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Local Newspapers as Public Connectors

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Local Newspapers As 'Public Connectors'

Consuming and Sharing Local Affairs News Online

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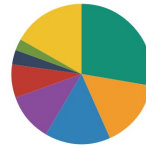
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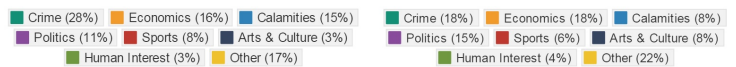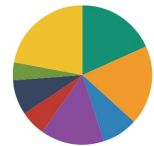
Introduction

Traditionally, local news media are assumed to be a reference point for citizens to keep up to date on 'public affairs' and to be facilitating 'public connection' (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2010). Studies found that online consumption of national news about public affairs is relatively low (Boczkowski and Mitchelstein, 2010), but little is known about click metrics on a local level. Moreover, it is unclear whether news consumers also avoid public affairs topics when sharing and clicking news on social networks.

• RQ1: Are news users relatively more likely to share public affairs stories than to click them?

• RQ2: Does what news users share on Facebook differ from what they share on Twitter?

• RQ3: Are news users more likely to share stories that are physically close to them?

Most Clicked

■ Crime (28%)   ■ Economics (16%)   ■ Calamities (15%)
■ Politics (11%)   ■ Sports (8%)   ■ Arts & Culture (3%)
■ Human Interest (3%)   ■ Other (17%)

Most Shared

■ Crime (18%)   ■ Economics (18%)   ■ Calamities (8%)
■ Politics (15%)   ■ Sports (6%)   ■ Arts & Culture (8%)
■ Human Interest (4%)   ■ Other (22%)

Most clicked and most shared news per topic

Method

• Time period: April 2nd - May 20th 2014

• Sample: the 25 most clicked and the 25 most shared stories on the websites of local newspapers Dagblad van het Noorden (www.dvhn.nl) and Leeuwarder Courant (www.lc.nl) for every other day

• Most clicked stories: those news stories with the highest number of unique visitors per day.

• Most shared stories: the stories that were most often shared on social networks and then clicked by users per day.
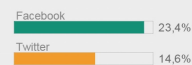
We also retrieved the top 10 stories most shared on Facebook and the top 10 stories most shared on Twitter, to compare social platforms.

In total, 2497 news stories (1453 unique news stories) were coded for three variables:
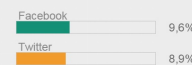
• whether the story was about public affairs (politics, economics, health, education, climate change, etc.) or non-public affairs (sports, crime, weather, entertainment, human interest, etc.)
• the topic addressed in the news story
• scope (local, national or international)
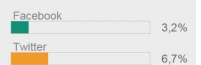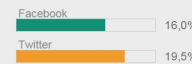
Topics Shared Per Social Platform

Crime
Facebook   23,4%
Twitter   14,6%

Calamities
Facebook   9,6%
Twitter   8,9%

Human Interest
Facebook   3,2%
Twitter   6,7%

Politics
Facebook   13,6%
Twitter   12,4%

Economics
Facebook   16,0%
Twitter   19,5%

Sports
Facebook   5,8%
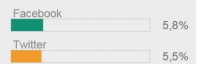Twitter   5,5%

Percentage of most shared news stories about a topic per social platform

Percentage of Public Affairs News Stories

	%PA Most Clicked	%PA Most Shared	p	χ²
DAGBLAD VAN HET NOORDEN	37,4%	45,4%	0,004 *	8,199
LC.nl	28,8%	38,5%	0,000 *	13,039

* significant for the 99% level, two-sided

Chi square tests of homogeneity (d.f.=1) show that for this sample, public affairs stories are significantly more likely to appear in the lists with most shared stories than in the list with most clicked stories. Non-public affairs stories are more likely to appear in the lists of most clicked stories.

Conclusion: What We Share Differs From What We Click

Example of a clicked story: funeral of the wife of a motorcycle gang leader

Example of a shared story: club forced to close due to new alcohol legislation

Although local newspaper site users avoid public affairs stories when clicking news (33,1%), they are relatively more likely to share public affairs stories than non-public affairs stories. Possibly, news users judge stories on politics, economics and social issues to be more relevant to others in their social networks, and thus share public affairs stories more often.

No significant relationship was found between the story's scope (local, national, etc.) and its appearance in the most shared or most clicked lists.

References:

- Boczkowski, P., & Mitchelstein, E. (2010). Is there a gap between the news choices of journalists and consumers? A relational and dynamic approach. The International Journal of Press/Politics, 15(1), 420-440.
- Couldry, N., Livingstone, S. & Markham, T. (2010). Media Consumption and Public Engagement: Beyond the Presumption of Attention. London: Palgrave.

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