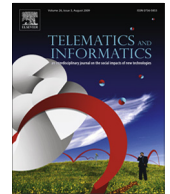




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News consumption in a changing media ecology: An MESM-study on mobile news



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ABSTRACT

News consumption across all sorts of media has been researched by communication scholars for decades; analyzing its effects, and describing shifts in news consumption behavior – mostly regarding changes in the media ecology. These days, we are witnessing another major change in the media ecology: the rise of mobile (online) media. The fast and wide-spread diffusion of smartphones, tablets, and the likes is influencing news media consumption—being able to bring news consumption into ‘niches in time and space’. In this paper, we will concentrate on the interplay of those niches, i.e., usage situations and the actual news consumption, therefore analyzing the influence of situational characteristics on communication device choice for news consumption.

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1. A changing media ecology: from nomadic to mobile media

News consumption across all sorts of media has been researched by communication scholars for decades; analyzing its effects and describing shifts in news consumption behavior—mostly regarding changes in the media ecology. In particular, the rise of online news sources in the media ecology and its effects on civic participation and engagement has attracted a lot of research over the past decade (e.g., [Ksiazek et al., 2010](#); [Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012](#)). These days, we are witnessing another major change in the media ecology: the rise of mobile (online) media. This fast and widespread diffusion of smartphones, tablets, and the likes are influencing news media consumption ([Westlund, 2008, 2010](#); [van Damme et al., 2015](#))—being able to bring news consumption into ‘niches in time and space’ ([Dimmick et al., 2011, p. 23](#)). In this paper, we will concentrate on the interplay of those niches, i.e., usage situations and the actual news consumption; therefore analyzing the influence of situational characteristics on communication device choice for news consumption.

With the exception of a few specific devices (e.g., newspapers, transistor radios), media used to be tied to specific locational settings, sometimes referred to as ‘mediatopes’ ([Quandt and von Pape, 2010](#)). This was especially true, when concentrating on digital media requiring online access. In the era of desktop computers, variation in usage situations was little, with usage normally being restricted to either at home or at the work place ([Hargittai and Hinnant, 2008](#)). Notebooks and netbooks along with wireless local area networks then extended use to any place within reach of a wireless network, e.g., one could comfortably use these devices at cafés, public parks, etc., where wireless networks are provided ([Hampton et al., 2010](#)). Usage had become ‘nomadic’, meaning that devices could be moved between, but not during usage situations ([Feldmann, 2005](#)). However, these extensions were limited, given the possibilities opened up by 3G networks and

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smartphones (Hess, 2007; Westlund, 2008): Usage has become truly mobile; filling the gaps between what had been islands of internet connectivity around Wi-Fi-hotspots. Places without access are becoming the ever-diminishing exception.

2. Determinants of communication platform choice in news consumption

This development led to today's multi-optional media ecology, providing users in many situations with various means of media access. For example, when being at home, users could read a newspaper, turn on the television set to watch the news, go to their computers to check a news website, turn on the radio, or check a news application on their smartphones. Our aim is to shed further light on this process of communication device choice when consuming news. We consider this process to be an interplay of three key elements potentially influencing device choice: (1) the communication device per se, (2) the user, and (3) the situational context.

2.1. Communication device

Different communication devices are different types of technologies. Based on previous research we do know that users' long-termed attitudes towards (new) technologies and/or devices influence their decisions to actually use them. An approach often used to analyze the influence of these attitudes on technology use is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989). The model is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985). It states that behavior occurs after the intention to perform this specific behavior was formed. Intention, in turn, is derived from one's attitudes plus social norms. TAM focuses on the perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) of a technology to affect attitudes towards using a technology. The influence of those dimensions has been identified for the adoption of mobile data services (Hong et al., 2008; Verkasalo et al., 2010), various mobile multimedia services (Pagani, 2004; Pihlström and Brush, 2008), mobile broadcasting (Kim et al., 2008), mobile multitasking (Liu and Li, 2011), and even mobile news (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013). We can thus hypothesize that characteristics of the communication device, i.e. perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, will influence communication device choice for consuming news.

2.2. Users

Second, users' perceived uses and gratifications of certain behaviors are known to have a strong impact on users' behaviors, a fact well researched for a multitude of media behaviors (e.g. Katz et al., 1974; Palmgreen and Rayburn, 1985; more recently regarding mobile phones Leung and Wei, 2000). Those media behaviors often form a bundle of content and device e.g. mobile news for which Chan (2015) found pass time and information to be most influential. In this study, we're trying to tear apart this bundle of content and device, thus only asking about the influence user motivations do have on communication device choice for consuming news.

2.3. Situational context

In addition to these two factors, early studies on news diffusion had shown that the locational and social context of usage is heavily influencing communication device choice (Greenberg, 1964; Hill and Bonjean, 1964), a fact mostly neglected in the following decades. Only recently scholars started to refocus on the spaces and situational context of news consumption as a relevant determinant in news use (Schröder and Steeg Larsen, 2010; Peters, 2012; Westlund, 2015). We want to expand on this work by integrating knowledge mostly from information systems into the analysis of news consumption. Literature in information systems has discussed the impact of situational context on the usage of various new media technologies for more than a decade—mostly labeled as context factors (e.g., Bouwman et al., 2012; Mallat et al., 2009; Perry et al., 2001; Turner et al., 2008; van de Wijngaert and Bouwman, 2009). In order to shed further light into the situational context of usage of new media technologies Lee et al. (2005), as well as Vartiainen (2006) split situational contexts into physical and social (human) factors, i.e. both the physical and the social environment of a given usage situation. Especially regarding new and mobile media, we do know that social surroundings do have an impact on media use in so far as individuals can exploit this highly observable media use to enhance their social status (e.g. Wirth et al., 2008).

3. An integrative framework

In order to integrate these three factors, we draw on Zhang and Zhang's (2012) situational model integrating personal psychologies (i.e. uses and gratifications), and location-related conditions (i.e. situational context) (see Fig. 1).

Personal psychologies are conceptualized, similar to gratifications sought, from the Uses-and-Gratifications-Approach. Regarding the location-related conditions, they differentiate the dimensions physical environments, media access, and social dynamics with respect to multitasking with mobile phones (regarding mobile web usage see also Karnowski and Jandura, 2014).

Physical environments comprise of the user's familiarity with his or her surroundings, i.e., whether he or she is at home or in public, and whether he or she is familiar with the environment. Media access is the second dimension of location-related

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