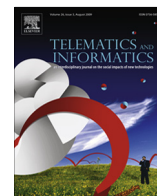




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Replacement or complement: A niche analysis of Yahoo news, television news, and electronic news [☆]

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ABSTRACT

This study adopted the theory of the niche to investigate the competitive relationship between three news media—Yahoo news, television news, and electronic newspapers. Two research methods, intensive interviews and a nationwide telephone survey, were employed to collect data for this study. The telephone survey resulted in 1002 valid telephone calls. This study found that Yahoo news did not produce its own news, but it was perceived by the respondents to be equivalent to television news and that the respondents perceived the strengths of Yahoo news and television news to be very different. Therefore, this study predicts that the two media would be able to coexist in Taiwan's news media market. Furthermore, the data from the niche analysis show that Yahoo news and television news were generalists, while electronic newspapers were specialists.

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1. Introduction

With the rapid development of new Internet technologies, the Internet has changed the way people consume news. Yahoo news is one of the emerging Internet news media, which is particularly popular with young adults in Taiwan. According to a recent survey (IKED of Shih Hsin University, 2015), 73.4% of the interviewed college students, in comparison to only 28.6% of the general public, indicated that they received news from the Internet. Interestingly, 52.6% of the college students who used online resources to obtain news relied on Yahoo, a portal site. In Taiwan, Yahoo news does not produce its own news but purchases news stories from the major news media. One advantage of Yahoo news is that it allows users to obtain unbiased news reports by accessing news stories from various news media. Most news media in Taiwan have a strong stance regarding political ideologies, and thus, a piece of news is often stated differently depending on the political ideology of the reporting news medium. Another advantage of Yahoo news is its quick updating process that allows users to obtain the most up-to-date information (Chan, 2015).

A recent survey found that approximately 59% of the general public received news from television, and therefore, television was considered the most frequently used news medium in Taiwan (IKED of Shih Hsin University, 2015). Among Taiwan's population of approximately 23 million people, news programs are extremely popular. This is evidenced by the fact that Taiwan has fifteen television news channels, comprising eight cable television channels and seven channels in MOD (Multimedia on demand), which is one type of IPTV. The penetration rates for the cable television and MOD in Taiwan were recorded at approximately 60% and 15%, respectively (NCC, 2015). The remaining 25% of Taiwanese households received

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news from the digital terrestrial television that has 20 channels including three news channels. These three news channels in terrestrial television were also included in MOD.

Another type of online news frequently used by the Taiwanese is electronic newspapers. The first electronic newspaper was established in 1995 by China Times, one of the major newspapers in Taiwan. However, this electronic newspaper did not make profits until 1998, after which all newspapers in Taiwan established their electronic versions on the Internet (Li and Lee, 2010). Before Taiwan's cable television was legalized in 1993, there was limited time allocated for television news. However, the legalization of cable television has brought about several 24-h cable news channels that have started to compete strongly with newspapers. With its appealing visual/audio presentation forms, cable television news has taken away a large portion of the audience from newspapers, which is apparent from the decreasing number of advertisements in the newspapers. Most newspapers in Taiwan have started to consider the establishment of electronic newspapers as a strategy that would give them a competitive edge on the Internet and permit various forms of news story presentation. As a consequence, all major newspapers in Taiwan have established electronic newspapers (Li and Lee, 2010).

According to the theory of the niche, the consumer's time and money are limited, and thus, when a new medium with better functions becomes available, it attracts the consumer to spend more time and money on it, leaving fewer resources for the older medium. The theory of the niche has originated from population ecology and can explain the coexistence of the new and old media in an environment with limited resources. The theory of the niche defines competition as the overlap of resources used by two populations, and hence, when the degree of this overlap becomes high, the two populations experience fierce competition (Dimmick, 2003; Gaskins and Jerit, 2012). Dimmick (2003, pp. 29–33) classifies the resources used in the media industry into six dimensions, among which gratifications obtained and gratification opportunities are the most critical resources because they automatically lead to consumer spending, consumer time, and advertising spending. Few studies investigated the sixth dimension, namely, media content because it is not a limited resource, which is not consistent with the core notion of niche theory.

Yahoo news is not a professional news medium, but this study included it in comparison with electronic newspapers and television news because of the following reasons: (1) Yahoo news does not produce its own news, but it has a powerful team of editing that integrates news efficiently to help users grasp important issues around them; thus, Yahoo news has become a major news channel for college students, one recent study indicating that approximately 40% of college students relied on Yahoo for news (IKED of Shih Hsin University, 2015); and (2) Yahoo has been ranked as having the highest rate of reach among all websites in Taiwan, which allows it to gain more advertising revenues than Taiwan's electronic newspapers (Chan, 2015). Television news, electronic newspapers, and Yahoo news all rely on advertising revenues for operations. According to Dimmick's niche theory (2003), when the resources used by populations are overlapped, these populations are in competition with one another.

Using the theory of the niche as the theoretical framework, this study focuses on the gratifications obtained and the gratification opportunities of television news, electronic news, and Yahoo news to investigate the competitive relationships between these three news media.

2. Literature review

2.1. Niche theory, niche breadth, niche overlap, and competitive superiority

A niche is defined as the resource utilization patterns of a population. According to organizational ecologists, the survival of an organization is more dependent on how well suited this organization is to its environment rather than on the organization's internal operation. The theory of the niche is designed to explain fitness between a population that is defined as a group of organizations with similar characteristics and its environment. According to this definition, television news is a population as is electronic news. Based on the theory of the niche, a niche might have more than one dimension because a given population often consumes several types of resources (Dimmick, 2003, pp. 23–42; Gaskins and Jerit, 2012; Min and Kim, 2012).

The niche theory has three key concepts including niche breadth, niche overlap, and competitive superiority. Niche breadth measures the area of a niche and contains both the quantity and the magnitude of resources used by a population. Populations that have a narrow niche are called specialists. Specialists tend to use their resources efficiently, but they are unable to make adjustments when the environments change significantly. By contrast, generalists, which consume many types of resources, are not particularly efficient resource users. Nonetheless, they have an ability to adjust themselves quickly to new environments when significant changes occur (Dimmick, 2003; Dimmick et al., 2010, 2011). Niche overlap is the degree to which one population uses the same resources in comparison to another population, and competitive superiority assesses the extent to which one population is superior to another population in terms of their resource-utilization capability. According to the theory of the niche, the data from the niche overlap and competitive superiority allow researchers to predict replacement behaviors. More specifically, a superior population will replace an inferior population when the niche overlap between the two populations is high. If the replacement is complete, competitive exclusion takes place. The phenomenon of competitive exclusion in the media industry is relatively rare. A more frequently occurring situation is competitive displacement that results in a part of the niche space being taken by a superior population (Dimmick, 2003; Dimmick et al., 2010, 2011).

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