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Immediacy Gratification in Online News Consumption and Its Relations to Surveillance, Orientation and Elaboration of News

Bahiyah Omar[a]*

[a]*School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM, Penang, Malaysia*

Abstract

Increasing numbers of people read newspapers online. This study uses argument about reform proposed in the theory of remediation to explain the shift from traditional print to online news sources. The argument pivots around the idea that the new media improves upon the inadequacies of older media. The improvement is manifested in the striving for "immediacy" which remediation theory considers the "goal" of media. Blending the theory of remediation and the uses and gratifications approach, this study proposes the concept of "immediacy gratifications" – a process gratification obtained in news media use. The current study uses experimental research method to test the concept of immediacy gratifications in online news consumption. The study finds that online medium has no effect on immediacy gratification and that surveillance gratification seeking and orientation in the information space do have significant effects.

Keywords: Online news; remediation; uses and gratification; immediacy

1. Introduction

Online news source has become the mainstream news medium (Nguyen, 2003). Notable attractions stem from the (mostly) free access to online news sources, the accessibility of breaking news anytime during the day, the unlimited media choice in the form of text, audio and videos (Stovall, 2004), and the ability to locate information

* Corresponding author. Tel.:+-604-6535094; Fax: +-604-6577736
 E-mail address: bahiyah@usm.my

faster than is possible using offline media (Online Publishers Association, 2004; Oostendrop & Nimwegen, 1998). In addition, online news stories can be "hyperlinked" to additional and in-depth information. Pavlik (1997) argues that such use of "hypertext" creates a more "contextualized" condition – one that includes news and information with a richer historical and cultural background.

The attractions of new media as news medium suggest media reform. The present study explores the idea of media reform advocated in the theory of remediation to explain the shift towards online news consumption. The theory of remediation suggests that new media reform older media. Analyzing the existing media today, Bolter and Grusin (2005, p. 57) claim that virtual reality improves upon film by providing a more immersive experience of participation in a virtual world, electronic mail allows faster delivery than physical mail, hypertext offers interactivity not available through plain text, and digital audio and video bring better quality – or more accessible – sounds and images than their analog equivalents. The current study, therefore, suggests the reform of print newspapers in online versions. As the reform is primarily related to an improved immediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), the current study measures the reform in the form of immediacy gratification.

2. Testing immediacy gratification

Three indicators for the concept of immediacy were be deduced from the theory of remediation: the experiencing of the real, a more exciting and lively experience, and an improved experience of media use (or the reform). These indicators refer to the process of experiencing through media use. This study hence establishes immediacy as a kind of process gratification. Stafford and Stafford (2004, p. 267) claim that "people use media either for the content carried by a medium (e.g., information or entertainment), or for the simple experience of the media usage process (e.g., playing with the technology, browsing)". The first suggests "content gratifications" and the latter suggests "process gratifications". While content gratification concerns the messages carried by a medium, process gratification concerns actual use of the medium itself (Nguyen, 2010). The current study combines the uses and gratification tradition and remediation's concept of immediacy to understand some facets of online news consumption. This approach brings about the measurement of surveillance gratification seeking as "content gratification", while the measurement of immediacy gratification as "process gratification". As the idea of media reform found in remediation theory is primarily related to an improved immediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), the current study measures the reform brought about by new media in the form of immediacy gratifications. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H_1: The use of online newspaper will significantly predict immediacy gratifications

In news research, most media scholars agree that the role of informing the public, that is the surveillance function, is considered central. More often, studies find the most common motivation for news is in fact surveillance gratification seeking (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004; Eveland, 1997). Surveillance gratification seeking should, therefore, have positive relationship with immediacy gratification.

H_2: Surveillance gratification seeking will significantly predict immediacy gratification

An important aspect in the process of online news consumption is "orientation in the information space". This is because navigation through Web sites requires high degrees of user control – users have control of the pace, order, and content of instruction**.** Eveland and Dunwoody conceptualize orientation as "attempts to understand the content and structure of the information space" (2000, p. 229). They argue that orientation is prevalent in the use of hypermedia systems. Eveland and Dunwoody (2000) consider orientation as a combination of navigational tasks and task management. The tasks are useful for learning both the content and the structure of information. A close examination of how orientation was measured in these studies indicates that the measurement of disorientation was used as a benchmark against which to examine orientation. If disorientation is labeled as the experience of "getting lost" (Dillon, 1996; Lee, 2005) in information space, orientation is experienced when users find their way in information space. Correspondingly, orientation should ease cognitive load – cognitive disorientation – by fostering coherent understanding of the content. Thus, the present study, therefore, hypothesizes that orientation is positively related to immediacy gratification and news elaboration

H_{3a}: Orientation in the information space will significantly predict immediacy gratification

H_{3b}: Orientation in the information space will significantly predict news elaboration

There is a large body of literature that examines the role of elaboration in memory and learning. Research examining the phenomenon of elaboration generally defines it as the process of connecting and associating new information to other information – such as prior knowledge and personal experiences – stored in memory (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002), or simply the connection between two or more existing bits of information (Hamilton, 1997). Eveland and Dunwoody (2000, p. 225) discuss two processes of elaboration: connecting new information into an existing schema, and creating greater interconnectedness within a schema. These processes are integral to the construction of knowledge. As more connections are made, the new information should be held more strongly in memory. Expertise in a subject grows in this way. Elaboration is considered as more valuable for meaningful learning (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2000; Tremayne & Dunwoody, 2001) than other types of information processing such as rehearsal, maintenance, or orientation. The current study further examines the relationship between immediacy gratification and news elaboration. This is because online newspapers bring improvements to traditional newspapers, particularly in terms of presentation and use. In this study, the improvements are measured in term of immediacy gratification. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that such improvement should have positive relationship with news elaboration.

H_{4}: Immediacy gratification will significantly predict news elaboration

3. Method

The current study uses a "between-subject" experimental design. The study exposed participants to two conditions; an exposure to print and an exposure to online newspapers. The experiment was conducted between 1pm and 2 pm on 11th September 2012 at one of the public universities in Malaysia – using volunteers recruited from the student population. Participants consisted of 48 undergraduate students from one of the public universities in Malaysia.

3.1. Design and procedures

The experimental procedures began when students voluntarily signed up for the study. They were then randomly assigned to one of the two conditions: online and print. On the day of the experiment, those assigned to the print group were directed to a classroom to read the traditional print version of *Berita Harian* for 30 minutes. Those assigned to the online group were directed to a computer laboratory to read *Berita Harian* online from its website for 30 minutes. There was no direction given on news selection. Participants were free to read the newspaper as they normally do in natural settings. Then a questionnaire was administered to the two groups.

The design of this study followed Tewksbury and Althaus (2000) study except for the duration of the experiment. Tewksbury and Althaus (2000) conducted the experiment over a week period of time to examine the process and effects of news consumption in a cumulative fashion. This study, however, conducted the experiment for one day akin to a study by Eveland, Marton, and Seo (2004). The difference in design between this study and Eveland and colleagues' study is that they examined "linked" online newspapers and "unlinked" online newspapers, instead of the paper and online version of a newspaper. A combination of the two studies (Eveland et al., 2004; Tewksbury & Althaus, 2000) was used for designing the current study.

4. Results

The testing of hypotheses in this study involved hierarchical regression analysis. This analysis is used because the current study involves a focus on certain independent variables (IVs) with less interest in the effects of other variables such as demographic characteristics. Selected independents variables were ordered according to research relevance based on the literature used to establish the hypotheses of the study. The results for hypothesis testing were presented in Table 1.

Table I. Hierarchical regression analysis of predictors of immediacy gratification.

Predictor variables	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3
Medium (online)	.037	.005	.042
General exposure to news media	.213	.052	.042
Surveillance gratification seeking		.488**	.421**
Orientation in the information space			.265*
R^2	.050	.259	.323
Adjusted R^2	.007	.207	.260
R^2 Change	.052	.207	.068
Sig of change	.311	.001	.045

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Hypothesis 1 posited that the use of online medium will significantly predict immediacy gratification. Table 1 shows that online medium has no significant effect on immediacy gratifications. In all three regression models tested, online medium consistently shows non-significant results. Thus, hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Hypothesis 2 held that surveillance gratification seeking will significantly predict immediacy gratification. The results suggest surveillance gratification seeking positively and significantly predicts immediacy gratification (*Beta* = .488, $p < .001$), causing R^2 change of 20.7%. This shows that surveillance gratification seeking has significant contribution (21% of variance) in explaining immediacy gratification. Thus, hypothesis 2 is well supported.

When orientation is added to the model (regression 3), the R^2 change is only 6.7% (after controlling for medium, general exposure to news media and surveillance gratification seeking). The contribution is considered small but significant. Table 1 shows that orientation in the information space positively and significantly predicts immediacy gratification (*Beta* = .421, $p < .01$). Hence, hypothesis 3a is also supported. The results for remaining hypotheses – H3$_b$ and H4 – were presented in Table 2.

Table II. Hierarchical regression analysis of predictors of news elaboration.

Predictor variables	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3
Medium (online)	-.093	-.145	-.145
General exposure to news media	.217	.044	.044
Orientation in the information space	.239	.116	.115
Surveillance gratification seeking		.574***	.572***
Immediacy gratification			.004
R^2	.125	.398	.398
Adjusted R^2	.064	.340	.324
R^2 Change	.125	.273	.000
Sig of change	.122	.000	.981

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 2 shows that orientation has no significant effect on news elaboration. Thus, hypothesis 3$_b$ was not supported. The last hypothesis tests whether immediacy gratification could predict news elaboration – the actual learning process. Table 2 suggests non-significant result. There was no support for hypothesis 4. Instead, the current study found that surveillance gratification seeking is a strong predictor to news elaboration.

5. Discussions

The study examines immediacy gratification, a new concept derived from the theory of remediation which denotes process gratification obtained in news media use. The expectation was that online news medium would predict immediacy gratification. The formation of the hypothesis was based on the concept of immediacy proposed by Bolter and Grusin (1999) who claim that new media reform the older media. The present study, however, found no support for this claim.

A possible explanation for the lack of support for hypothesis 1 is that the experience of media use might have "different meanings for different people". The basic definition of immediacy was a sense of presence, an

experiencing of the real. In the case of newspapers, the "real" experience of reading newspaper could be associated with traditional and ritual ways of acquiring the paper-based newspapers. This could explain why many newspapers today – including the material used in this study i.e. *Berita Harian* newspaper – provide a section for subscription to the print edition (or virtual newspaper) which could be read on the website. The technology of virtual newspaper aims to bring the experience of reading newspapers alive – allowing users to flip through pages as if they are reading the news from print copies.

Based on Bolter and Grusin's (1999) description of immediacy – which was then applied to the use of non-immersive media, the measurement of immediacy in this study examined whether online medium could predict gratification or satisfaction in the news reading process. The lack of support for the effect of online medium on immediacy gratification can also be explained in the context of traditional print newspapers as an established medium in media industry. Print newspapers have been widely used for centuries. Hence, it was not surprising to find that online medium is not a predictor of immediacy gratification. This is because people might feel reading from paper is more gratifying than reading from the screen.

The issue of gratifications relates profoundly to the second hypothesis which posits that surveillance gratification seeking significantly predicts immediacy gratification. Eveland (2001) describes surveillance gratification seeking as the goal that drives people to consume news. Meanwhile, Bolter and Grusin (1999) describe immediacy as the goal of new media. The results of hierarchical regression analysis provide some evidence that the goal of news consumption – i.e. surveillance gratification seeking – significantly predicts the goal of media use – i.e. immediacy gratification. The significant result also demonstrates the viability of introducing surveillance gratification seeking as a form of content gratification sought and immediacy gratification as a process gratification obtained. This study provides some evidence of successful combination of two theoretical perspectives; remediation and uses and gratifications.

Orientation in the information space was found to be a significant predictor to immediacy gratification. Orientation measures the extent to which users feel "oriented" when using the medium during the structured exposure of the experiment. The support suggests that the feeling of "oriented" in the information space has a significant effect on the feeling of satisfaction or gratifications in the process of using the news media. As users become highly oriented in using the medium, they experience greater satisfaction in using it. The effect of orientation in the information space on immediacy gratification was supported in the current study.

Previous studies (e.g., Eveland & Dunwoody, 20002002; Tremayne & Dunwoody, 2001) claim that elaboration is a central component of the process of learning. They consider the role of elaboration more important than other types of information processing. Substantial evidence in experimental research (e.g., King, 1992; Willoughby, Wood, McDermott, & McLaren, 2000) and survey research (e.g., Eveland et al., 2004; Miller, Always, & McKinley, 1987) has demonstrated that elaboration facilitates learning. This study hypothesizes that immediacy gratification predict news elaboration. The hypothesis, however, was not support. Non-significant result implies that immediacy gratification has no effect on the extent that readers elaborate the news they read. This further suggests that immediacy gratification may not contribute to the process of learning from news.

Acknowledgements

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