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## The evolving interactivity of online news : an exploratory study using content analysis, Q-methodology and activity theory

Nor Hazlina Hashim  
*University of Wollongong*

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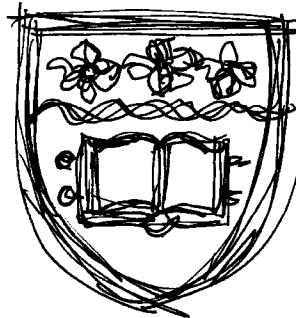
**THE EVOLVING INTERACTIVITY OF ONLINE NEWS: AN  
EXPLORATORY STUDY USING CONTENT ANALYSIS, Q-  
METHODOLOGY AND ACTIVITY THEORY**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

from

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**



by

**NOR HAZLINA HASHIM**

Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication (Public Relations),  
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.  
Master of Arts (Communication), Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia.

**INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
FACULTY OF COMMERCE**

**2010**

## **CERTIFICATION**

I, Nor Hazlina Hashim, declare that this thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Information Systems, School of Economics, Faculty of Commerce, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Nor Hazlina Hashim

31<sup>st</sup> March 2010

## ABSTRACT

The findings of the research described in this thesis add to our understanding of the dynamic of change in the contemporary phenomenon of online news. The research adopts an interpretivist perspective, which brings together a suitable mix of methodologies and theoretical concepts. The study focuses on the adoption of interactive features by Australian newspapers websites as well as in the identification of different user profiles through their perception and opinions on the constant changes in online news. Thus, the research has significant contributions to theory and also has lessons for practice.

The research undertook four sets of data collections as follows: Phase 1 – a web-based content analysis of twelve Australian online newspapers (2006-2007); Phase 2 – an initial Q-study of Australian online news consumers (2007); Phase 3 – a second Q-study of Australian and Malaysian online news consumers (2008); and Phase 4 – the revisiting of the newspaper websites of Phase 1 of the web-based content analysis (2009). The news websites study employed a longitudinal approach, which enabled the researcher to understand the shift of focus on interaction between readers and the news as well as the changes over time of the general online news environment. An additional Phase was then added to the research after the main data collection was completed. This took a critical look at current innovations in online news to suggest its possible future as the distinction between producers and consumers of news are becoming blurred through the use of social media on the Internet. The research demonstrated the revolution and evolution of online news, which impacted not only the business model of news industries, but also the working environment of the journalist's professions, and the involvement of the public news consumers in general.

This research is of significance to both, academics and the practitioners. In terms of scholarly significance, the study is important theoretically and methodologically. The dimensions of the concept of Interactivity underpin the study of the dynamic aspects of content and layout of online news. Activity Theory was found to be useful for analysing in a more general and holistic way, people's views and motives when engaged in activities of accessing online news. By using a mixed-method approach to data analysis involving both the content analysis of websites and the Q-Methodology technique, the

research covered both, the objective and subjective aspects of the online news. Although Q-Methodology is relatively new to the online news literature, it was found to be a valuable method for indentifying categories of people's views on the constant changes in online news. The Interactivity concept and Activity Theory are two strong theoretical pillars that complement each other in creating a descriptive picture of the content, nature and use of the news websites. Together, they provide a useful mechanism to aid the research in understanding the link between the web elements and the web users' needs and activities in the news industry.

The main contribution of the thesis is that it provides evidence that demonstrates the changing nature of online news content layout and features with greatly increased interaction and participation by consumers while also showing how different groups of people perceive and act with the constant changes in online news. The different activities of these groups are identified in terms of how they engage with the Interactivity dimensions of the websites and how different features of the websites should be designed to mediate the different activities of users. This thesis presents a rich picture of the recent substantiation growth of the interactive nature of online news with the variety of patterns of exchanges and the ways it now meets current informational and social needs and desires. As such, the Internet will continue to be engaged as a potentially powerful and persuasive tool in the future of the online news industry in ways that we cannot now anticipate.

## PAPERS

The following papers and publications have been produced from the research reported in this thesis:

1. Hashim, N. H., and Jones, M. (2007). *Activity Theory: a framework for qualitative analysis*. Paper presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Qualitative Convention (QRC 2007), 3-6 September 2007, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
2. Hashim, N. H., Hasan, H., and Sinnapan, S. (2007). *Australian online newspapers: a website content analysis approach to measuring interactivity*. Paper presented at 18<sup>th</sup> Australian Conference on Information Systems (ACIS 2007), 5-7 December 2007, Toowoomba, Queensland.
3. Hashim, N. H., and Meloche, M. (2007). *Australian online newspapers: an exploratory study on internet savvy users using Q-Methodology*. Paper presented at 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity (ISSSS 2007), Bethesda, Maryland, US, 4-6 October 2007, and also published in *Journal of Human Subjectivity*, 5 (2), pp. 31-48.
4. Hashim, N. H., Hasan, H., and Meloche, J. (2009). *What's new in online news*. Paper presented at Proceedings of Pacific Asia Conference on Information Systems (PACIS 2009), 10-12 July 2009, Hyderabad, India, available in <http://aisel.aisnet.org/pacis2009/42/>.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AFR	Australian Financial Review
Ad	The Advertiser/Adelaide Now
Age	The Age
AUS	Australian
BBC	British Broadcast Corporation
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
CM	The Courier Mail
CNN	Cable News Network
CSCW	Computer-Supported Cooperative Work
CT	The Canberra Times
DT	The Daily Telegraph
HS	Herald Sun
HCI	Human-Computer Interaction
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IS	Information Systems
URL	Uniform Resources Locator
US	United States
M	The Mercury
MMS	Multimedia Message Service
NAA	Newspaper Association of America
NT	The Northern Territory
RSS	Really Simple Syndication
SMH	Sydney Morning Herald
SMS	Short Message Service
WA	Western Australian
WAN	World Association of Newspapers
WWW	World Wide Web