Newspapers Vs. TV: Who is Taking the Most Advantage of The Www?

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Abstract

While both TV and newspapers have been using the WWW for many years, the different backgrounds of the content producers has meant that the different media have been using the Web in different ways. To study the differences between the media and their utilization of the Web, content analyses of websites in the top 25 U.S. TV markets (four stations each, for 100 total) and the top 100 circulation newspapers in the U.S were conducted. The studies showed that while TV stations naturally excelled at putting video on the Web, newspapers' use of the Web in almost all other aspects was significantly superior to their TV counterparts in almost all other categories.

Keywords: international reporting, the Macedonian, Slovenian, Serbian newspapers

Introduction

It goes without saying that the Internet has dramatically transformed journalism. In varying degrees, both the commercial media and journalism educators the past 15 years have embraced convergence, the merging of print and broadcast primarily though the medium of the World Wide Web. This transformation has affected all aspects of journalism, from researching information to reporting and storytelling techniques to the distribution of those stories.

Studies of that transformation have, however, focused much more on how print, rather than broadcast outlets, have adapted to the new technologies. Perhaps because there are more newspapers than TV stations or because there are more print-centric journalism teachers/scholars than their broadcast counterparts, the number of qualitative and quantitative studies about newspapers and the Web have greatly outpaced broadcast studies about television newsrooms and how they are utilizing Internet multimedia and interactivity capabilities. Our team aims to remedy that.

Our team of researchers set out to explore the web sites associated with the top 25 television markets in the United States and the top 100 circulation newspapers in the U.S.

Literature Review

In the spring of 2014 The Media Insight Project group, an initiative of the American Press Institute and the Associated Press-NORC center for Public Affairs Research group published a study called the Personal News Cycle. They discovered that nearly 85 percent of Americans get their news directly from television, with a close 70 percent looking to the Internet for obtaining their daily news. They noted that nearly half of all Americans have signed up for alerts via their preferred news station.

Clearly, TV stations—and their Internet sites—remain a key part of news distribution and consumption. Given that position, it's important to study how those TV stations are using the web, in both distributing content and interacting with readers.

While there have been some studies conducted about TV news websites, the bulk of the studies have focused on print. Some of the earliest studies have been done by Kamerer and Bressers (1998), who compared local and national news coverage on websites in 1997, and Peng, Tham and Xioming (1999), whose study, also in 1997, surveyed editors about web site design.

Another 1997 study by Schultz (1999) involved 100 newspapers of different sizes. Like our study, he used a content analysis method, looking for features such reader polls, photos, and forums. Likewise, in a 1997-2003 longitudinal study, Greer and Mensing analyzed 83 newspapers for not only multimedia and interactivity, but also ad revenue.

Other landmark newspaper studies include two content analyses done on the websites of the Top 100-circulation newspapers in the U.S., first by the Bivings Group (2006) and later, adding many more multimedia, distribution and interactive features, by Heater, Beckwith, Lyons, Ford, Miller and Bergland (2013). Using a two-pass review system and a 35-item matrix, the group found that the use of multimedia by the newspapers increased significantly, with video jumping from 61 percent to 95 percent. Interactive features also increased, with the most dramatic changes coming in the growth in comments sections after articles, from 19 percent to

96 percent. Another seminal study was conducted by Russial (2009), who surveyed editors at the 210 U.S. newspapers with circulations over 30,000. As with the other studies, he found that their use of multimedia was behind what one would expect at these top newspapers.

While these studies were newspaper-based, there have been some other related studies that have looked at broadcast news websites, including early ones done by Lind and Medoff (1999) and Kiernan and Levy (1999) and a similar study done later by Pitts and Harms (2003). Other studies, such as Chan-Ohlmsted and Park (2000) and Lin and Jeffres (2001) have compared broadcast and print websites, finding that the newspaper websites contain more local news than TV station websites—but that these are better than radio websites, which contain virtually no news. Perhaps because of the bandwith at the time, these early broadcast websites often did not contain audio or video (Pitts 2003). Some other studies, such as DeMars (2009) and Batsell and Kraeplin (2011) looked at partnerships between TV stations and newspapers, with Dailey, Demo and Spillman (2009) and Kraeplin and Criado (2009) finding that these partnerships are diminishing as newspapers were starting to produce their own videos.

In addition to these more quantitative studies, there have also been numerous qualitative studies, including ones about broadcast outlets. For example, there have been several ethnographic studies, including Dupagne and Garrison (2006), of the Tampa Tribune/WFLI merger. For example, Haung (2004) and his research team looked at how the quality of coverage did not decline after the merger.

Brannon (2008), who worked at *USA Today*, conducted one of the most diverse and useful ethnographies that involved broadcast and print, looking at how NPR, ABC and *USA Today* newsrooms have adapted to the move to online models. Internationally, Wahl-Jorgenson and Wardle (2011) looked at the BBC and how it has handled user-generated content.

Research Questions

The background research of broadcast and print outlets led us to ask several key questions that we hoped to answer through our research:

RQ 1: What multimedia, interactive and distribution features are utilized most by the Top-25 market TV stations?

RQ 2: How are these stations taking advantage of social media?RQ 3: What are the key differences between networks in their use of multimedia/interactivity/distribution/social media?

RQ 4: What are the differences between TV and newspapers in these features?

Methodology

To help answer these questions, we needed to choose a methodology that was both feasible and reliable. That methodology required a careful selection of the media outlets to study, the choice of method for analyzing the websites of those outlets and decisions about what website features to study.

Selection of Subjects

Our group had neither the time nor the resources to analyze every U.S. TV station website. The decision, then, was how to narrow down the list. Similar to the Russial (2009) study that chose 210 newspapers with over 20,000 circulation and the Bivings (2006) study of the top 100 newspapers, we chose the largest markets. Our rationale was similar to that of the newspaper researchers: the stations in the largest markets reach the largest number of people, and these stations are the most likely to set the standard for the smaller stations. We chose to work with the top 25 market regions as outlined on stationindex.com, listed by rank and metropolitan market region/area, with New York as number one and Indianapolis at 25. We then chose the four major news networks: NBC, CBS, ABC and FOX. While a few cities had other stations with higher Nielson numbers than one or more of these four, we kept these four so as to be consistent in our comparisons. The final tally, of course, was 100 stations. This study was conducted in March and April of 2014. The companion study of the top 100 circulation newspapers, based on the Audit Bureau of Circulation statistics, was conducted in March and April of 2012.

Method of Analysis

When studying news outlet websites, there are many ways in which to conduct research. Others have used various methodologies, but the two main approaches are surveys and content analysis. The survey method, which involves sending surveys to news directors or publication editors, has been employed by a number of researchers such as Peng et al. (1999) and more

recently by Russial (2009). The main benefit of the survey method is the quantity and quality of information obtained. The main disadvantages include weaknesses such as often-low response rates and self-reporting errors.

The other main approach, content analysis, involves the researcher physically viewing the website, analyzing the site and documenting findings. The most common method is a onepass method that involves a researcher looking at a site one time, starting with such early studies done by Schultz (1999). Numerous journalism researchers have used this method, such as Sparks, Young, & Darnell (2006). In "Convergence, Corporate Restructuring, and Canadian Online News," they looked at a sample of approximately 100 print and broadcast outlets using a single-pass, single-coder method for their data collection. The Bivings Group (2006) study of the websites of the U.S. top 100-circulation newspapers, and the Bergland,
Hon, Crawford and Noe (2012) study of newspaper websites in the U.S., United Kingdom, Australia, Ireland, Canada and New Zealand likewise used a single-pass content analysis method. The benefit of this method is that it ensures 100 percent of the websites are being studied, a direct contrast to a survey method that might only have a 20-30 percent response rate—and the accompanying bias that can entail, since those not responding might be less likely to be concerned about the web and might not have a good web presence. The main disadvantage is that it provides only a snapshot of each website on the day it is studied. For example, a news outlet might have produced an audio slide show in 2014, but because that slideshow was either no longer on the site or was buried too deep in the site, the single-pass researcher might not find and record the presence of that feature.

Our team decided to use a content analysis, and conducted the study in March and April of 2014 for the TV websites and March and April of 2012 for the newspapers . But, instead of a one-pass system, we chose to use a two-pass method to gather our data, similar to that used by Hashim, Hasan and Sinnepan (2007) in their analysis of 12 Australian newspapers and also employed by Heater and her team of researchers in a 2013 study of website features of the top 100 U.S. newspapers, a revisiting of the 2006 Bivings study. As with the Heater study, the first pass involved all of the researchers looking the sites and marking the presence of all the multimedia, interactive, social media and distribution features on the websites. The second pass was an additive pass, meaning that a different researcher looked at the same sites about a month later, marking any features not recorded by the first researcher. This two-pass method increased

reliability in two ways: it was able to note any features that were not present when the first pass was conducted, and it allowed the second reader to catch any features that might have been missed on the first pass.

Units of Analysis

The final methodological decision concerned the features to analyze. To be able to compare the TV station results with the top U.S. newspaper results, we based our categories on those utilized by Heater (2013) and her top-100 newspaper research team. Some of Heater categories were eliminated because they didn't apply to TV stations (such as the PDF-front page and PDF-whole newspapers), while others were added, such as having the full news broadcast. In the end, our group looked at 34 features which fell roughly four categories:

- Multimedia (Orginal segment, AP/news service segment, whole broadcast, photo gallery, audio slideshow, audio, etc)
- Interactive (blogs, polls, comments sections, etc.)
- Distribution (mobile and tablet optimization, mobile alert, RSS feed, email digest, etc)
- Social media (sharing, Facebook page and Twitter links, Facebook and Twitter feeds on the websites.

Results

Comparison between networks

As one would expect, the use of video was ubiquitous on these websites. But, there were significant differences in many of the other features, such as audio, mobile alerts and mobile apps.

As one can see, almost none of the stations outside of the Fox affiliates posted their entire broadcast online; most of them just had links to various segments. Conversely, while CBS frequently used links to audio or podcasts on their station sites, Fox stations and the other network stations almost never had audio/podcasts.

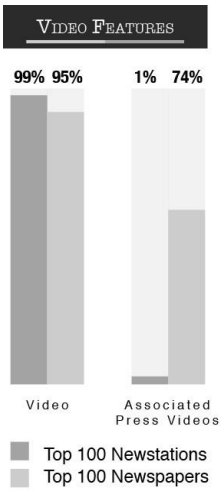
The network-to-network comparison is also useful in showing the differences in the accommodations the stations are making for mobile and tablet devices. Again, Fox stations led the way, with virtually all of their stations using mobile alerts, mobile apps and tablet

optimization, while CBS brought up the rear with 84 percent and 82 percent of its stations having mobile and tablet apps, respectively.

Overall, however, across all of the 34 categories used, most stations utilized between 10 and 12 of those categories, with CBS utilizing the most multimedia categories per market. Part of these differences could be attributed to the content management systems used; most all of the network stations used their standard network CMS/template. So, if the CMS accommodated a certain feature, almost all of the stations had that feature.

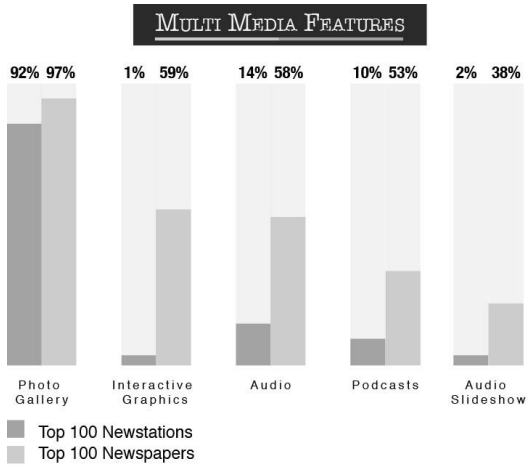
Comparison between TV Stations and Newspapers

There were huge differences between newspapers and TV stations in their use of the various features. For comparison, we are using the 2012 Top 100 circulation U.S. newspaper study conducted by the Heater team. In some categories, such as the use of original video, the differences were very slight.

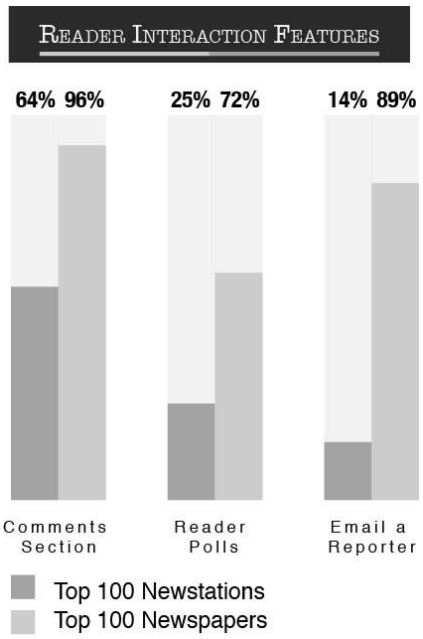


Two important things to note: these figures only compare whether or not the outlets had original video, not the amount of video. So, while the TV stations were only slightly more likely to have original video, the amount of video they had was probably much greater, which is probably part of the reason why the newspapers were supplementing their original video with Associated Press video. Second, these figures are twice as high for newspapers as they were in 2006, with the Bivings study. Essentially, the top newspapers have greatly expanded their use of video, almost reaching the saturation point like the top TV stations.

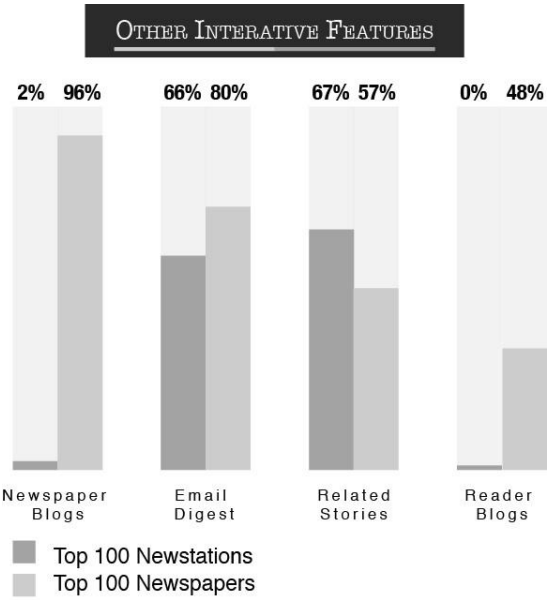
When it came to other multimedia features, though, the newspapers were much stronger. The TV stations were nearly as likely to have photo galleries, but were less likely to have audio and podcasts and much, much less likely to have interactive graphics and audio slideshows.



Interactivity also showed significant differences. While most of the TV stations had comments sections, much fewer of them had reader polls and even fewer still included links in their articles posted for the reader/viewer to contact the reporter.



Similarly, while TV stations were a bit more likely to have links to related articles, blogs from either readers/viewer or the reporters/anchors/editors on the TV side were almost nonexistent and much lower than their print counterparts.



Discussion

While TV stations in the largest markets have a strong web presence and are posting video on their websites—and offering text versions of their stories, which was not possible in the days before the web—these stations are not taking full advantage of the capabilities of the web. For the most part, they are way behind newspapers in almost all of the categories besides video. In terms of interaction with their readers/viewers, they are still following a more traditional, linear model of mass communication, from the sender to the receiver, without as much interactivity and user-generated content. Whether do to the training of their staffs or operating with fewer personnel, they are also not departing from their traditional storytelling models, not using audio, audio slideshows and interactive graphics. For now, at least, the newspapers are the media outlets that are taking the most advantage of the capabilities of the web in terms of offering new ways to tell and supplement their stories and connect with readers.

Limitations/Future Study

There were several limitations in the study. First, the scope for this project was to analyze the top twenty-five markets in the U.S. and the top 100 newspapers. Accordingly, these results cannot be generalized to the state of U.S. television in its entirety or the entire newspaper market in the U.S. Obviously the percentages of multimedia used by smaller markets would most likely be lower.

Another limitation was the examination period, as we used only a four-week window. The second pass results revealed some features that were either missed from the first pass or were added. Analyzing the results during a longer time frame may have yielded different results with regards to how TV stations and newspapers respond to technological change more than other stations featured on the list.

An ideal future study would be to analyze the smaller markets, to see the impact of station size/viewership on the multimedia and interactive features on the site. Similar studies of smaller/weekly newspaper confirmed hypotheses about how smaller staffs translated into the presence of fewer of these features; it would be interesting to see if the same were true for TV stations.

Finally, another study could be done in four or five years as a follow-up to this project. With the results from this study serving as a baseline, that research could serve to show how technological changes, viewer expectations and other factors lead to changes in the website features on newspaper and TV station websites over time.

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