she was looking at tabloid Web sites.

Another favorite for her was Yahoo, which she kept as her homepage. She went to Yahoo.com to check her e-mail and she could see all the current headlines. The Philadelphia Daily News was a print source of news for her. Lisa got the paper from a co-worker and sat at her desk while she ate lunch and thumbed through it. WKYW on the radio was important in her

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car and mostly for weather and traffic.

Lisa's PDA was central to her information and news-gathering. Lisa got e-mail, calls or text messages from friends about the news, such as the story about the singer Beyonce falling onstage (during the time of the field study). Her PDA also provided her with traffic updates when she was stuck in traffic. YouTube was also a source for content. Lisa would go to YouTube after hearing about a story to see a certain video (as she did when she heard about Beyonce's stumble).

Robert, a 28-year-old man, was working 50 to 80 hours a week as an events manager at a performance venue. He usually arrived at work around noon and would stay until somewhere between 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. Robert also worked periodically as an independent auditor

for a restaurant that was an eight-hour drive away and as a musician and a performer. Robert's performances were cabaret-style and incorporated odd news about current events.

Robert
28
Events manager

Robert said he would only go home to sleep and to feed his cat. He might spend one hour at home after he woke up and one hour at home before he went to bed.

Robert's social network was rooted in his work. He had worked at the performance venue for three years and spent a majority of his time there. Robert did not have Internet access at home, so he relied on his phone (which he referred to as a Pocket PC) and his office computer to keep in touch with the "outside" world.

Because Robert was the

only person allowed to access a PDA on the "floor" (in the venue where he worked), he had become the "news node" for employees to get news updates. Robert would look for particular news stories on his PDA at work if he needed to communicate something to his employees. Robert engaged with the news throughout the day via his PDA.

Of particular interest was the connection Robert had made between texting and checking news. After finishing a text message, Robert habitually hit the Internet button on his PDA and quickly browsed headlines. Other moments of engagement with news during the day included overhearing the top of the hour NPR (National Public Radio) news that was broadcast via the radio station WXPB that played throughout the building where he worked.

A New Model for News

Studying the Deep Structure of Young-Adult News Consumption

Hannah, a 30-year-old woman who still lived at her family's home, was studying for the state nursing board exams while working at a hospital. She said she loved be-

Hannah
30
Nursing graduate

ing a nurse because she described herself as a compassionate person who cared about people and the state of the world. "I stay up on the news because I wish I could make more of a difference." She felt that since one person cannot really make a difference globally, she could help "one patient at a time" by informing those around her of what she learned from the news. "I pay more attention to things that are more significant to me and the world around me."

Hannah worked at a hospital about 15 minutes away from her home for three to four days a week from 7

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a.m. to 7 p.m. Her days off were usually spent studying for the board exams, either at home or with a friend at a coffee shop. Her daily routine was very different between when she was at work and when she was off.

On her days off, Hannah liked to start her day

with the news, utilizing both TV and the Internet until she felt "up to date." After an hour or two, she began studying either at home, at a friend's house or at a coffee shop. When Hannah was studying, she was usually using her computer by taking test questions and using online study resources. When she got tired she liked to "take breaks and look at the news a bit." In explaining this habit, she said, "I like to have my mind concentrate on something else, not just go dead, because it's harder to get my mind going again if I totally disengage and daydream or something."

At work, Hannah's news consumption was much more social, as her colleagues updated her on the latest headlines while they did their rounds. Keeping up on the news at work was a very communal endeavor and an ingrained cultural habit and even the patients were involved. At work,

A New Model for News

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Hannah depended on others to update her on the news. Her access points for news at work included the nurse sitting at the nursing station with access to Internet and the computer in the break room, which she normally used to look up or browse news a couple of times during a 12-hour shift.

Much of Hannah's news consumption behavior took the form of a search for answers. Not being someone who automatically accepted other people's opinions or an editorial piece, she tended to investigate the reasoning, facts and supporting evidence behind a story on her own until she was satisfied with her own opinion on it.

For instance, a story in the headlines of the day during the study was about a mother in Ocean City, Maryland, who had left four fetuses out to die on her property. Hannah was curious whether the boy-

friend would be charged with committing a crime in addition to the mother. Hannah felt that because the two had been together for so long and had four other children that "there's no way he didn't know she was pregnant and I think he should be punished too." She checked every article she could find about that story but never found the answer. She said she would continue to follow this story to see if any new information was released.

Bess, an 18-year-old woman, was working as a receptionist at a hair salon chain. Her mother was a hair stylist and Bess had just taken her styling test. She was to become a stylist at the same store in just a few weeks. Bess worked af-

Bess
18
Receptionist

ternoons into evenings six days a week, usually from 4 to 8 p.m. She sat at the front of the salon behind a counter and computer, greeted and scheduled guests as they came in and took their payments when they left. Her other responsibilities included sweeping, cleaning, washing towels and taking inventory.

When she had downtime, or when the door traffic was slow, she surfed the Internet for news, usually starting from the computer's homepage (msn.com) or her e-mail homepage (Yahoo). From there, she clicked on headlines that most interested or intrigued her, or that had some relevance to her life or the lives of her friends and family. An avid baseball fan, she always clicked on baseball-related headlines.

The owner of her salon hardly ever came in, but had a Web spyware application installed on her

A New Model for News

Studying the Deep Structure of Young-Adult News Consumption

computer so he could watch what she was doing on the screen. If she was playing solitaire or looking at the news, he would look at the check-in software program to see how many people were being worked on and how many were queued. If he thought the salon was too busy for her to be fiddling around on the computer, he would often call her and tell her to get busy.

Bess had just graduated from high school and still lived at home with her mother and stepfather. Her 21-year-old boyfriend, who she had been dating for five months at the time of the field study, recently moved in as well.

They shared her small childhood bedroom and had plans to save up enough money to move out, find a place of their own and get married.

At home, Bess started watching the news nightly

with her parents to spend more time with them. The nightly news became a time for her to catch up with them and she said she enjoyed it. Bess would also sometimes look something up online from home, particularly if she got a piece of a story sometime during the day and was curious about the whole story. She rarely turned on the computer at home to just browse; rather, she was usually looking up some specific story.

Bess was usually engaged with the news only to the extent of discussing it with those around her. Rarely did a news story impact or change her behavior unless it was a local story about a storm (“need to know about the weather”), accident (“need to know about traffic”) or murder/rape (“need to know what areas to avoid”). Bess was basically a passive recipient of news

and typically felt no need to take action or be further engaged.

Corey, a 24-year-old, was working at Best Storage, a privately owned storage facility, where customers rent individual storage units. Corey

Corey
24
Aid/
Student

also worked overnight most nights at two different halfway houses for mentally challenged adult men. In addition, Corey was studying accounting.

In the mornings, when he was at one of the halfway houses, Corey and “the guys” would sit around the kitchen table and watch the news on TV (first the regular news, but as soon as sports news came on at 8 a.m. they switched to ESPN). After the news, he usually would head to Best

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Studying the Deep Structure of Young-Adult News Consumption

Storage, where he worked five to seven days a week. When he first got to work, he caught up on what was new (starting with Yahoo and moving to CNN.com) or confirmed stories he had heard on TV that morning, as well as from the newspaper or word of mouth.

An important trigger for knowing the news was a co-worker. Corey talked a lot with one of his co-workers about news. As he said, “Half the reason I’m so intent on keeping up with sports is so I can argue about it with her!”

Two nights a week, he

had classes and usually was too busy for news. However, on the few nights he was home, he would often sit with his wife, Mel, and watch the news on CBS, ABC or CNN. They discussed what they saw, but Corey tended to avoid talking “politics” with Mel, since she would get annoyed and bored with political discussions.

Corey did not have Internet access at home, so he only looked online when he was working at the storage facility or at school.

Corey was engaged with what he learned from the

news insofar as it helped him feel more confident and intelligent and allowed him to form opinions for discussing issues with others. He felt it was important to “know what’s going on” around him and enjoyed talking with other people, whether they be colleagues, fellow students, teachers, family or friends, about what was going on. Since he kept up with the news so much, he usually found that a lot of the information was repeated and that he knew most of what he saw in headlines already.

A New Model for News

Studying the Deep Structure of Young-Adult News Consumption

Susan, a 25-year-old woman, was living in the suburbs with her parents, her brother and his wife and their 8-year-old son, Frankie. Susan's goal was to be working as a nurse, or in some type of field where she could help others.

Susan
25
Nanny/
Student

Susan's direct news consumption was very structured and public. Watching TV news was a daily, family event, particularly in the evening prior to dinner. Her family watched the local news at 5 p.m., then the national news at 5:30 p.m., followed by the local news again at 6 p.m. The family did not subscribe to newspapers.

Susan had a laptop and the family had an Internet connection. However, Susan described her news consumption as "very traditional," because it

Kansas City | U.S.



was based on television viewing. Susan's active newsgathering routine was based mainly on the times other people were consuming news. In the car, she had the opportunity to listen to the radio, but for her, "the radio is for music." She did not like to listen to "people talking on

the radio," so she avoided most exposure to news. Sometimes, though, she would listen to drive-time DJs discuss current events while she was in the car.

Susan might catch the early news with her father before she left the house at 7:15 a.m., for her job as a nanny. But typically, she did not get time to hear the news in the morning because she was busy helping her nephew get ready for the day and preparing to go to work. She paid extra attention later in the day to stories people told from hearing or reading the news. In this way, Susan said the news "kind of comes to me ... from other people who read the newspaper" or who watch the morning news.

She was particularly keen on human-interest and local stories. Susan believed most news was far too negative and she actively avoided national and international news.

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Sometimes she would look up the information about breaking news on Google – “Google’s a little bit better” – to obtain more information. She did not go first to news Web sites, which she said could be difficult to navigate and therefore frustrated her. Mostly, Google and Yahoo were tools that she associated more with college coursework and writing papers.

Jack, a 22-year-old man, attended the University of Kansas and lived in Lawrence. He started out at the University of Kansas as a business major and shifted to psychology. He and four fraternity brothers shared half of a duplex apartment in a new subdivision on the south side of town.

Jack
22
Psych
major

To Jack, news was in-

formation that was close to him. “It’s important to know what’s going on if it’ll affect me.” The face of news for Jack was the face of his social network. He felt that his friends, parents, co-workers and uncle were the constant face of news for him. These were the people who “I hear from and talk about news and events.” At the same time, he said that he did not know a lot of people who were highly informed.

Jack distinguished between “breaking news,” “latest news,” “top stories,” and “most popular” news stories. “Breaking news” was “not the full story, like a preview, but it is kind of annoying sometimes. I don’t like to get bits and pieces of information.” “Latest news” was just a fuller exposition of what was previously “breaking news,” but he said that “top stories” were “more depressing” than latest or breaking news stories.

“Given the choice,” he added, he “would probably go to most popular stories” because the title did not make him feel quite so depressed. Jack followed sports news and other news stories differently. He received RSS feeds on his Yahoo homepage about his favorite teams and sports leagues and followed those headlines. He said he would just glance at other stories.

Jack had three variables that determined whether a news story was high priority for him: location of an event, its severity and his prior familiarity with the context of the story. He acknowledged, though, that his ideas about what was news were changing as he matured. “In high school, I couldn’t care less about the news. In my more in-depth classes, I’ve been learning the way the world and the government work.” He found that the scope of things that affect him was widening: “I’m start-

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ing to get out on my own and there are things I need to know about like Social Security.” Jack therefore thought that what was news for him would probably change over time.

As for his approach to news, Jack said, “I don’t really go hunting for the news; I just accept it when it comes.” This was clearly not the case for sports news, which he actively sought out on a daily basis, usually sometime after he woke up: “I always look up the sports. Then I might look at the weather and finally the headlines if I have time.” He was particularly active in finding news about his fantasy sports teams. While he made a habit of looking up information on Yahoo Sports, he said that if he saw a story on ESPN first, he might go to the Internet to follow up on it.

Jack’s main sources were Yahoo Sports, ESPN and the Daily Kansan, the Uni-

versity of Kansas newspaper. He also listened to 101 FM and 98.9 FM, especially DJ Johnny Dare and to AM 810 WHB, a sports talk station. These tended to be the easiest sources to access. Yahoo was convenient to access because it was his Internet homepage and the Daily Kansan was available free on campus when school was in session.

Secondary sources for Jack included Fox 4 local TV news, CNN, MSNBC and the Lawrence Journal World newspaper. These sources were outside his normal patterns of consumption. However, with certain friends and co-workers he might use them more frequently.

Max was working in the seafood and meat department of a large grocery store in the far southern suburbs. Max was living with his parents and sister

in the expanding south side of Kansas City. The two-story house sat at the edge

of farmland.

Max was enrolled at the local community college.

Max did not consume the news much

when he was actually working, but he did when he was on break. In the break room, he looked at The Kansas City Star newspaper – first the sports, then the auto classifieds, then the FYI section (a lifestyle section) and the headlines. In the break room he could look at the news openly, but the environment behind the seafood counter was not conducive to reading the paper.

He would sometimes discuss the news with co-workers. He found talking about the news with the retirees he worked with to be particularly enlightening. “I learn a lot from them,

Max
20
Market
worker

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Studying the Deep Structure of Young-Adult News Consumption

about all kinds of things I wouldn't know about otherwise. Financial stuff, for example." These discussions were public, because it was not a distraction to the work of servicing a seafood counter.

Outside of work he consumed the news largely with friends. This was particularly true of sports news, which was the subject of heated discussion between his male friends and himself. With them, he watched television, especially ESPN. With his girlfriend, he was more likely to watch E! Entertainment news and admitted that she had gotten him interested in celebrity gossip. But most of his news came from friends. "I get more information from hearsay or my friends. They're like human TiVos." Hearing something from one of his friends would often prompt him to pay extra attention

to a story.

Because he worked most of the day, if he watched the news on television, it was usually late in the morning or in the evening after work. He also enjoyed and depended on his car and he listened to the radio when he was driving to and from work and around town.

Interestingly, Max said that "news is work; you have to work" to access and understand it. The faces of news for him were the social satirists and news entertainment anchors Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert (cable TV comedians). They embody what Max called "anti-negativity."

When Max was online, he used Yahoo most often to search for information. "Another thing I like to hit up is Wikipedia," because "you can type in just about anything" and get the news you want. Interestingly, he

did not associate Wikipedia with user-generated content. Instead, he suggested that he did not trust user-generated information. "People who use blogs are probably blobs," he remarked.

Overall, he did not represent the stereotypical 20-something when it came to computers. "The computer is a time suck," he complained. He only went on the computer during his "down time. If I happen to be on the computer, it's because I'm bored." He did not see himself as part of the wired generation.

"I would like to go on record as saying that I more or less pride myself on the fact that I don't spend all my time on the computer not using my mind ... like people who aren't out there experiencing what there is in the world."

A New Model for News

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Andrew, a 20-year-old man, was finishing his second year of college at De

Andrew
20
Business major

Anza Community College. A business major, he planned to move on to the University of

California in Santa Cruz. He went to school full time and worked part time in the hardware section at Sears, a department store. Andrew spent some of his time at home, but most of his time hanging out with his friends. Andrew lived with his family.

Andrew was an active news seeker. During the observation period, Andrew spent about an hour and a half doing his online class and homework and then took a break to eat. During that time, he turned on ESPN and watched sports news while glancing at the sports section of *The San*

Silicon Valley | U.S.



Jose Mercury News. When he returned to his room, he went online to Yahoo Finance and read an article about Netflix and Blockbuster stocks. Then he continued with his homework. A while later, he watched more sports news on ESPN. He also caught part of

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, among other parts of programs, such as the Jerry Springer talk show and *Family Guy*, the animated situation comedy.

Andrew said his normal daily routine involved reading the sports section while eating breakfast and reading it again while watching TV over lunch. He usually consumed sports news but sometimes he read the front page of the newspaper. The main trigger that spurred him to check the news was boredom. Whenever he was bored, he watched TV or looked online for news.

Staying up to date on the news was important to Andrew. He said that when he went to Israel for two weeks, he did not have access to TV or the Internet. He came back completely unaware of what was going on and “out of the loop.” He told the story of a friend whose parents canceled their cable TV, leaving her

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unaware of what was going on in the news.

Frank, a 19-year-old man, was living with his parents in Santa Clara. He was attending his second year at a local community college and was interested in political science, local

Frank
19
Politics
major

news and anything that directly influenced his life. He did not distinguish between the types of news

he enjoyed. He repeatedly said that anything that affected his life in some way was news.

Frank's main source of news came from the Internet. He looked at Digg.com and any sites that were linked from Digg. He also accessed news from Google News, the local television station's Web site KTVU.com, as well as MercuryNews.com. Frank said

that he first started checking the news purely out of boredom, but it had become a habit. He checked the news three to four times a day: before he left his house in the afternoon, before he ate dinner and before he went to sleep. He had been doing this for at least a year and the habit had begun to take on a bit more meaning for him. As he explained, "I read the news when I get bored, but then one of the reasons I read the news is because I gain information."

Frank shared information with his friends via links he sent them over AIM, a Web messaging service. He often sent them funny news stories and they, in turn, would send him news links. When he regularly met up with friends at Starbucks the conversation often began with "Did you hear about ...?"

Frank was proactive in

his news consumption and searched for online articles and sites that interested him. For Frank, news was everywhere and he did not wait for it to come to him. The ease with which he could access the news was made clear during the in-depth interview when he stated, "Back in the olden days, people used to pay for newspapers. Now you can find everything for free."

Frank used headlines to decide whether or not to read articles. For example, on the Digg site, he browsed the headlines and read the paragraph-long summaries. He estimated that 75 percent of the time he continued on with the stories. When he browsed the headlines, he was looking for something that caught his eye, something that related to his life.

Frank quickly jumped from site to site and article to article while consuming the news. Frank moved on when a story got more

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attention than it deserved. When a story could not go anywhere else, he stopped paying attention to it. In the case of Paris Hilton going to jail (during the time of the field study), one picture of her going to jail told the whole story. It was enough.

Sally, a 25-year-old woman, was working as an office manager/administrative assistant at a start-up health insurance company. She left her house at 8:30 each morning and had a 30-minute commute that she shared with her husband. They listened to the local public radio station that carried NPR for the duration of their drive.

During the evening observed during the study, Sally returned home from work and immediately turned on the television to the local news. She was

quite engaged with local happenings, commenting on some stories, and maintained an interest in any stories that had to do with her profession in the health field.

While watching the news, Sally checked her e-mail on the laptop she and her husband keep near the television.

After watching the local news for about 20 minutes she turned on an Oprah episode that she had taped on their TiVo machine. While watching Oprah, Sally was checking her e-mail, but stopped to take notes on products that Oprah featured on her show. When her husband began to use the laptop, Sally switched to surfing the Web on her iPhone. Besides checking her e-mail, she went to Digg, because she wanted to get information about a possible vacation she and her

husband might take.

Sally paid attention to headlines in the newspaper and online and used them as a guide to know which articles to read. If a headline resonated with her, if it related in some way to her life or interests, then she read the article. Verifying stories was not very important to Sally, as she said, “I don’t confirm the news I hear unless I want to know more about something or find out if it really happened. There’s too much news to do that with everything.”

Sally preferred to get her news from the television, particularly ABC and NBC, because she thought the content was very good and she enjoyed the mix of local and national news that could be gathered in a short time. Sally liked to stay current with the news because it helped her make judgments and decisions. For example, during this study Sally was interested

Sally
25
Office manager

A New Model for News

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in buying a car and she found several news reports on car safety to be particularly helpful. News stories that directly impacted her life were most newsworthy to Sally.

The news gave Sally something to talk about at work. She stressed that it was very important to be well-informed so that she

could participate in discussions during lunch. She and her colleagues always talked about the news, although most commonly that meant celebrity gossip. One of her colleagues who was always up on such news usually began the conversations, and if it was something Sally did not know about, she later looked it up online.

Overall, Sally was a believer of news. Sally defined news as an unbiased source of facts from which she got most all of her information. She considered news to be honest; something she could use to form her own opinions. “Newsworthy is something that affects my life.”

Changing Consumption: Conclusions and Recommendations

Today's Model

If the ultimate goal from ethnographic research and anthropological analysis is to uncover the deep roots of the culture under investigation, you might consider the structure that emerges from such an inquiry as an experience or behavioral model.

With an understanding of the culture's roots, it becomes possible to map those roots to people's actual and prospective behaviors and the products and services people use or might use. In this fashion, a behavioral model can provide a company or industry – the news business in this case – with a framework for innovation.

The illustration on page 37 was drawn by the Context team to capture the news consumption behavior and needs observed in this study group. The observations suggested an imbalance in the components that make up what might be called the “whole story” behind a particular piece or body of news. Participants in the study were receiving and accessing an imbalance of headlines and updates in their daily routines, versus deeper background, labeled in the illustration as the back story and future stories and spin-offs. The study showed people spending the majority of their time “above the

fold,” to use a print news expression, consuming mostly headlines and updates. Meanwhile, “below-the-fold” content captured much less attention.

The fold also can be seen as a dividing line between news that was consumed mostly passively (facts and updates encountered from e-mail, portals or word of mouth) versus deeper dives that required more active consumption, or real “work,” as the subjects themselves described it.

People in the study were able to articulate the imbalance of their news diet as a problem. They spoke of having trouble keeping up or finding resolution in the

A New Model for News

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news. In short, the study illustrated a contemporary news consumption model where the foundational elements for news and journalism – background and next steps – were mostly out of range. Stories “below the fold” seemed in danger of becoming vestigial news organs.

The logical explanation for much of the current news consumption behavior is connected to the Internet-driven, 24/7 news world. In the study, seemingly unlimited access to

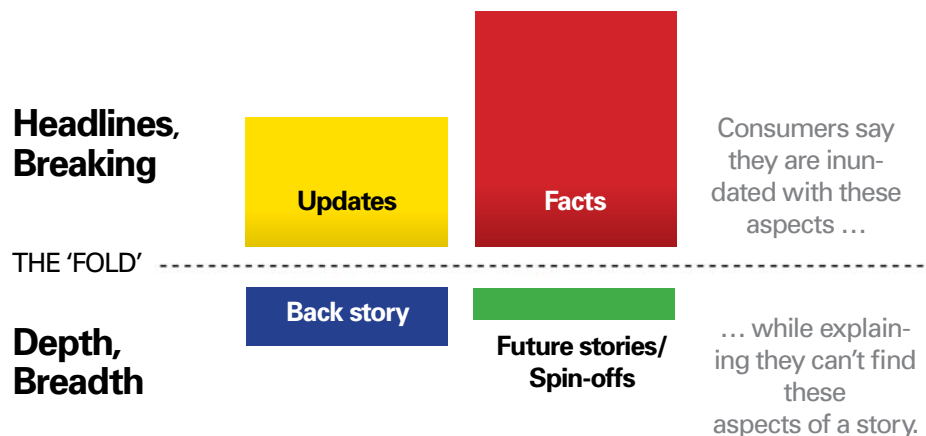
news, through unlimited channels, created an environment for excess. The participants in the study were consuming a steady diet of bite-size pieces of news in the form of headlines, updates and quick facts.

News consumers do have a ubiquity of news to select from at almost any time, from anywhere on a variety of technologies and platforms—television, Internet, mobile devices, radio and more. However, the reality is that the

abundance of news and ubiquity of choice do not necessarily translate into a better news environment for consumers. In fact, the consumers in this study exhibited news fatigue as they attempted to navigate an information stream that mostly dishes up recycled headlines and updates. For example, Jack from Kansas City said that “news [today] is not the full story, but more like a preview—it’s kind of annoying sometimes. I don’t like to get bits and pieces of information.”

Today’s model

Faster delivery vehicles and platforms have created a news model based on quick delivery and quick-scan consumption. New generations of news consumers seldom dig deeper – or “below the fold” – which may explain why they crave more information.



* – Larger boxes indicate more available content

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And Riya from Hyderabad said that she loses interest after three days if a story has become stale or is just repeating earlier news.

The study clearly showed a contemporary news diet that was short and getting shorter on journalistic substance. For instance, when speaking about developing stories, Robert from Philadelphia said he “does not want to be fed bits. I want to know all the details at once.”

But there are signs of hope, too. The subjects talked about “working their

news” as they tried to uncover the depth of news and the resolution of stories they desired. Furthermore, they wanted to “work their news” on their own, putting together their news by producing it (at least in part) by themselves. Lisa from Philadelphia was a good example. To her, news was “here and now. If you want background, it’s up to you,” she said.

That dedication to working the news also produced a valuable result. Many of the subjects found they could use the news as

powerful social currency in their interactions with others. Raj from Hyderabad and Jill from Brighton were good examples of this promising phenomenon. Raj used a whiteboard to chart his prospective conversations; Jill kept up on sports to impress her boss at work.

The most hopeful sign that came through in these observations is that news fatigue is not fatal. Energy remains for the pursuit of news worth sharing, as the following key findings suggest.

Field Study Findings

News Is Connected to E-mail

A majority of these subjects digested news alongside their e-mail. The predominant use of Yahoo, MSN and other Web-based e-mail services promoted this behavior and likely ingrained a habit for e-mail/news checking. “I get my news when I check my e-mail,” was the most often heard response in reference to when people



get their news.

On the surface, the study suggested that matching e-mail with news checking was a perfect marriage. Delivering simple headlines fit nicely with e-mail behavior – pushing small snippets of information

via quick, half-sentences. However, the small doses of news in e-mail formats mostly failed to deliver the deeper content that might have produced a richer and more rewarding experience for these participants.

Since e-mail is mostly viewed as an update system, news producers should explore new ways to move users to deeper content from those programs.

Constant Checking Is Linked to Boredom

After e-mail, participants in the study said they checked updates and headlines as a way to pass time and break boredom. This behavior appears to be related to the e-mail connection with news as well as to the ubiquity of news access and choice available online. Overall, participants in the study constantly checked for news and therefore technically consumed news on a very frequent basis. However, the news they most frequently accessed largely consisted of headlines and

updates. Their behavior therefore suggested a “false positive”; that is, the participants were checking news more frequently but not exploring stories in any depth.

Some participants in the study had become aware of

their habit to check news out of boredom and were changing their behavior. Frank in the Silicon Valley, for instance, actively searched for online articles and sites that interested him. But Frank nonetheless made quick jumps from site to site and article to article, suggesting that news producers need to find ways to keep people like him engaged, so that they can quickly decide whether a news environment merits further exploration.



Contemporary Lifestyles Impact News Consumption

The contemporary context for news consumption helps make sense of the seemingly irrational news-checking behavior that was observed in this study. For example, consider the living room in Mark's Brighton apartment, featuring a large flat-screen TV and a Sky Digital set-top box. A typical scene in the lounge found Mark, roommates and girlfriends seated in front of the flat-screen with laptops also opened and online.

In order to make sense of the behavior in the room, it is necessary to first re-define the social behavior

represented in such settings. That is, does the fact that they are sitting next to each other and not talking mean they are anti-social? Not talking does not mean they are not communicating. What is important to understand is how they are communicating. In this case, the friends were involved in a multidimensional information experience. They were physically located in the living room but in reality were connected

across time and space to countless other individuals, groups and information, as well as to each other. Understanding how to deliver valuable news across such "virtually relative" environments like Mark's living room appears key to making a better connection with this audience.

Popular online search and sharing mechanisms are tools that could be harnessed to provide deeper access to news content and viral distribution opportunities.



Consumers Want Depth But Aren't Getting It

Participants in this study did show signs of largely shallow and erratic news consumption, however the study also suggested that people wanted more depth and were trying to find it. Unfortunately, more often than not, people did not understand that their attempts to substantiate and validate stories were not actually getting them anything new. Typically, people in the study were just checking the same story through the same source (or news “brand”) across different media. Or they were checking different platforms but unwittingly reading content coming from the same source, such as AP.

From a psychological point of view, one might interpret this news consumption behavior as a classic Pavlovian response. In other words, people were

conditioned to respond to headlines and updates as presenting whole news stories, when in reality they do not. We observed consumers click and re-click news updates and headlines and continue to do so, seemingly regardless of the outcome. Unknowingly, they often clicked through a link for more “depth” and in reality just got the same content from a different “news brand,” or on a different platform.

If the news industry continues to support this habitual response, a cycle of “above-the-fold” scanning for headlines and updates will likely be perpetuated, limiting demand for – and ultimately the supply of – more in-depth news coverage. In business terms, this could result in the loss of potential revenue from premium content delivery, or content that lives “below

the fold.”

For the participants in this study, in-depth searches for news were limited mostly to crisis situations. For instance, during the period when the field research was conducted in 2007, a major bridge collapsed in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Bess, the receptionist at the hair salon in Houston, clicked on the “interactive” pieces of the Minneapolis bridge story on Yahoo, which digitally recreated the fall of the bridge and pointed out potential areas of weakness in the bridge’s structure.

The implication for the news industry is to see crises as times to educate news consumers about the tools for digging deeper into stories with the hope that they will use these tools more often.

News Is Multitasked

Unlike past media models, where consumers made a scheduled date with a source of news – the morning paper or the evening news, for example – the participants in this study almost always consumed news as part of another set of tasks. Multitasking kept these subjects from giving their full at-

tention to the news as they were consuming it. For example, Mark in Brighton almost always consumed news in tandem with some other activity, such as driving or working.

The tendency toward multitasking the news was another key factor contributing to the predominant scanning behavior. Going

for depth necessitated more attention to the activity than these subjects tended to give it. This argues for the development of more interactive news experiences, such as the bridge collapse package that enticed Bess to engage more intently with the content.

Consumers Are Experiencing News Fatigue

Participants in this study showed signs of news fatigue; that is, they appeared debilitated by information overload and unsatisfying news experiences. Many consumers in the study were so overwhelmed and inundated by news that they just did not know what to do. Participants with news fatigue would try to ascertain whole news stories, but they regularly and

repeatedly were left unsatisfied. Ultimately, news fatigue brought many of the participants to a learned helplessness response. The more overwhelmed or unsatisfied they were, the less effort they were willing to put in.

Adding to news fatigue among these participants was the widespread belief that “all news today is negative.” Over and over again

in the study, the negativity of news – tragedy, crisis, war, terror – added to the desire to tune out.

Ironically, satirical news shows provided an antidote for news fatigue by creating an “anti-negative.” American respondents in the study noted that the news comedian Jon Stewart could take even the most serious news, spin it and make it palatable. Robert

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in the United States said he liked Howard Stern, a crude radio show that discusses newsworthy items as well as entertainment-type news. “[Stern] talks about things in a way I can relate to. I don’t need an anchor to tell me a script. I get it. For a lot of news it’s a case of if we don’t laugh, we’ll cry. I’d rather trust a satirist than a wax-faced suit on network news.”

The irony in news fatigue is that these consumers felt

helpless to change their news consumption at a time when they have more control and choice than ever before. When the news wore them down, participants in the study showed a tendency to passively receive versus actively seek news. As one person put it, “I don’t go hunting for news, I just accept it when it comes.” Or as another said, “News kind of comes to me ... from other people who read the paper or

watch the morning news.”

The implication for the news industry is not to flood the marketplace with repetitive content, but to counter the audience’s anxiety and overload with compelling content delivered in innovative ways, whether it be with technology or tongue in cheek. It is important to keep in mind that learned helplessness is a chronic condition that can be reversed.

Television Impacts Consumers Expectations

Participants in the study consistently mentioned TV news as an important element in their news diet, both as a point of frustration and relief. On the negative side, broadcast television's propensity to "tease" the news in promos that break into programming and throughout newscasts themselves was a major contributor to news fatigue for many of these subjects. Max from Kansas City, for example, wanted to catch "top stories" but felt television news usually "hides" them at the bottom of an hour. On the other end of the spectrum, some of the U.S. participants were obvious fans of shows that turn the news into entertainment. Several referenced "fake news," specifically *The Daily Show* (Jon Stewart) and *The Colbert Report*

(Stephen Colbert) as "news sources." The two are back-to-back news satire shows on cable television. Jack from Kansas City said Stewart was "absolutely" the human face of news for him.

The fact that people in the study were growing tired of real news and relaxing with fake news would seem to confirm the conventional wisdom that young consumers are rejecting traditional news formats. But, in fact, these American shows cast themselves in the formula of old-style broadcast news journalism with simple sets and an anchor behind the desk presenting a series of headlines followed by depth, spin-offs and editorializing. The viewer actually gets a significant dose of content along with humor

and entertainment. By using the old style news delivery formula, news entertainment shows deliver a balance of "above" and "below" the fold content, and participants in the study ate it up. Participants in Britain mentioned Sir Trevor McDonald in a similar vein. Unlike Stewart or Colbert, Sir Trevor plays largely a traditional anchor role, but he ends shows with a satirical spot that's entertaining.

The takeaway from these television trends is that this young audience had little patience for formats that promise and don't deliver. They enthusiastically embraced clever presentations that delivered even more than they promised, such as the fake news cable shows.

Story Resolution Is Key and Sports and Entertainment Deliver

Participants in the study consistently mentioned the importance of sports and entertainment news in their lives. People enjoyed their sports and entertainment news regardless of format, and it is worth noting that sports and entertainment news on TV borrow heavily from old-school broadcast journalism formulas. Audiences

get a series of updates and headlines balanced with in-depth back story, future story and editorializing.

The behavior of the participants also suggests that people loved their sports and entertainment news because of the level of resolution that this type of news offers. Stories tend to have a beginning, middle and

an end or clear next steps. Games are won and lost; movies are released and reviewed; stars are born and followed everywhere. General interest news, politics in particular, cannot always offer such resolution, but building that kind of storytelling into other content areas could have an impact on this audience's engagement level.

News Takes Work Today But Creates Social Currency

Several people in the study were able to articulate the concept that news takes work today. They might be called the “enlightened news consumers” – people who saw through the fog of their news fatigue and were doing something about it. In essence, the enlightened news consumers in this study were actually trying

to re-balance the relationship between “above-the-fold and “below-the-fold” news on their own terms.

“News is shallow today,” one participant said, “If you want background, it’s up to you.” By saying that news was up to them, the consumers in this study were suggesting that they, the consumers, were the “face of news today.” And

many said just that. Raj diagrammed the news for himself on a whiteboard routinely. As people came to understand the reality of contemporary news offerings, they showed signs of wanting to take matters into their hands. If news was going to take real work, then it should also work for them and help them meet their personal needs.

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Any news that did not meet these needs was ultimately deemed unhelpful and ignored.

The enlightened consumers turned news into “units” of social currency that could be used in a variety of interpersonal situations – to look smart, connect with friends and family and even move up the socio-economic ladder. But the news as it is predominantly delivered in digital formats today, in the form of quick headlines

and updates, did not offer people in the study enough value to create the currency they needed in their lives. They longed for more news they could use.

Several participants sought help, not from the media, but from their own networks of friends, family and co-workers. Not surprisingly, sports and entertainment news was quickly shared and transmitted, checked and re-shared over varieties of media and

platforms. Sharable information was the key. In this study, people were observed in constant communication with their extended social networks. Following a particular news story was in large part dependent on whether the news was worth sharing with a trusted member of the network. As one member of the study said, “News helps me maintain relationships.”

Recommendations

The competing notions of “news fatigue” and “news as social currency” stand out among these findings. This study demonstrated across cultural boundaries that the news can turn consumers off, just as easily as it can turn them on. The key value point to the audience was news they could use. They understood that aggregating their own personal news reports could involve real work, but they were willing to do it if the effort produced real currency.

At a high level, the challenge for news providers is two-fold: Create appealing content, designed to satisfy all four news needs in the consumption model (Facts, Updates, Back Story, Future Story) and then deliver it across all the channels these consumers use. But even if you create news people can use, how do you reach consumers who spurn established packaging and consume information in haphazard, non-linear fashion?

Anthropologists cannot

answer that more difficult question for the news industry, but the value proposition is clear for both producers and consumers: Young people are tired of the same old news and want something better. They just need some help. Many have lost sight of what to do once they get “below the fold.”

The following pages contain some summary recommendations to the news industry based on these findings.

One: Delivering Depth

Currently, news consumption is frequently connected with e-mail, but the preponderance and overwhelming nature of e-mail have begun to make it less relevant as a deep information source. E-mail may work best as an alerting mechanism, and other

venues should be explored to deliver depth. In this time of “virtually relative” environments, multiple channels are a necessity.

Some participants in the study became aware of their habit to check news out of boredom and have consciously changed their

behavior to be more proactive about news consumption. News producers have a unique opportunity to re-engage this enlightened segment of the audience by designing innovative formats and creating easier pathways to deep content.

Two: Addressing News Fatigue and Balance

The irony surrounding news fatigue is that, at precisely the time consumers have gained more choice and control over their news consumption, they are actually feeling more and more helpless. The younger generation has turned to “fake” news

as a way to balance their news consumption, perhaps without realizing it. The “fake” news programs are providing all four pieces of the news consumption model and adding entertainment on top of it.

News producers can give control back to the con-

sumers by improving the discoverability of deep and relevant content, eliminating as much repetition and duplication as possible in their news and bringing closure to stories whenever possible.

Three: Creating Social Currency

Consumers are using news as social currency in a variety of ways: to stay connected with loved ones, to be the hub in their circle of friends, to advance in their careers and to engage with others they don't know. Current technologies and globalization have led to changes in the value chain for news. Is it the news industry or consumers of news who produce social currency from news?

Today, it is both. News is no longer simply delivered, in a one-way transaction, from producer to consumer. Communications are two-way, and news is widely shared among consumers themselves. Understanding

the dynamics of this new environment and creating mechanisms to enable better search and sharing of news will harness the power of this emerging social currency system.

Although consumers have gained more control over where, when and how they consume the news, the task of restoring balance to the news consumption model identified in this study requires active engagement from news producers. Deeper news resources, beyond the oversupply of Facts and Updates, must be built out, and the routes to those resources need to be constructed. If left to chance, the machines of the digital

age will not automatically enable satisfying connections with the news, as the experiences of these subjects attest.

The clear conclusion of this work commissioned by AP is that the mix of strategies for content and distribution will require continuous fine-tuning to restore the power once delivered by the packaged media of the analog era. That fine-tuning, in turn, relies on a sophisticated understanding of the value proposition for this new generation of consumers, who will draw currency from the news – if they can find it.

'AP 2.0' – Embracing a New Model for News Delivery

How AP Mapped Behavioral Patterns to Digital Strategy

The idea seemed fascinating but unbelievable: Research had uncovered a young man in India so obsessed with the news that he committed his analysis of current events to a whiteboard every night before going to bed.

The existence of such a newshound seemed much too good to be true. Could it be that untapped demand actually remained to be harnessed in the oversupplied news marketplace? The behavior of Raj, a young engineering student in Hyderabad, seemed to suggest there was hope.

Raj (identified here by pseudonym) was one of the real, live people plucked



“Raj” didn’t just consume the news; he diagramed it.

from obscurity last year for an in-depth study of news consumption around the world, commissioned by AP. He was not discovered by an AP journalist. He surfaced, by chance, among 18 men and women in six cities (four U.S. and two abroad), who were solicited by a team of cultural

scientists to participate in the study.

The goal of the project was relatively mundane. AP pursued the research to put a human face on the growing universe of data about the shifting media habits of the digital generation. The anthropological study was to be combined with other market and trend analysis to inform AP’s strategic planning for future news services.

Thanks to Raj and the other subjects in this study, AP got much more than it bargained for. In addition to telling detail about individual consumer behavior, the powerful conclusions of the study helped define

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a new framework for thinking about how the news meets – or mostly misses – this audience.

As the cultural experts from the Context-Based Research group have explained in their analysis, the young consumers in this study group were eager to consume news and found great value in it. Raj, for

example, said he used his nightly whiteboard analysis as a foundation for his interactions the next day to win friends and influence people. He said he hoped that, over time, his mastery of events would help him rise above his hereditary caste and move up in the world.

Others in the study

didn't have quite as much at stake, but they also said they used the news to inform their choices and support their personal interactions. In general, the news served as a basic form of "social currency" in all of their lives, the Context researchers concluded.

News Diet Out of Balance

While that conclusion was reassuring, the most urgent finding was not. The research team discovered a deep strain of fatigue among these subjects that traced to an overload of basic staples in the news diet – the facts and updates that tend to dominate the digital news environment.

The subjects were being bombarded every day with news in small bursts – headlines in e-mail programs, snippets on portal pages or in search results

and electronic word of mouth shared over mobile devices or instant messaging. Indeed, many of the facts and updates they were seeing seemed repetitive or, worse, promised more than they were delivering in the form of real news.

The anthropologists, viewing the phenomenon from a cultural perspective, concluded that the subjects' news diets were therefore out of balance. They were eating too many chips and not enough vegetables.

The over-consumption of facts and updates is understandable in the context of these young lives. These subjects, whether in Hyderabad or Kansas City, mostly encountered the news opportunistically, meaning they ran into it via computer or mobile device. Their television viewing and newspaper reading were sporadic in most cases.

Those observations worried the anthropologists and led them to conclude

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that informed societies would be threatened – let alone the news business – if this snacking habit were allowed to persist. With that, the stakes were suddenly raised for what started out as a business strategy project.

In their report to AP, the researchers created a simple illustration to sum up their findings. The illustration sought to break down the consumption of the subjects into four basic components of news,

which the young people were either already finding or looking for. The components were laid out as stacked boxes labeled Facts, Updates, Back Story and Future Stories.

Facts and Updates – what happened? -- are the staples of breaking news and the predominant form of news online. The concept of Back Story represents the context of a news item – what does it mean? Future Stories represent the resolution – what happens next?

The anthropologists used the arrangement and relative size of the boxes to communicate the imbalance they observed. The subjects were generally overdosing on Facts and Updates – represented by the bigger boxes – and yearning for, yet not finding, more breadth and depth in the news.

As the researchers described it, using an old newspaper idiom for emphasis, the subjects were mostly skimming the news,



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rather than diving more deeply “below the fold.” Furthermore, the researchers noted, the behavior was strikingly similar across geography and cultures.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the four pieces of the news model identified by the anthropologists align closely with the traditional definition of the news that journalists carry around in their heads. Those four components have shaped some of the iconic models of modern journalism – the newspaper-of-record approach of The New York Times, for example, promising “All the news that’s fit to print.”

To one degree or another,

that same editorial confidence continues to inspire the production of front pages, television broadcasts, news Web sites and news wire services the world over. And based on the success of those established vehicles over the years, the four-box model might seem to suggest that there’s an easy fix to the problem of restoring lost context and resolution in the digital news age: Just build it and consumers will come.

But clearly, based on the experience of the subjects in this study, it’s not that easy anymore.

The critical difference in today’s news environment is that technology can undo

the tidy packages that news providers produce. News gets split apart into atomic pieces for today’s digital consumption – headlines, 25-word summaries, stand-alone photos, podcasts and video clips – all of which can be easily e-mailed, searched and shared beyond the confines of their original packaging.

The all-too-familiar result is that newspapers, broadcasts and Web sites are being outpaced by the quicker hits and easier access to news that is mostly unpackaged and aggregated by the users themselves through any number of digital means.

From Containers to Entry Points

The visual model with the four boxes provided an initial trigger for thinking through a response to the market challenges this consumer behavior presents. Where the anthropologists saw a map of the news from the consumers' perspective, it followed that news providers might find a path to creating new products.

But a new brainstorm was needed, since the original boxes seemed literally to suggest that packaging could solve the problem – that bigger, better packages for the Back Story and Future Stories, for example, could attract more audience attention.

To encompass the idea that the world was different today, the journalistic minds at AP turned the stacked boxes into free-floating spheres, or entry points,

for news. (Recalling a bit of elementary science, the spheres could be thought of as four essential pieces, like the geosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere and biosphere of news. The spheres also evoke the atomization of the news in the digital space, where headlines, photos and video clips can be pulled from Web sites and re-distributed through e-mail, search and sharing.)

Facts (!) and Updates (+) are the entry points that take up most of the current digital space, with the Back Story (◀) and the Future Stories (▶) fighting for attention. How the audience navigates these four points, across platform and brand, is nowhere near as straightforward as opening up the old media containers, where one simply subscribed, tuned in or logged on.

Based on the behavior ob-

The new model



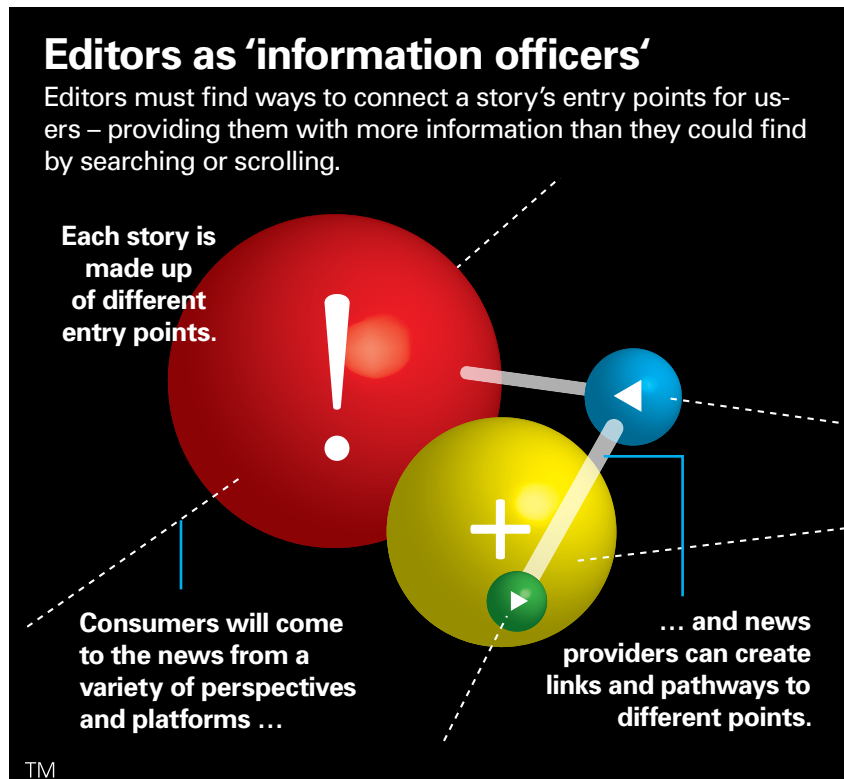
The “boxy” model seemed to indicate a solution was in packaging. The redesigned AP model moves news into the new space – a universe of stories made up of different spheres, each ranging in size and scope – and consumers interacting with the story from different entry points and platforms.

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served in the study group, a consumer might start his or her day by opening an e-mail news headline package, then click on a headline and move to a story. But then what? What happens later when the story develops? How do critical questions about the back story get answered? Where can the user go for a look ahead, or for spin-offs that are more personally relevant? These were all questions to which the consumers in the study lacked clear answers.

A key issue, demonstrated in this study, is that consumers are accessing the entry points to news as much by chance as by design. Human editors at a particular site can set paths from one story to another and add links to other media coverage, buttons for sharing with a friend, etc. But that activity only covers a small fraction of the many circuitous routes consumers are now empowered



to take through the news.

Hypothetically, new value can be created if news producers and distributors can figure out ways to help consumers connect the dots more coherently. But where do you start? This study confirmed the need to maintain two parallel tracks of work. First, create more

appealing content for the key entry points. Second, and more difficult, build the connections that will transport consumers to that content across both media platform and brand. As AP has discovered, that's a job for both people and machines.

AP's Own Transformation

The AP emerged from this and other research with a renewed commitment to new content development and digital technology. The new model, splitting the news into its fundamental atomic parts, provides a conceptual framework for that work, much as the old “inverted pyramid” once did for news writing.

Born of an earlier technology revolution in news production that introduced high-speed presses, the inverted pyramid conditioned journalists to organize the information in their stories from most important to least important to beat the competition. That model drove the journalism and the business of the AP news cooperative for more than a century and a half, as the news was packaged day in and day out for competitive, space-efficient

display in newspapers.

The model even worked for new media as they came along through the 20th century. AP created services based on newspaper stories to supply news for radio, television and eventually the Internet and mobile platforms. Even today, it does not seem out of place to read “newspaper” stories online. Indeed, the news Web sites of newspapers around the world are often seen as online editions with better deadlines.

But as the study confirms, the increasing movement of the audience online is rapidly changing the environment. Consumers, like those in the study group, have grown up using digital tools and view the old packaged news products as much less efficient. The ability to search for news and information makes it even easier for consumers

to eschew a scheduled date with packaged media. Add the capability of viral sharing to the mix, facilitating electronic word-of-mouth interactions among consumers, and the utility of packaged media appears increasingly limited. Newspaper stories, packaged as a snapshot in time, struggle to connect with an audience that is being conditioned to aggregate and manipulate unpackaged information on their own.

For AP, these trends delivered a clear directive to adjust the newspaper-story-first mentality. A shift to fastest-formats-first had already been made at the agency well before the consumer study. That shift has now accelerated with key new initiatives to enhance the differentiation of services to match platform and market needs.

Chief among those initia-

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tives is a fundamental new process for newsgathering in the field called “1-2-3 Filing.” The name describes a new editorial workflow that requires first word of a text story to be delivered in a structured alert (headline format) to be followed by a short, present-tense story delivering the vital details in step 2. Then, in a final step, a story takes whatever form is appropriate for different platforms and audiences – a longer form story or analysis for print, for example. Other media types are coordinated along the way in similar fashion.

As one of the editorial leaders instituting the new process around the world, Special International Editor Deborah Seward has described the shift as profound for both journalists and consumers. A report built for constant deadlines is becoming even more dynamic. “We’re reporting what is happening,” she



The Top Stories Desk sets the direction on big stories – focusing on faster formats, then following with more depth.

said, “not what has happened.”

That subtle, but powerful, change is all-important to the digital audience, as the study group told the anthropologists. Those consumers said they wanted to see real updates, not duplicative stories presented as updates, and they wanted some coverage to go much deeper. Present-tense alerts

and updates, followed by deeper dives for print as well as online, are designed to answer those calls. In the past, one story destined for print moved through the filing process, amassing detail for new developments into a structure built for next-day newspaper reading.

The biggest stories of the day get even more attention

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from a new “Top Stories Desk” at AP headquarters in New York. The editors on that desk are urged to consider the big-picture significance of a select number of stories each day and to provide the perspective and forward-looking thinking that can enhance their development across all media platforms. This attention to key stories also plays out on a slightly smaller scale at regional news desks situated in three locations outside the United States and, by the end of 2009, in four U.S. cities.

Taken together, these changes in workflow directly address the needs to both tighten and deepen the news report that consumers, like those in the study, can find as they surf and search for information.

A third major initiative at AP responds to the need for more variety in the news. Major new content develop-

ment projects have been launched in entertainment, sports and financial news to create more entry points for consumers with appetites for broader, deeper content in those categories. In addition to the obvious appeal of the subject matter to young consumers, the big three news “verticals” also represent important

new revenue opportunities for news providers in the years ahead, as demand grows in the digital marketplace for specialty and premium content.

A fourth initiative from AP aims to deliver news content, across category, to a platform most likely to be in the hands of the young target audience.

A comprehensive mobile news service was launched in the United States in May 2008, aggregating the coverage of AP and its constituent member newspapers.

The Mobile News Network – www.apnews.com – is optimized for the Apple iPhone and other “smart-phones.”

On a smaller, everyday scale, AP has been actively pursuing the creation of content with more “social currency” for consumers. A special unit in the newsroom was created to launch many of these efforts in



AP's Mobile News Network was created for smartphones.

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2005 and the work has since been integrated into the daily routine. The unifying theme: Each piece of journalism is designed to give news consumers something worth discussing in interactions with their friends, acquaintances and co-workers. A few examples:



Ask AP: This regular feature unites newspaper readers and online news consumers with AP reporters who are experts in their fields. Readers with news questions are given direct and personal answers from AP journalists.

Interactive explainers: Interactive Web graphics take users more deeply into the news without requiring them to read a long text

story. One AP interactive created for the start of last year's hurricane season, for instance, allowed the user to move a slide along the Saffir-Simpson scale of storm severity, while simultaneously displaying an animated demonstration of the damage that would result from such a storm.

Audience views: At selected news events, AP has given cameras to bystanders and/or participants, then asked them to take photographs of the event from their perspectives. This approach has been used for everything from the music industry



This interactive graphic showed how a hurricane's destructive force increased with the storm's intensity.

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The Measure of a Nation series looks at the election through the prism of American culture.

Grammys to an earthquake anniversary in Mexico to the family of a dead soldier meeting with President Bush in the White House.

Alternative story forms: A key question for news planning today is “How can this story best be told?” Increasingly, the answer can be found outside traditional storytelling formats. In one popular example in the 2006 U.S. elections, an AP multimedia producer “mashed up” excerpts from political attack ads with a musical

mix. The result garnered more than half a million hits after going viral and getting passed along from the customer sites that displayed the piece.

Measure of a Nation: For 2008, the AP has undertaken a yearlong multimedia project to look at the elections through the prism of American culture, rather than simply the candidates and the horse race. This involves identifying key themes and exploring how they play out in the culture and influence what Ameri-

cans expect of the next president.

These initiatives at AP, large and small, have sprung from a concerted effort to think about the news from an end-user’s perspective, re-emphasizing a dimension to news gathering and editing that can get lost in the relentless rush of the daily news cycle. The consumer study provided important validation for that approach, as well as a continuing framework for thinking about future innovation.

Importance of Linking Mechanisms

On their own, however, new content initiatives cannot ensure a connection with the digital audience. The fragmented and unstructured approach the study members took to their daily news consumption illustrates the challenge. Distribution now requires a new kind of connection with consumers.

This cannot be accomplished on a large scale without some new and sophisticated distribution mechanics, meaning an infrastructure that smartly connects the audience to available, relevant content in virtually unlimited ways. At the core of such an infrastructure are two concepts AP has strongly embraced – database access to content and metadata mark-up.

AP began moving to a database platform in 2003, as it became clear that media customers of the agency wanted more and better access to AP content than the old system of one-way, “wire” feeds could deliver. The agency had long relied on the feed model, delivering news content by telegraph and phone lines and later by satellite. The system required customers to catch the content and sort through it on their end.

Once all forms of content could be rendered to digital formats, it opened the way to a new model, where content is maintained in a database that enables customers to come and get what they need when they need it. By extension, the database model also is making it possible to access ar-

chived content on demand, opening up opportunity for the transactional sale of deep photo and video content by topic or time period. Visit www.apimages.com and www.aparchive.com.

The key to success with the database model is to make sure the content is well-organized and searchable. The job requires creation and implementation of a system for tagging content with digital coding that describes it in great detail. In the jargon of the age, that means creating a system for metadata – or data about the data.

AP began work in this area as part of its shift to the database. Now in place is a classification system for subjects, or categories of news, and a related sys-

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tem for identifying entities, or famous people, places and things in the news. Also included as part of the metadata system are tags for originating sources (AP or a member newspaper contributor) and authors (writers), among other attributes. Most important, links to related content are created based on the intersection of these attributes across the full range of the database. Effectively, the system makes it possible to surface and link all text, photos, graphics, audio and video that are related to each other.

The impact is twofold: Within the database, content can be easily organized and searched. Once in use online, the content carries the necessary digital coding to automate its flow to the right entry point for consumers and to enable links from one piece of content to another. Such a system takes a big step toward the



AP Images – on demand and in demand.

ultimate goal of making all parts of the news – breaking news, background and spin-offs – linkable in cyberspace in ways that would delight young digital consumers.

But yet another big step is required to accomplish

that goal: standardization. Unless many – indeed, most – news providers adopt a standard set of digital tags, content will not be automatically linkable across both brand and platform. As the digital consumers in the behavioral study dem-

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onstrated, the audience is looking to be transported to relevant information no matter its source. Where online consumers once surfed and bookmarked news sites, users now wonder why a logical trail through the news can't simply unfold, link by link, across a multitude of sources.

Significant human co-

operation, on a very large scale, would have to occur to ensure that outcome across the worldwide Internet. For its part, AP is offering to apply its metadata tags to the content of its member newspapers in the United States, so that related news can be linked across provider. In addition to enabling such links, the metadata initiative is also

part of the shared infrastructure that supports the new Mobile News Network. Long term, the shared tagging system could provide information to guide search algorithms, widget technology and other digital information agents that power content discovery around the Internet and mobile space.

Unanswered Questions

Still to come are the business models that will drive this new distribution system of entry points and links.

For AP's Mobile News Network, national and local advertising is being pursued to support display of headlines, stories, images and video clips. Constituent newspapers will contribute both news and local advertising to the network, and one paper's ad can support the display of another paper's news, linked by geographic coding and other metadata. Business rules have been established

to award display to local ad sellers who offer the highest rates of return for the network. Ad revenue will be aggregated and shared among all the providers.

All the content and advertising is being presented outside the packaging of the news companies' own Web sites in a format designed especially for smartphones.

Such cooperative models may provide a way to create the scale that online and mobile businesses will require to generate significant revenues. As Google's advertising model

has proven so definitively, a business built on clicks requires a network of massive numbers, not just a single Web site. When information is available any time, any place, as it will be for generations of news consumers to come, models must be constructed to connect huge numbers of people with personalized bits of information. Those models will require the aggregation of content, advertising and audience on a very large scale – perhaps not all in one place, but all connected.

Case Study: The Telegraph

O V E R V I E W

New approaches to audience engagement can have real impact. That's the lesson to be learned from a brief case study of The Telegraph, a leading news company in Britain that has taken the shift in news consumption patterns very seriously.

Like their American counterparts, most major European newspapers are

facing declining circulation, a challenging advertising environment and mass-scale audience migration to digital platforms. Changing demand has caused venerable news institutions across the continent to reconsider editorial and marketing strategies.

Notable for its huge jump in online traffic year over year, The Telegraph is in

the vanguard of the European transformation. AP has had a window on The Telegraph's work, as strategists for both companies have shared their insights with each other at various points over the past year. A brief summary of The Telegraph's ongoing work is added here as a case study in how to put new models to work.

The Telegraph's Transformation

The Telegraph, in print, remains a broadsheet. Nonetheless, the company has embarked on a strategy that is transforming the daily newspaper, read only once a day, to a round-the-clock news outlet that readers check continuously.

Telegraph.co.uk has the

many features of a comprehensive news portal: up-to-the-minute news, regular updates, story background, and other archived content, video, cartoons, celebrity news, etc. The Web site offers readers multiple entry points for exploration of its broad selection of content,

presented in an interactive and engaging way.

In a year's time, the Telegraph has become the third most-visited national newspaper Web site in Britain – 17 million unique users visited Telegraph.co.uk in March 2008, compared to 7.2 million in March 2007,

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according to electronic audit bureau numbers. The paper attributed the sharp increase not only to the impact of the month's news, but also to the tactical moves it has taken to execute its strategy.

What the Telegraph Does

The Telegraph has built a multi-layered news presentation by cross-linking current news stories with other relevant content assets – background, analysis, video, etc.

By extending the user's time on its Web site, The Telegraph is able to display more targeted and contextual advertising and consequently generate more revenue.

As illustrated by the randomly selected story, "Global warming may 'stop,' scientists say" from April 30, 2008, the Telegraph offers its readers a variety of



Smart links and multi-layered content give users of The Telegraph's site a choice to interact with content or move on to bigger subjects.

entry points.

- ▶ The breaking news story link, which was published on the front page leads to the actual story, which is published in the Earth section. Several links, embedded in the text, offer readers the option to interact with the content or explore the bigger topics of Earth and ecology.

- ▶ In addition to traditional text and photos, the site offers video, produced in-house, that is related to

the topic.

This interactive, non-linear presentation strategy drives the business model, as well as the journalistic model. As Edward Roussel, Telegraph's digital editor, points out, success is being measured against targets for visitor traffic and corresponding revenues. "We want to make our content visible to the widest possible audience," he said, summing up the goal at the center of the strategy.

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How they Do It

Ironically, the re-invented Telegraph is following a strategy not unlike that of a television news channel.

With the mindset of a broadcast-news production center that has to feed dynamic demand for “new” news round-the clock, The Telegraph has replaced its newspaper process with a new approach that delivers news as events unfold.

Editorially, the Telegraph has a simple-to-manage news strategy: headline first (via any available communication method – SMS, e-mail, phone call), followed by a 150-word brief, and, within an hour, a 450-word, multimedia story. Following that, assigned editors decide whether to commission analyses, opinion pieces, additional multimedia, etc.

As Roussel told AP, big breaking news events are

always assigned a supervisory editor with commissioning responsibilities, who is accountable for the overall coverage and presentation of the story.

High-impact news stories are developed into micro-Web sites, offering readers a plethora of options to explore related topics. The goal is to offer Web readers a live and dynamic news product.

The commissioning-editor function is central to the success of telegraph.co.uk. The editor is continuously charting the coverage, just like a live news producer, commissioning editorial content from multiple units, improving the presentation of the story on the Web page.

User-generated content (UGC) has become increasingly important, Roussel said, and not simply to enhance audience engage-

ment. “Text, imagery and user-generated content,” he said describing the new formula. “We tell the story with that combination.”

“The story-building process begins in a relentless way as news breaks,” he said. “First, alerts, then 150 to 250 words within 15 minutes, invite user-generated content and fold in multimedia.”

While the Telegraph relies on Web 2.0 technology solutions, such as metadata, tagging, cross-linking, semantic searching, etc., there is still a lot of room for human editor intervention to vet the links and make sure that the content package is relevant to the news story itself. A redesign of the site and its basic infrastructure will be instituted this year to introduce enhanced content management tools for editors and better navigation and UGC

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tools for users.

As always in transformation, the biggest challenge to overcome is the rooted culture of an organization more than a century old. The move to a new home (a former market trading floor), with a new floor plan for the newsroom, has eased the transition, Roussel said. Moreover, the news managers are now

organized by category, not by “the means of distribution,” he said, so that key “content executives” can make decisions across the boundaries of media formats.

For Roussel, there is still a lot work to be done. The archives are only partially digitized (about 10 years’ worth so far) and the site redesign is eagerly awaited.

Viral distribution opportunities, beyond search engine optimization, are in the early stages of experimentation. The site offers e-mail services, desktop alerts and news on the go to mobile devices.

Roussel is nonetheless confident that The Telegraph is on the right

Telegraph Alerts

Last Updated: 2:09AM BST 12/07/2007

Keep abreast of breaking news and sports headlines delivered straight to your desktop.

WHAT ARE TELEGRAPH ALERTS?

With Telegraph Alerts you can receive news feeds and updates direct to your home or office desktop. You tell what news you want, and we'll keep you informed with instant, up-to-the-minute bulletins.

TELL ME MORE

Free of charge for telegraph.co.uk users, Telegraph Alerts takes only seconds to install and is free from spyware, adware and viruses. You can customise your Telegraph Alerts and control the way you receive your news by choosing either a ticker or hourly pop-ups.

HOW TO GET TELEGRAPH ALERTS

Simply download the Telegraph Alerts program to your desktop, click install and follow the on-screen instructions.

TELEGRAPH ON THE GO

Get the news first, get it for free

We can send the latest headlines and stories direct to your Blackberry or mobile every morning - and update them every lunchtime and afternoon. They tell you all you need to know before the business day begins and keep you informed as the day goes on.

We can also send you the biggest stories as they break, direct to your mobile phone.

Register and stay informed for free.



Internet access

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track to be reborn as a full-fledged digital news medium. As for the print edition? Roussel said there would always be room for

it, as the paper morphs into a more analytical, thought-provoking and in-depth news product.

“In two to three years, ev-

erything will be published to the Web,” he said, “and the best of it will be in the newspaper.”

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What you see in this document is a compilation of the ethnographic field research and several review and brainstorming sessions conducted over the past year with Context. We also have integrated other learning acquired along the way, including several insightful discussions with our friends at The Telegraph, particularly Edward Roussel, who is leading that media company's digital transformation. We included a look at their work as a coda to our own.

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Of course, our greatest thanks are reserved for the young subjects of this unusual study. Their unstructured paths through the news have helped us to rethink and restructure our own approach to serving them and others like them.

– Jim Kennedy | Director of Strategic Planning | The Associated Press