The Appification of News: Exploring Media Diversity in the App Ecosystem

October 2017
International Symposium on Media Innovations
David Nieborg & Thomas Poell
THE PLATFORMIZATION OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Thomas Poell, David Nieborg, Brooke Erin Duffy, Robert Prey, Stuart Cunningham
Organization(s): 1: University of Amsterdam; 2: University of Toronto; 3: Cornell University; 4: University of Groningen; 5: Queensland University of Technology

Panel overview

This panel focuses on an emerging set of techno-economic relations reshaping cultural production and networked publics. In a growing number of industry segments—from journalism to games and from music to video and fashion—cultural entrepreneurs are finding audiences and advertisers on and via digital platforms. In response, they are reorienting their production and circulation strategies. This process of platformization appears to fundamentally transform the organization of cultural production, distribution and marketing. Preliminary studies on digital news publishing, for instance, indicate that ‘datafication’—the systematic collection and algorithmic processing of user data—marks a shift from editorially- to demand-driven modes of production and distribution. These shape-shifting industrial practices seem to render cultural commodities ‘contingent’; that is, they are not only modular in design, but also continuously reworked and repackaged, informed by datafied user feedback (Nieborg 2015).
Appification
Political economy & policy

- Downing’s (2011) “democracy-strangulation” hypothesis
- Strong evidence for ownership concentration (Noam, 2016)
- Napoli (1999) and Winseck (2008) on diversity
  - Source (ownership)
  - Numerical / Content (format)
  - Exposure
Institutional political economy

An empirically-driven, critical, historical, institutional perspective on the platformization of the cultural industries
Demand
It’s all about them apps…

Share of Digital Media Time Spent
Source: comScore Media Metrix Multi-Platform & Mobile Metrix, U.S., Total Audience, June 2017

- Desktop: 34%
- Smartphone App: 50%
- Tablet Web: 2%
- Tablet App: 7%
- Smartphone Web: 7%

Rapid growth since 2013 in portion using mobile to get news; desktop/laptop usage holds steady

% of U.S. adults who ever get news on ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HARDLY EVER</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOMETIMES</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFTEN</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What about news apps?

Share of Mobile App Time Spent by Content Category
Source: comScore Mobile Metrix, U.S., Age 18+, June 2017

- Social Networking
- Music
- Multimedia
- Games
- Photos
- Instant Messengers
- Retail
- Search/Navigation
- News/Information
- Maps
- Other

Entertainment & Communication Categories

Music +2 pts vs. June 2016

Multimedia +3 pts vs. June 2016

("The 2017 U.S. Mobile App Report", Comscore)
New news apps?

Smartphone Users’ Number of App Downloads Per Month
Source: comScore MobiLens, U.S., Age 13+, 3 Month Average Ending June 2017

Users downloading
0 apps
+2 pts
vs. June 2016

0 Apps: 51%
1+ Apps: 49%

1 App: 13%
2 Apps: 11%
3 Apps: 8%
4 Apps: 5%
5-7 Apps: 7%
8+ Apps: 5%
Supply
A competitive disadvantage

1. Increase in market entry
2. Price pressure
3. Rising acquisition costs
4. Platform politics & economics
Today Tab
This daily destination helps you keep a finger on the pulse of what’s happening in the world of apps. If it’s newsworthy, our editors will let you know about it.

Games Tab
Since games are so popular, we gave them a place to call their own. Curated by expert gamers, this tab takes your love of gaming to the next level.

Apps Tab
Apps are a vital part of our daily lives. And now they have their own home. It’s organized and brimming with content that makes it easier to find the right app for whatever you want to do.
Diversity

Disproportionality

= capitalism
## Method

- App Annie’s Top-500 on May 1, 2017
- iOS & Google Play
- US, CA, Mexico, UK, France, Germany

### Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>Monetization</th>
<th>Genre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Profit</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Business/Financial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>Non-Profit</td>
<td>Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Genre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>TV-station</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>Business/Financial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>Aggregator</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>Digital Publishers/Platforms</td>
<td>Special Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Podcasts</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Community Alerts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SM</td>
<td>Weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Technology/Gaming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hi Team,

This is a professor at a University. Unfortunately we will want be able to service their request. The ISR team will be ignoring these types of requests.

Thanks,
#findings 🎆👍
1. Digital publishers & platforms
2. Newspaper
3. TV
Medium (i.e. genre)

Canada

France

Germany
Canada

- A presence of public organizations (e.g. CBC, BBC)
- Modest revival of local apps (15 in top-100)
- Clear signs of ownership concentration (Bell, Rogers, Postmedia Network)
- Private ownership (Google Play) vs. corporate ownership (iOS)
- EN, FR, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, and Hindi
France

- French, beaucoup French
- High national news and national ownership (in top), local news past top-150
- Incumbents & legacy (TV / Newspaper) in top
- Presence of diasporic communities (Senegal, Morocco, Algeria)
- General interest in top, more niche material on lower regions.
Mexico

- Mix English / Spanish (50/50)
- Stark differences Google Play & iOS
- TV stations and aggregators dominate, few public media

UK

- English dominant in top-150
- BBC only public entity
- Trinity Mirror plc and DMG Media for local news
Limitations method

- 1 (very random) day
- Only downloads / free (no DL numbers)
- Data / corpus issues
  - Native app(s) are missing
  - App Annie data
- Top-500 too much
- “Only” 6 regions
Thanks!

David.Nieborg@utoronto.ca