



A Comment on Comments

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The Changing Form of Online Social Interaction

NOT BREAKING NEWS: Print Media is on the decline! Over the past 15 years, the industry has been entangled in a continuous struggle as its digital counterparts have become more mainstream in a changing media landscape. IBIS World reports that between the years 2005 and 2014, employment numbers for newspaper publishers have fallen by close to 45.5%, and revenue within the industry has been predicted to decline to an annualized rate of 5 and 6%.

The motivation for this project comes from two phenomenon. Firstly, the decline of the print media industry as mentioned above has encouraged many of these traditional print outlets to focus more on their online presence, and adapt their industry to meet both print and digital audience. The second phenomenon is the reduction in the barriers to entry. Traditionally, these have been committing large amounts of capital to enter the industry and be competitive with industry leaders. Today, it is a much simpler process to create a website with little to no technical knowledge. With this ease, comes more outlets competing for the same pool of viewers, and this encourages the need for niche targeting and innovating previous design.

The comment systems used by the varying websites reflects the audience that the site is aiming to attract. Comments are just one method of user engagement, but it is often the most personable method since it encourages the user to participate in the conversation.

Research Questions

How have website comment systems evolved over the last 10 years? What are the reasons for the changes? What are the implications?

Scope

The scope for this project takes an external view at 8 of the leading News Delivering Websites today. This mix of websites includes both traditional print outlets, but it also includes sites that have been developed from a purely online perspective. The data for this project was collected by scraping archives of the websites. The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of importance for this project are whether the website displays comments, allows the user to share the articles to social media, and finally, if they manage the comment system internally or through a third party service provider.

Traditional News Channels



Online Newspapers

Los Angeles Times
The New York Times

Online Magazines



Technology Blogs



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References

"Industry At a Glance: Newspaper Publishing in the US." IBIS World. Oct. 2016. Web. 16 Apr. 2017.

Findings

Do they Display Comments?

	CNN	Traditional News Channels	Online Newspapers	Online Magazines	Tech Blogs
In 2007...	No	No	Split	Split	Yes
In 2010...	Yes	Split	No	Yes	Yes
In 2013...	Yes	Split	Split	Yes	Yes
In 2016...	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Allow to Share to Social Media?

	CNN	Traditional News Channels	Online Newspapers	Online Magazines	Tech Blogs
In 2007...	No	No	No	No	Yes
In 2010...	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
In 2013...	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
In 2016...	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Managed Internally or Externally?

	No Comment Management	Self-Managed	External (Service Providers)	External (Social Media)
In 2007...	7	1	0	0
In 2010...	0	4	1	3
In 2013...	0	4	2	2
In 2016...	0	2	2	4

Discussion

The preliminary data source for this project was data provided through Alexa.com. The primary data source was archived webpages that show a snapshot of the chosen websites at a particular time. This included the layout of the User Interface at the time, in addition to the plugins, add-ons and content linked to other websites and service providers.

Highlighted findings:

1. CNN has been the leader of adaptation from print media to digital media between the Traditional News Channels category.
2. CNN is more willing to experiment with new features on their site.
3. In 2016, CNN no longer shows comments, but instead encourages you to share, tweet and like on social media outlets.
4. Online Newspapers have been late to adopting new features. They have only now begun displaying comments on their site when other sites are moving away from this.
5. Tech blogs were the first to use social media to its full potential. Their success contributed to this feature being adapted to other sites beyond just blogs.
8. There was a significant cost associated with moderation services such as Disqus that media delivering websites had to incur.
6. Social media has become a staple of the media industry. This is not only because of the revenue that these shares generate, but more importantly the removal of a third-party service provider to moderate comments.
7. Comment systems were used specifically as tools to encourage engagement and retention to websites. Social media sharing is seen as a significant source of income in the way of AD Revenue.

Social Media "Must-Haves"

