

Online Branding in Newspapers: A Conceptual Model

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Abstract

Online media branding strategies is growing at a very fast pace and is increasingly adopted not only by pure players companies but also by traditional firms. In the digital newspapers sector, online news are becoming the most required services from Internet users and their sites are among the most visited on the web. Researches on online branding of newspapers seem incomplete and there is still a lack of investigations and studies about newspapers e-brands aspects (exp: content, interactivity, web site attributes...). Our aim is to develop a conceptual model allowing a better understanding of the newspapers e-brands aspects and their relations with levels of substitutability and reader motivations.

Keywords: Newspapers, e-brands, reader motivation and substitutability.

Introduction

Ten years after the bursting bubble of the Internet, media groups are making a strong comeback in the web landscape. Given the important consumption of media products and the growing spread of Internet use, the Web becomes an inevitable gateway for media firms. Similar to other sectors, the constant development of the Internet has given rapid changes in the distribution of informational products and services. It was also at the origin of important transformations in relationships between media companies and their audience. Press, radio and television have more and more content and editorial expertise with strong brand names. However, despite the introduction of some successful development models, many media firms still lack clear

strategic visions about the use of Internet and web based technologies. There is also a lack of researches on online media branding and strategies, and substitutability between offline and online distribution.

Media and web based technologies

ICT innovation has transformed traditional media distribution through more efficient production, new forms of interactions, transformation of relationships between media companies and their audience conventional and new conceptions of certain activities and businesses (Blackman, 2004; Forrester Research, 2004; Cheong and Park, 2005). Besides, Internet introduced new players to the web landscape, gave more choices to consumers and gave the opportunity to each one to publish and

broadcast (Blackman, 2004). Industries like newspapers, are for example one of the most affected by Internet and online distribution (Flaviàn and Gurrea, 2006). Moreover, Blackman (2004) added that innovations like broadband networks, content management systems or peer-to-peer communications will have an impact in shaping the media sector.

On the other hand, England and Finney (2002) mention that Online editing of web site content is the new branch of journalism and publishing thanks to interactivity of new media and internet. Furthermore, customers will need more for personalized and customized products and services (Blackman, 2004; Peters, 1998; Nielsen, 2005). As a consequence, many aspects of the media sector will be influenced.

Interactivity

Having been one of the most important ideas of the cybernetic theory (developed by Norbert Wiener), interactivity is becoming the principal aspect characterizing the new media and the Web. Interactivity integrates digital media into a structured digital computerized environment to allow people

to interact with the data for appropriate purposes (England and Finney, 2002).

Lamizet and Silem (1997) noted that it is in the interactivity that lies the media revolution: media evolution is essentially characterized by a more developed capacity of interactivity. For Heeter (1989), increased interactivity is seen as a primary distinction of new media (such as Networked Multimedia, Internet, WWW, interactive TV, e-games, virtual worlds, e-learning, e-entertainment etc.).

Jensen (1998) argues that the definition of interactivity in media studies and computer science is mainly based on three ways: prototypic examples, criteria (characteristic that must be fulfilled) and continuum models. In this article, we will use the last way to define the concept of interactivity: continuum (based on the degree of interactivity). As Heeter (1989) noted, interactivity is a multidimensional concept and can be explained under varying degrees. Jensen (1998) summarizes different inputs of authors in term of the number of dimensions they used to define interactivity (see table 1).

Table 1: Number of Dimensions Used to Define Interactivity, Adapted from Jensen (1998)

One dimension	Rogers (1986) ; Schrape (1995) ; Sheizaf Rafaeli (1988).
Two dimensions	Szuprowicz (1995)
Three dimensions	Laurel (1986 & 1990)
Four dimensions	Goertz (1995)
N Dimensions	Heeter (1989)

Substitutability and Remediation

Thanks to interactivity, Web site offers a facilitated communication, a customized information, images manipulations and entertainments for the customer (Fiore and Jin, 2003). Web site can be considered as a full new medium with its specific aspects and characteristics like networking, multimediality or hypertext and can as a network medium accept a dialogic or conversational traffic pattern (Nielsen, 2005). The author added that the web must

be considered as an interactive multimedium and not only, as an online user interface. However, this full status presents in some cases a cannibalistic effect between on line and off line media. Indeed, authors like Rathmann (2002) noted the fact that the duality of the news media in both physical and digital environments can cause cannibalization. Other authors (Bolter and Grusin, 1999; Everett, 2003), mention the remediation aspect of the web site: it can remediate existing media. Substitutability and remediation will generate more interests

particularly with evolution of interactive media like digital television or publishing on demand.

Online Newspapers

ICT and internet is transforming traditional media and publishing: better efficiency in production, wider choices for consumers and more forms of distribution (Blackman, 2004). The evolution of online newspapers is considered by Li (2006) as one of the most spectacular success story of the internet. Flavia'n & Gurrea (2006) added that the newspaper industry is among those that have been most affected by the development of the internet.

"Rather than becoming the replacement for its print version, as so many predicted it would be, the Internet has afforded newspapers a unique opportunity to leverage the news and information and the interested audience into a new medium" (John F. Sturm, The Newspaper Association of America President and CEO)¹.

Kanaujia & Srivastava (2003) added that Internet is becoming an interesting area for news addicted, allowing them to gather information from all over the world. Besides, according to Flavia'n & Gurrea (2006), the usage of Internet as a channel for online publishing newspapers has made significant changes in the sector. Media groups generally and newspapers industry in particular, does not limit their offer to the print medium, they also initiate new services online (Kanaujia & Srivastava, 2003). In this context, companies operating in this sector are faced to new challenges (Dans, 2000). Under the view of Li (2006), despite the increasing influence of electronic newspapers, it has modest impact on the regression of newspaper circulation. The author found interactive processes and relationships between online newspapers and printed versions. However, Greer and Mensing (2003) found a difference regarding the way of work of online and offline medium. Traditional editorial offices would be slower than electronic ones. But in term of contents, Kanaujia & Srivastava (2003)

argued that online newspapers, as the printed ones, provide content their readers want and the quality audience that advertisers look for. Indeed, much like a printed version, design of electronic newspaper affects reader interests and priorities (Li, 2006). Flavia'n & Gurrea (2006) talked about the specific advantages of online journalism. According to them, the most important revolution of online media news is related to the rapidity with which news get to the reader, the low cost of information diffusion and the occasion to create more direct contact and interaction with readers. This reader has much greater choice, particularly with the entry of new players in the online newspapers sector (Blackman, 2004).

Online Branding of E-newspapers

The most common definition of the brand concept is developed by Kotler (1994):

"A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of the competitors".

Brands help firms to establish a unique identity enabling them to attract a large amount of repeat business (Ibeh et al., 2005) and let consumer identify product/service in the market (Cooke, 1996). War and Lee (2000) added that brands become more important nowadays because of the surplus of information: Brand enables customer to save time, by reducing search costs. In an electronic context, online branding is being essential.

Simmons (2007) noted that, with dynamic challenges, internet made branding more complex. Moreover, online branding presents enough challenges and opportunities (Rowley, 2004). For Da Silva & Alwi (2008), even if issues concerning consumers in an online and offline context are the same, online branding is more focalized on personalization, customer service, ease of use and security. Rowley (2004) argues that in an online environment, "physical interaction is

¹ April 30, © 2002 Media Life

reduced and benefits must be distilled and captured in a way that can be communicated over the wires". Furthermore, the lack of sensory interaction with Internet and worries about security make the construction of strong e-brands more complex (Simmons, 2007). The author also added that internet branding strategies are more difficult because of the real-time interaction and marketplace crowding. But according to Rowley (2004), online branding is more important for high value products, which represents the infrequently purchased and highly differentiated items. In these circumstances, companies must have a real e-branding strategy and establish rapidly an internet label to gain the first mover advantage (Doyle, 1998). The development of e-branding strategies also helps firms creating some distinctiveness (Kenney and Curry, 1999), building stronger relationships with unique messages (Ibeh et al., 2005). These strategies need better targeting and more understanding and learning about the online customer (Kierzkowski et al., 1996). In their study in 2008, Da Silva & Alwi confirmed the fact that building relationships is vital online and consumers are co-creators of brands. According to the same authors, online company has to "listen" more to its customers. Simmons (2007) developed a Four Pillars of e-Branding framework. It provides the basis for e-branding strategies: Marketing communication, Understanding Customers, Interactivity and Content. Despite these findings, it is still imperative to study more about branding in digital environment. According to Merrilees & Fry (2002), there are few empirical studies focusing on the effects of internet on firm's brand image and there is a lack of strong confirmation about what drives value on internet. Rowley (2004) added the fact that it is important to explore some of the potential impacts of online channels for branding strategy and the difficulty to differentiate, the practical and theatrical aspects between online and offline branding.

According to Blackman (2004), "Media companies will rely heavily on being the trusted gatekeeper of information. In this context, branding enables users to recognize

trustworthy information sources and, therefore, to deal with the problem of too much choice". Moreover, the technology evolution, has attracted new players (Blackman, 2004) and increased the number of content providers and competitors (Ots, 2008). However, as stated by (Chan-Olmsted, 2006), media brand management is far from completely developed, and its practices are still not enough strategic. Branding in this sector is seen to be quite difficult and more complicated with some particularities (Siegert, 2008). Furthermore, brands allow the creation of quality and services continuity, the separation of products and firms from their rivals and the development of strong relationship with consumer (Siegert, 2008). The uniqueness of branding in media is resumed by Ots (2008):

a) Media firms operate on dual markets (building brands toward consumers and at the same time selling the effects of this brand loyalty to advertisers). b) Media companies through their own products powerful mass-marketing tools can both build the existing brand and help launch new brands or new products. With the growth of online and offline brands, the web is becoming an integral part of the modern "brandscape" (Christodoulides & Chernatony, 2004). Brand's Internet success needs an effective online presence (Hanson, 2000). This is also true for media and newspapers sectors. In fact, Nielsen (2003) argues that electronic newspapers are among the most usually required and visited web sites on Internet. Siegert (2008) has noted that brand management has become a fundamental managerial task and researchers are encouraged to explore its implications for media firms.

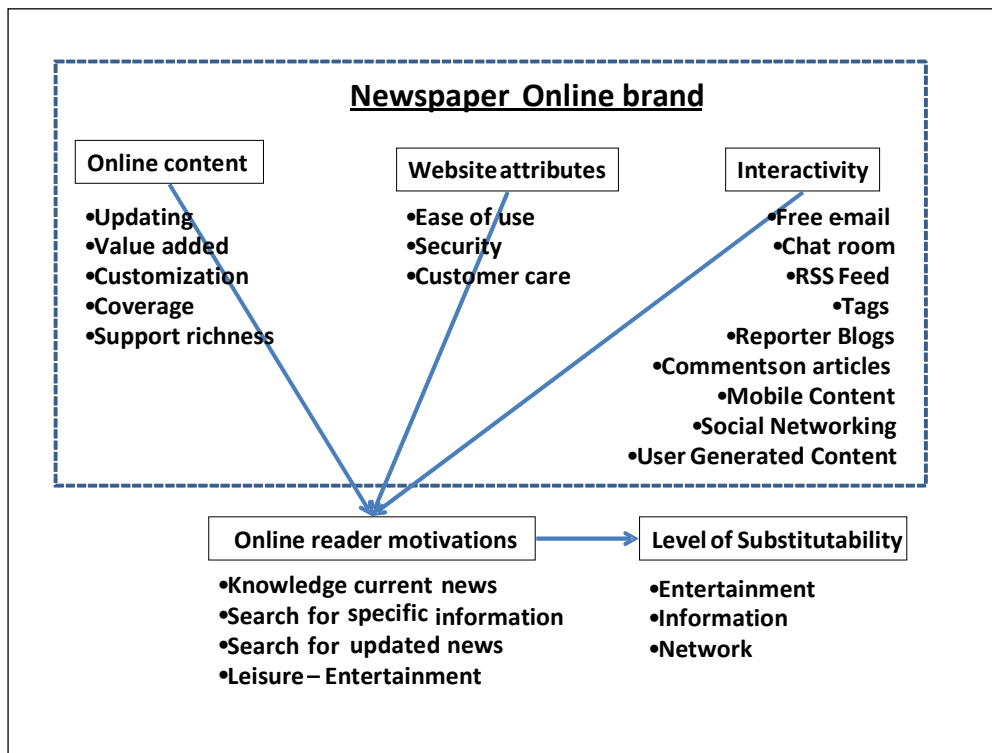
Conceptual Model

Researches on online branding of newspapers seem incomplete and there is still a lack of investigations and studies about newspapers e-brands aspects (exp: content, interactivity, web site attributes...). Our aim is to develop a conceptual model (figure 1) allowing a better understanding of the newspapers e-brands aspects and their

relations with the online reader motivations and their impact on level of substitutability.

With our conceptual framework, we try to contribute to the wider understanding of e-branding of newspapers.

Figure1: Conceptual Model



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