

Applying a Multi-gated News Model to a Social Web

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Abstract: Traditional Newspapers have been struggling to find a new business model to economically survive in this new wave of digital social revolution. This study uses ontology of a multi-gated model to suggest that program designers use different kinds of most popular news cues to satisfy diverse citizens' needs. Different concepts of citizens are discussed theoretically in exploring how a social semantic perspective based on various meanings of news cues might help news users to participate or disseminate news stories by social media.

Key Words: news cues, most popular news, gatekeeping, news attention

1 Introduction

The trend of online news use is changing fast. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, people's relationship to news is now becoming portable, personalized, and participatory [1]. In terms of being portable, 33% of cell phone owners now access news on their cell phones. From the personalized perspective, 28% of Internet users have customized their home page to include news from sources and on topics that particularly interest them. As to the concept of a participatory Web: 37% of Internet users have contributed to the creation of news, commented about it, or disseminated it via postings on social media sites like Facebook or Twitter. More than 8 in 10 online news consumers get or share links in e-mails. Therefore, online users consume news aiming not only to convenient news use but also social participation.

Nowadays, mainstream news media or portal news sites offer different most popular news lists to users for news selection. However, we rarely see mainstream news sites offer these different kinds of most popular news lists as applications to social or mobile media (See Table 1). It seems that managers of a news site don't consider their most popular news cues as an ideal tool that can be applied to a social and participatory Web. News use is becoming a shared social experience as people swap links in e-mails, post news on their social networking site feeds, exchange news stories in their Tweets, or discuss threads for hot topics or events as the Pew Internet and American Life Project suggests. This paper theoretically discusses why designing different kinds of most popular news lists as applications for social media has important potential for online users' various sharing purposes.

Table 1. An example of a list of most popular news, collected by Yahoo! News. (A similar list rarely presented as a live feed in social media such as Facebook.)



2 News Attention and Multi-gated News

Exploring how different designs of news cues may affect online news consumption, scholars have proved online news users use different news cues to select news. Different designs of media salience cues [2,3,4,5,6,7,8] influence the roles of media as gatekeepers and agenda-setters. Study also shows that different kinds of most popular news, selected by people, contain different social meanings [9]. Applying a multi-gated model, the author explores meanings of various gated news by defining citizens who have different patterns of news selection. This research provides a theoretical argument to discuss the possibility that different kinds of most popular news cues are potentially personal or social tools for users' news attention[10].

Scholars commonly use technology, market, and democratic theories to explain the process of news gatekeeping for new media. Bennett uses a multi-gated model to demonstrate how the economy, journalism, technology, politics, and publics shape news content[11]. Bennett's model offers four dimensions—reporter-driven, organization-driven, market-driven, and technology-driven—to define who uses news, what is news, and what roles news media play. In this study, the author adjusts Bennett's model and further develops four types of gated-news by identifying the concepts of public, journalistic roles, gatekeeping norms, and online users' decision basis for news selection (See Fig. 1).

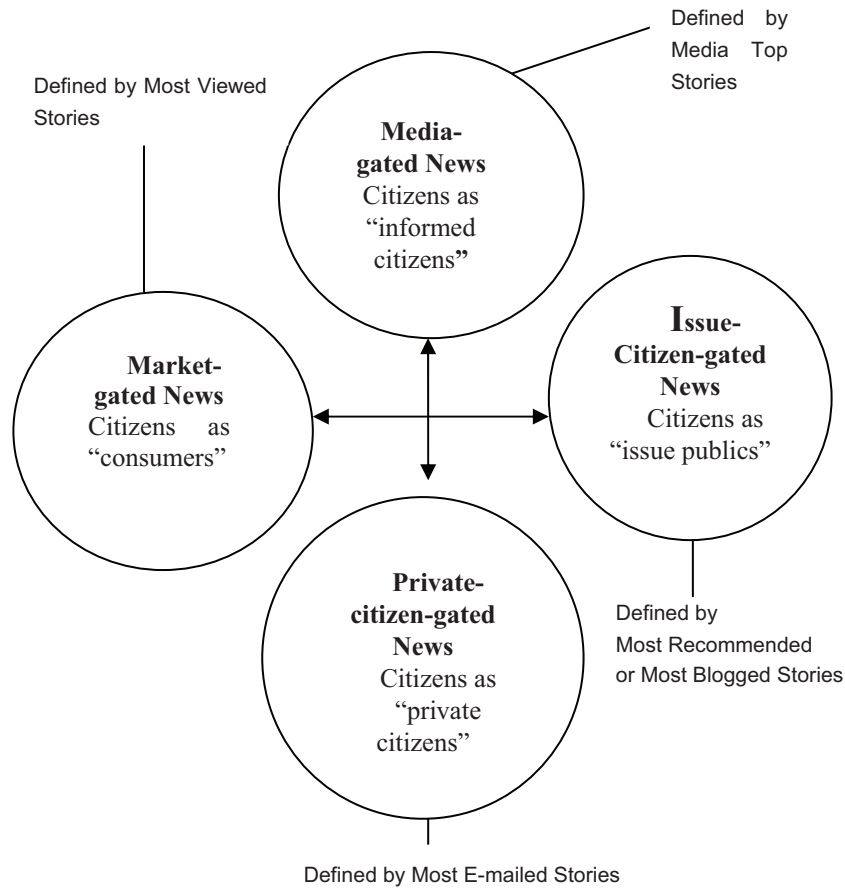


Fig.1. A Multi-gated model explains how four kinds of gated news cues compete for online users' news attention.

(Note: Two black arrows represent the competition of four kinds of gated news cues on people's news attention.)

In Bennett's model, from a reporter/organization-driven dimension, the concept of citizens is engaged citizens and social monitors who are concerned about public interest. In addition, he describes the journalistic role of this dimension as a watchdog and record keeper and news is defined by journalists, officials, and established interests. People usually follow top news selected by editors are regarded as informed citizens.

From the market-driven dimension, the concept of citizens is entertainment audiences that are concerned about consumer content. From this perspective, Bennett considers the journalistic role as a content provider, and the decision basis of news media is profits and the audience's demographics. Because the norm of

news definition is “plausibility”—whether it makes a good story if plausible, its information gathering process turns news into infotainment as the media focus on market formulas. According to the market-driven dimension, most viewed stories can be treated as market-gated news.

From the technology-driven dimension, Bennett describes the journalistic role as a transmitter, sending news content to the audience. The concept of citizens is interactive citizens who interact with news content by sending information to others. Two types of interactive citizens are further identified in this study—private citizens (online users who e-mail stories to others) or active citizens (online users who recommend stories or write blogs and add a story link to a blog). E-mailing news to people they know, private citizens pay attention to information or issues related to their private life or individual rights. In contrast, online users as active citizens pay attention to public affairs and interact with others by recommending stories or writing blogs. Therefore, private-citizen-gated (most e-mailed) news should be related to individual issues or matters about private life; in contrast, news characteristics of active-citizens who recommend news or blog news and put news links to their blogs should pay attention to public affairs or public issues.

3 News Characteristics and Multi-gated News Cues

The four kinds of online users in this model are defined as “informed citizens,” “consumers,” “interactive private citizens” or “the interactive issue public.” Study shows that these four kinds of gated news have distinctive news characteristics [9]. Therefore, developing the ontology of this multi-gated model helps explain how different kinds of most popular news attract citizens’ news attention. For those who read media-gated news (media top stories), the public acts as “informed citizens” and is more likely to follow hard news. The rationale is that the reporter and news organizational dimensions reflect how news media fulfill their social responsibilities by focusing on presenting news about what people need to know such as hard news and issue stories. For those who read market-gated news (most viewed news), the public acts as “consumers” and is more likely to choose soft news or sensational news. If news media adopt a business model, media will offer them what people want to know such as sensational news and soft news. From the technology-gated dimension (most e-mailed/recommended news), news media create interactive citizens that choose to interact or share news content with other and are more likely to choose hard news, issue stories or soft news that is useful to individual citizens.

According to Burnett’s model and the concepts of characteristics of four kinds of gated news, characteristics become good factors in analyzing the content of most popular news because news characteristics reflect online users’ uses and gratifications. In addition, news cues of media-gated news, market-gated news, and private-citizen-gated news are significant group factors in testing and explaining online users’ news attention [12] (See Table 2). From Figure 1 and Table 2, we can infer possible interactions between various concepts of citizens based on news cues and that suggests a semantic Web design, if reflecting objects’ relations among specific actors and agents, might possibly push group or public dynamics.

Table 2. Spearman Partial Correlations between News Cues and News Popularity¹

| Rank Scores | | Yahoo! News | | Washingtonpost.com | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| | | Most Viewed Stories | Most E-mailed Stories | Most Viewed Stories | Most E-mailed Stories |
| Aggregated News Cues | | | | | |
| Editors' News Cues | Zero Order | .32** | .74** | .51** | .50** |
| Most Viewed News Cues | Zero Order | | | | .56** |
| | 4 th Order ^a | | | | .52** |
| | 5 th Order ^b | | | | .35** |
| Most E-mailed News Cues | Zero Order | .30** | | | |
| | 4 th Order ^a | .32** | | | |
| | 5 th Order ^b | .24** | | | |

^a Partial rank order correlations were controlled by news characteristic.

^b Partial rank order correlations were controlled by news characteristic and aggregated editors' news cues.

*p<.05, **p<.01 (two-tailed tests). An empty cell means no tests conducted for it.

4 Applying Gated News Cues as Attention-setting Factors for a Social and Sharing Web

Based on the results discussed above, this paper theoretically draws two trends of news consumption (See Figure 2): First, most popular news characteristics and news cues imply different purposes for users' news selection. Second, news editors can apply different news cues to social media to broaden news use as social sharing tools to serve the various concepts for citizens. A potential development of a social semantic Web might answer the question—what are social consequences of interactions invoked by the connection of various concepts of citizens together? Related tests are still in progress by connecting online public forums and issues with various kinds of citizens, defined by news cues that are set and presented by social media.

5 Discussion

¹ News content and most popular news rankings were downloaded from news sites four times a day for the two weeks of November 15 through November 28, 2006. The download times were 8 a.m., 12 p.m., 6 p.m., and 10 p.m. that represent morning news, news at noon, evening news and nightly news. This download plan is designed to reach online users with various surfing schedules. There are 3,341 stories in total analyzed in this study. Please see the methodology in detail in *Exploring the Potential of Most Popular News Cues as a Web 3.0 Interactive Tool and Its Public Nature* [12].

It is important to discuss a social semantic Web from an interdisciplinary perspective because semantics of Web influences how citizens see themselves as consumers, issue publics, or private citizens. From a communicative perspective, program designers become more important because they influence how citizens select news based on news cues they design for Web sites. This paper suggests more scholarly cooperation in the fields of computer science and social science to explore how a semantic Web, designed as most popular news cues, has important implications for public and social consequences.

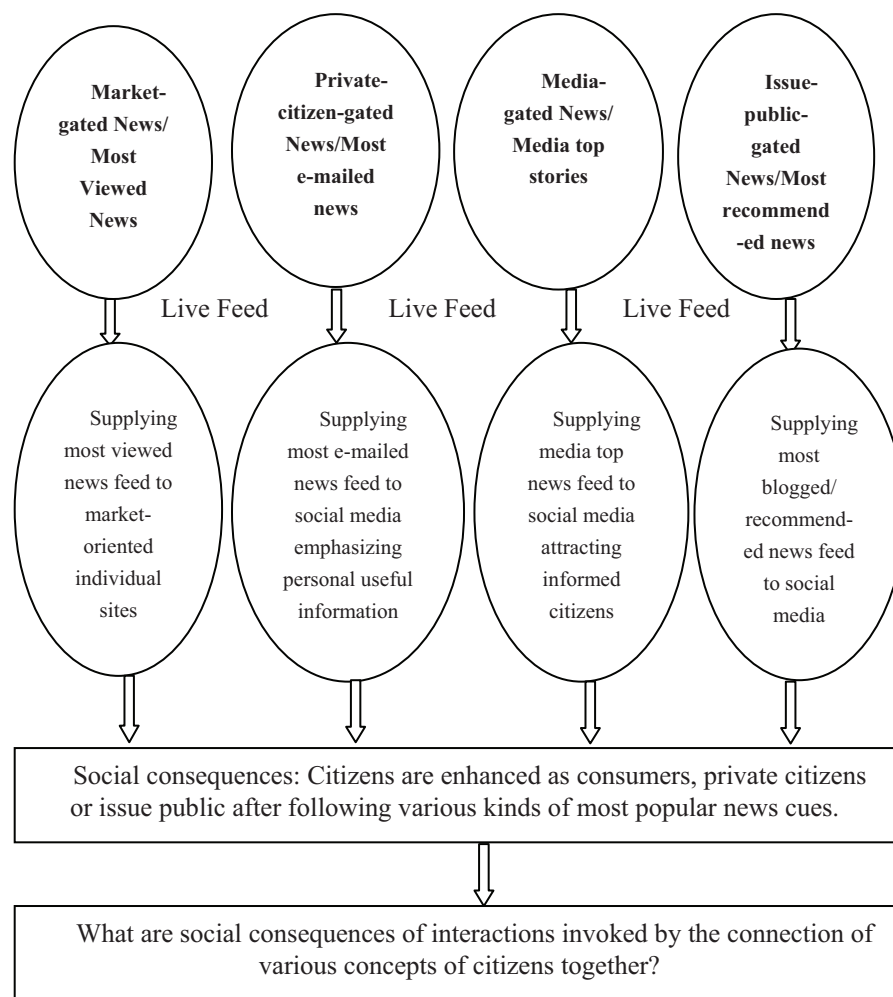


Fig. 2. Four kinds of gated news cues applied to attract social media users’ attention based on what kinds of citizens they are.

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