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THE EVOLUTION OF A NEW(S) GENRE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis describes and analyzes how the online newspaper genre has evolved since its inception on the Internet in the mid-nineties. The overall research question is: What characterizes the online newspaper genre evolution? The thesis is based on both synchronic and diachronic studies with a multimethod approach (including six different studies involving, e.g., interviews, questionnaires and web site analyses) intended to provide a comprehensive picture of this genre evolution. On the basis of genre theory, the thesis proposes a framework for understanding online newspaper genre evolution, integrating design (layout) aspects with publisher and audience views. Applying this framework to the collected empirical material, the thesis presents a comprehensive and integrated view of this evolution. Over time, online newspapers have evolved into a specific digital genre, with genre characteristics such as content and form, distinguishing them from other digital genres. However, this rapid development has also led to diversities in form and function, triggering both academics and practitioners to seek ways to design for consistency within the genre. Several factors have influenced the online newspaper genre evolution, e.g., in-house attitudes, business model shifts and technological progress at the publishers' side. The audience demographics, habits and preferences have also changed. The layout of the online newspapers has been altered into long pages stuffed with content like news streams, headlines, photos, and services not possible in the printed edition. There has also been a shift towards frequent updates throughout the day and more content produced for the web. In addition, the thesis contributes to digital genre theory by modifications relevant to the online newspaper genre. For example, the concepts of genre awareness and genre interdependence are elaborated, a framework for identifying genre characteristics is proposed, and the concept "positioning" is introduced. Further, the thesis also contributes with implications for online newspaper design and publishing with longitudinal mappings of online newspaper layout and the habits and preferences of the audience.

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