

Serendipitous news consumption.

A mixed-method audience-centred study on mobile devices

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Abstract

As a consequence of media convergence, news production and consumption are substantially liquefying (Murray, 2003). This especially holds up for news items, which have become transferable commodities that are no longer inherently tied to a specific platform. In recent years, mobile news consumption has increasingly permeated individuals' news consumption repertoires (Picone, Courtois, & Paulussen, in press). Hence, the main purpose of this study is to gain insight in the serendipitous find of mobile news, with an emphasis on mobile news consumption through social media. Based on existing models of serendipity (Sun, Sharples, & Marki, 2011; Rubin, Burckell, & Quan-Haase, 2011), the role of serendipity in mobile news consumption has been investigated.

The study elaborates on the relation between serendipity in mobile news and (1) specific news types, (2) the news interests of the consumer, (3) the location and (4) the device used by the consumers. A second topic is the difference in the experience of serendipity between different groups of mobile news consumers.

A multi-method user-centred design was set up to investigate these topics, combining three research phases: (1) an in-depth interview on news habits, followed by (2) a week in which the news related activities of the respondents are being followed through diaries and device logging and (3) a debriefing to confront the respondents with their news consumption patterns.

The data analysis shows that three groups of mobile news consumers can be distinguished. A first cluster of *omnivores* is predominantly characterized by a digital news diet originating from multiple sources. Each of them experience news serendipity differently. They frequently experience serendipity through the use of social network sites. Second, a cluster of *traditionalists* is discerned, which mainly sticks to traditional audio-visual outlets, while rarely engaging in mobile news consumption. To them, serendipity is mostly experienced on the tablet, through social network sites or the scanning of news websites. Finally, a third cluster is composed of *stumblers*, not routinely engaging with news, albeit usually digital in nature when they do. The smartphone is the preferred device and they experience serendipity through scanning of news websites.

Results show that news serendipity is mostly experienced at home for all three of the groups and the greatest part of serendipity is directed towards lighter news types and the types of interest from the consumer.

References

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