folklor/edebiyat, cilt:17, sayı:66, 2011/2

AN ANALYSIS OF INTERACTIVITY POSSIBILITIES IN ONLINE JOURNALISM

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INTRODUCTION

With the developments in science and technology, the digital age that we have been going through has changed the use of means of mass communication like all other aspects of our lives. Newspapers as one of the means of mass communication have started to perform their function of reporting news online in addition to their traditional way of reporting. News "is the re-construction of the reality to develop and transform the knowledge and interest of society in accordance with the structure, technology and ideology of the media organization which is going to publicize it." (Rigel:2000). This paper also notes that news publication is called by different names vis-à-vis online, virtual, digital, electronic journalism, and web or Internet journalism in other studies.

Since the start of the proliferation of the Internet, the number of newspapers reporting news digitally has been increasing regularly. Digital journalism has considerably become another means of mass communication in addition to traditional print journalism. In view of the economics of publishing, online journalism has become more important as only 40 percent of the total expense of many national newspapers is now reserved for collecting, writing and constructing news. The remaining 60 percent that has usually been spent on printing, marketing and distribution has been abolished with online journalism.

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1. ONLINE JOURNALISM

1.1.Development of Online Journalism in the World and Turkey

Electronic communication started with messages sent by newsgroups to their subscribers' e-mails, this together with the development of various hardware and software applications on the Internet is what has given birth to online journalism.

The first production of virtual newspapers started in the USA. In 1995, the eight big newspapers in the USA (among which there are publication organizations like The Washington Post, Times, Mirror, USA Today, and the Tribune) started the virtual period in journalism at an institutional level through enabling immediate online transmittance of the newspaper pages ready to be printed into the computers of their readers. In the subsequent stage of this development, the newspapers in other countries (such as Der Spiegel in Germany and China Business Journal) also started to publish their virtual editions on the Internet. (Kırçıl, Karagüler: 2003)

1994 may be accepted as the starting date of Internet publications in Turkey. Nevertheless since the language used that year and in the subsequent two years was predominantly English, the possibilities offered by the Internet were only accessible to proficient readers in English. However, It can be seen that traditional newspapers and magazines started preparations for online publishing since the middle of 1995 because of the increasing recognition of the Turkish language on Internet.

In Turkey, Aktüel magazine took the first step into online publishing in July 1995 through benefiting from internet opportunities. It was immediately followed by Leman magazine in October 1995. Although, among the newspapers in Turkey, Zaman newspaper, was credited with starting the first online publishing on December 2, 1995; it was Xn, which actually initiated proper news reporting on the Internet in January 1996, as it was able to update news regularly. Unfortunately, Xn did not last long as it ended its publishing activity abruptly (Gürcan: 1999). In 1997, the daily newspapers with high circulation rate (Hürriyet, Milliyet, Sabah etc.) also started to reach the virtual readers on the web (Kırçıl, Karagüler: 2003).

The chronological order for online journalism can be considered within three periods: The first period is characterized by publication of the news contents produced for traditional print journalism by newspapers on their web sites. In the second period, news is offered online in a categorized and interactive manner on the Internet depending on the developments and opportunities provided by web technologies. In the third period, the content of the news is subjected to a new process and produced purely as web content. These periods reflect development of online journalism in North America and Europe between 1995 and 1998 with Turkey not far behind in its own online journalism by approximately one year later.

1.2 Grouping Online Journalism

The applications of online journalism are divided into four groups by Deuze

(Deuze: 2003), which are mainstream news web sites, index and category web sites, meta and comment web sites, and finally share and discussion web sites. As the most widespread application, mainstream news sites present editor-controlled news on the basis of the model offered above, enabling readers to involve in filtered communication. The newspapers publishing their pages on the web are included in this group. While CNN, BBC, MSNBC are representative of this group on the world scale, NTVMSNBC, Hürriyet and Milliyet can be taken as national examples.

Index and category group generally consists of search engines (Yahoo, Alta Vista, Google etc.) associated with marketing and research companies. Although, index and category sites are not news sites in themselves as they share with the public several addresses and links providing them with some clue information; nonetheless their knowledge based web sites where people can share their experiences are regarded as a type of online journalism.

The third category Meta and comment sites are mostly informative about the media world and reporters, which include Meta and comments. These can also be seen as newspapers on other newspapers. Freedom Forum, Poynter's Medianews abroad and Dördüncükuvvetmedya, Medyatava in Turkey are representative of this group of web sites.

The fourth group of share and discussion are sites where online journalism can be perceived most clearly. While editorial control is reduced to minimum, employment of technological means is maximized. Such sites may have a local reaching while they may also serve as environments where ideas and comments can be exchanged on a global level. In this sense, online journalism offers freedom of news reporting by virtue of its user platform, which the traditional media is unable to provide.

1.3 The Characteristics of Online Journalism

Online journalism has some major characteristics, which distinguish it as a new branch of media. According to Deuze, online journalism has four major characteristics: New news sites have become more attentive under the effect of online journalism. Correspondents and editors are enabled to expand their visions through employing different media technologies in their content production and by virtue of measurement of reader feedbacks.

Opportunities offered by web such as interactivity, multimedia and hypertext render news sites and online journalism more privileged than other news resources.

Modeling of characteristics of online journalism enables news sites to make analyses on specific topics.

In online journalism, (visual, audio and written-graphical) contents are re-presented from an integral media perspective.

The journalists active in online journalism must be informed about and capable of

major internet instruments such as multimedia, interactivity and hypertext as different from traditional journalists. An online journalist is required to decide which media is best to publicize news and take the options necessary for reader feedback into account. He may be even expected to render some news interactive and above all to maintain connection of news with others, archive of news or provide information about their resources through hyperlinks within the hypertext.

Hyperlink is the mechanism which enables to maintain connections of documents among each other. In fact an important point of connection is found in almost all texts from the point of view online journalism. While hyperlinks may include the addresses of internal texts; that is, the news can be offered with more details referring to internal resources or can be directed to other news inside, it can also be directed to the addresses of completely independent, external texts with new contents.

Carrie Heeter identified six dimensions of interactivity: complexity of choice available, effort users must exert, responsiveness to the user, monitoring information use, ease of adding information and facilitation of interpersonal communication. (Heeter:1989)

Complexity of choice available

Designers of online newspapers realize that the more hyperlinks they add, the more choice users have to navigate through the newspaper site, and that these choices are important to interactivity.

Effort users must exert

Interactivity is mathematically the ratio of user activity to system activity. At one extreme, users exert no effort beyond reading the text information which an online newspaper automatically "pushes" to them based upon information the users provided about themselves. At the other extreme, users select each "page" or screen to view, sending a message to the central computer asking to display the requested page.

Responsiveness to the user

Online newspapers can interpose a human who responds to user queries or they can use technology to respond. Usually, reporters or editors simply answer e-mail questions from users of their online site. Computer response, however, is possible, and ultimate machine interactivity is achieved when communication roles of human and machine are interchangeable.

Facilitation of interpersonal communication

E-mail addresses can make communication easy between users and workers at online newspapers. Discussion forums and live chat areas attract and keep readers at a

Web site. In addition, a site may offer synchronous communication with data transfers occurring at fractions of a second, or at the other extreme, a mandatory time delay may be imposed, perhaps to allow editors to screen messages.

Ease of adding information

In this case, the user becomes the reporter-editor, and the message intentionally is transmitted to a larger audience. If online Web sites make it easy for users to add information, then they empower users. Some online newspapers allow users to add the following types of information: Web pages, hobby and special interest pages, announcements of births, marriages and deaths and reviews of movies, plays and other cultural and entertainment events.

Monitor system use

Unlike the other dimensions, this one derives from the perspective of the online newspaper. A monitoring device is defined as any explicit means by which a Web site operator can record who has visited the site and/or which part of the site they visited. This information also is a valuable measure of how the site has attracted and maintained user's attention.

Categories of Interactive Features

Factor 1: Human/Medium Interactive Features

''Submit stories'' function
''Submit photos'' function
''Submit news tip'' function
Reporter/editor e-mail links
Letters-to-editor

Factor 2: Medium/Human Interactive Features

Customized weather
Customized topics
Customized headlines
Search feature
}E-mail updates/alerts

Factor 3: Human Interactive Features

Message boards
Chat functions
Q&A (live chats)

Factor 4: Medium Interactive Features

Audio files
Video files
Eigenvalues (özdeğer)

Variance Explained (Varyans Açıklaması)
Reliability (Cronbach a)
Mean (S.D.)
(Chung: 2008)

CONCLUSION

Interactivity in online (cyber) journalism is a very important instrument that provides the opportunity to create a first impression that will positively contribute to newspaper's brand perceptions, to inform, to attract the target audience, to create a community, to reward the community, to make them feel special, to ensure continuous and bidirectional communication with readers and to enlarge the audience. The more intense the interactivity, the more the reader can feel himself/herself inside the reporting process. This is the essential feature that distincts online (cyber) journalism from the conventional media.

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ONLINE GAZETECILIKTE INTERAKTIVITE OLANAKLARININ İNCELENMESI

Özet

Habercilik ve yayıncılık hiç durmadan değişen bir mecra yapısına sahiptir. Dünyadaki sürekli değişimde de, habercilik sektörünün çok önemli bir rolü olmasına ek olarak; teknoloji ve değişen yaşam koşullarından en çok etkilenen sektör de, habercilik sektörüdür.

Bu bağlamda, gazetecilikte de, yaşam tarzlarındaki değişimle birlikte, online gazetelerin kullanımı vazgeçilmez bir hale gelmiştir. Gazete okuma eylemi sıradan okuyucu ve kağıt etkileşiminin dışına çıkmış, okuyucunun da yorum yapabildiği, kendini ifade edebildiği, etrafındaki insanlarla haberler üzerinde tartışabildiği interaktif bir hale gelmiştir. Bir başka değişle, online gazetecilikte, interaktivite olanakları, okuyucunun gazeteye olan ilgisini arttırmakta ve haber okuma dışında da, o sayfada vakit geçirmesini sağlamaktadır.

Interaktivitenin en önemli özelliği, mesajların birbirleriyle ilişkili ve kullanıcının katılımına/müdahalesine imkân tanıyacak şekilde yapılandırılmasıdır. Interaktif iletişim, gazetecilikte de, okuyucunun dikkatini çekmek ve ihtiyaç duyduğu bilgiyi etkili bir formda vermek için kullanılmaktadır. Interaktivite araçlarından bir kısmı; anket, forum ve chat olanaklarıdır. Online gazetecilikte teknolojinin gelişmesiyle birlikte, interaktivite artmakta ve "aktif tüketici" modellerine uygun biçimde, "kontrol", okuyucuya verilmektedir. Interaktivite, okuyucuyla iki yönlü iletişim kurulmasını sağlayarak, mesajın doğru yerde verilmesini sağlamaktadır.

Online gazetecilikte interaktivite; gazetelerin marka algısına olumlu katkı sağlayacak görsel bir ilk izlenim yaratmayı, bilgi vermeyi, hedef kitleyi çekmeyi, topluluk yaratmayı, topluluğu ödüllendirmeyi ve onlara kendilerini özel hissetmelerini sağlamayı, okuyucuyla sürekli ve çift taraflı iletişimde olmayı ve okuyucu kitlesini genişletmeyi sağlayan çok önemli bir araçtır. Interaktivite yoğunluğu ne kadar yüksek olursa, okuyucu da kendisini o kadar haber sürecine dahil hissedebilmektedir. Bu da, online gazeteciliği geleneksel medyadan farklı kılan temel unsurdur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: (siber) çevrimiçi habercilik, interaktivite (etkileşim), gazete web sitesi tasarımı.

AN ANALYSIS OF INTERACTIVITY POSSIBILITIES IN ONLINE JOURNALISM

Abtract

The study in investigating the interactivity possibilities in cyber journalism in Turkey examines web sites of national newspapers comparatively to the web sites of newspapers from different countries thereby utilising the methodology of comparative analysis in its research of the interactivity possibilities in online journalism.

The most important character of interactivity is that messages are formatted in relation to each other and in a way enabling the participation and or intervention of the user. Interactive

communication is used in journalism to attract the reader's attention and provide her/him with the information s/he needs in an effective manner.

Some interactivity instruments are questionnaire, forum and chat facilities. With the advance of technology, interactivity in online (cyber) journalism and the "control" are both found to have increased and conveyed to the reader correspondingly to the "active consumer" models. Interactivity ensures the message is delivered at the right place by establishing a bi-directional communication with the reader.

Reporting and broadcasting have a channel structure that changes constantly. Besides the fact that the reporting sector has a crucial role in the constant changes in the world, it is the sector that is influenced most by technology and changing living conditions. In this context, the use of online newspapers has become inevitable in journalism as a result of the changes in lifestyles. The act of reading the newspaper has gone beyond the ordinary interaction between the reader and the paper, and has become interactive where the reader is able to comment, to express himself/herself, and to discuss about the news with people around him or her. In other words, the interactivity possibilities in online (cyber) journalism increase the interest of the reader in the newspaper and enable him/her to spend time on that page besides reading the news.

Keywords: cyber (online) journalism, interactivity, newspaper website design.