

Analysis

Editing

As a hypermediated space, the Internet is constrained by neither geography or physics. There are no determined limits to the amount of information it can make available at anyone time, and a non linear navigation system like hypertext provides the only way of navigating such an infinite mass. When considered objectively and accepting both mediums on their own merit, the abilities of print media are contrary to those of the Internet. Physical capacity places constraints on the amount of information print can contain. There is also time to consider, both in terms of printing multiple copies and distribution.

Despite the above comments, this study has shown that with respect to current daily content, Virtual Face and Parallel Alliance news forms are restraining from utilising the unlimited space offered by their new host. As such, the study backs comments made by Herbert (2000), that the journalistic style prevalent within media convergence is becoming shorter and clearer. The manner in which news stories are edited are the same for the new medium as they are for the tried and tested newspaper. This study has also established, from academic and industrial sources, that consumers require news to be edited for it to form part of their cultural and social space. There is only so much information consumers can read on a screen, or indeed have time to read in either format. There are also economic considerations, can editors be expected to fund the creation of additional content to be given away for free, when there is possibility that it will go unread? Editing procedures originally devised because of space constraints, are now being imposed by the ideals of human computer interaction and economics.

There is also evidence to demonstrate the effect that conversion to the web has on the linear narrative of content. Both Virtual Face and Parallel Alliance forms flatten the steep hierarchy of the newspapers structure into a hypertextual form. It has been shown that elements of the tabloid format have been recreated within Virtual Face, but generally all newspaper stories look the same on the web. This flattening effect, the removal of organisational predictability, requires producers of Virtual Face forms to edit the titles of articles. This is done so that they make sense both within the context of the

web, and as stand alone stories that have been stripped of the social cues associated with a tabloid newspaper. Guardian Online, the Parallel Alliance example, edited one story title out of fifty analysed. This indicates that irrespective of context, stories from the broadsheet newspaper do not rely so heavily on the culturally embedded structure of its form.

Results also indicate support for the idea proposed by Katz (1994) and Herbert (2000), that online culture is more informal and outspoken. Differences in wording are evident in almost half of the stories analysed, and there is also incidents of slang being used in both Parallel Alliance and Virtual Face. This points to a distinct shift from the traditional printed paragraph structure, to a shorter, more graphical conversational style that is synonymous with broadcast.

An example external to the study may also highlight differences in attitudes between print and the web. The Daily Mirror has in recent months tried to shed its 'Red top' image in a shift towards a higher quality of journalism (Fig 5.1). It is interesting to note that The Daily Mirror website still retains the red masthead (Fig 5.2), even though the front page displays a picture of the daily paper in the manner of Parallel Alliance.



Figure 5.1 The Daily Mirror's recent transformation from a traditional 'Redtop'.



Figure 5.2 The Daily Mirror's web site in a slightly different livery to that shown in Figure 4.1

The Sun and virtual face

The Sun newspaper occupies a distinct place within our society and sits at the head of its own culture. Unlike recent attempts by its rival tabloid, the Daily Mirror, to shed its red top image, The Sun uses its established reputation as the ultimate tabloid as the basis for its look. It uses multiple large images and text as a means of delivering news in a sensationalist graphical style that compliments the content. It is this familiar style, so intrinsic to The Sun's central aims and success, that has made Virtual Face the obvious choice of form for electronic translation. To remove the paper's image, and focus on content in the style of Parallel Alliance, would undermine its self-established cultural position. In producing a web site that looks like a newspaper, it could be argued that The Sun has designs on some form of transparency

The Sun maintains its Virtual Face form at the expense of page download times, an issue vital to Parallel Alliance and highlighted as important by Simon Leek, projects manager at This Is Essex. Results of OnlineSun show fairly lengthy page download times even over a high bandwidth connection. This is a consequence of using the large images in an attempt to recreate a vibrant online presence. Part of The Sun success story, Page 3 for example, can only be translated to the web as a graphic, this takes time to download. OnlineSun also uses flash animation on its front pages. Again this takes up valuable download time, and is something Simon Leek suggested could cause problems depending on the level of client side technology. Guardian Unlimited gets round this potential problem by using small animated GIF images that require no additional browser technology.

OnlineSun can afford to ignore the high economic stakes attached to page download speeds because of its physical counterparts' aforementioned position within British cultural space. It can rely on the loyalty of its readers not to go elsewhere because they want to consume The Sun, and its cultural identity, before news content. This suggestion of economic pull counteracts the deterministic ideas of technology push. OnlineSun's indifference towards the economy of download times contradicts the printed newspaper that, as was discussed in the Introduction, is fanatical with cover price. Interestingly, the need to assert the image of the printed media can manifest itself in other forms, Parallel Alliance for example. Ft.com, the web incarnation of the Financial Times daily broadsheet allows subscribed users to download PDF files showing an image of the front and back pages.

Parallel Alliance, broadcast and economics

Neither examples of the parallel alliance Online news forms used in this study transfer any part of the newspaper layout onto the web. The distinctiveness of the printed news form is abandoned along with history and tradition in favour of hypermediacy. Parallel alliance justifies its presence by content displayed in a manner optimised for the setting. The two Parallel Alliance examples used in this study both have designs on moving into the daily work environment. GuardianUnlimited with its publicly available breaking news window, and This Is Essex with its portal link directly onto the Essex County Council Intranet. This Is Essex can rely on being connected full time because of the nature of an Intranet. However GuardianUnlimited makes the assumption that many users are connected full time, either at work or increasingly at home via a broadband link. Both of these examples suggest a move towards broadcast, a type of modern hybrid of the Television and transistor radio, adapted for the full time personal computer user.

The two established mediums of print and television have converged into the same form. As a rule television news does not contain editorial opinion, its web layout is based around content rather than identity, so for the purpose of this discussion we will identify its form as Parallel Alliance. However, it must be noted that this may change rapidly with the inevitable increase in bandwidth.

In keeping with the broadsheet journalistic style, The Guardian does not confuse daily news content and editorial opinion. The two are separated physically in the newspaper and that same distinction is made on its web site. This brings newspapers that adopt the Parallel Alliance form into direct competition with web forms of television news. With so much instant content available free of charge, and with consumers driven less by the desire for identity, page download times assume a more important role.

In 1995 Stephen Isaacs, an academic from Columbia University - New York, was quoted as saying that most online newspapers use a, 'Deadly dull formula of scrolling text with few photos or images' (Ziegler 1995). He suggests that instead, online news should embrace the concept of multimedia, using large 'Snazzy' graphics, sound and video. This study has presented evidence surrounding the importance of page download times within Parallel Alliance, and why web news producers do not share his sentiments. Whilst Isaac's comments may be well founded, they are also a good

illustration of the disparity between ideas and economic reality. The ironic nature of the OnlineSun page download time issue is repeated inversely in Parallel Alliance. The cover price of the Guardian retails at 55p Monday to Friday and £1.05 on a Saturday. This high price is justified by quality and quantity of content, however GuardianUnlimited is doing everything possible to ensure that the same information can be viewed as quickly as possible for free.

The social shaping of online newspapers

Observations made during this research indicate that the technology of newspapers, and their subsequent online counterparts are shaped by consumer demands. Practically, Parallel Alliance is the most obvious way of presenting data on the Internet. Deterministic thinking could argue that the shape taken by the Parallel Alliance form is based around the Internet's most compatible elements. And as such technology is providing the framework around which Parallel Alliance is fashioned. However, is it more than coincidental that the clean and spatial Parallel Alliance form is evocative of late modern broadsheet design? Broadsheet newspapers have approached the Internet with the same philosophy that they used to redesign their print products in the latter part of the last century. Extracting maximum usability from the medium in hand, whilst shaping the design based on layout and navigation. It is apparent then, that designers are using aesthetics shaped by a knowledge of human computer interaction principles to manipulate technology. This disputes the idea suggested by McAdams (1994) that the newspaper metaphor is a superior navigational model.

The layout and character of The Sun was mentioned earlier, as were consumer expectations of OnlineSun. The Sun's authoritative identity within its own culture, and our society, has used the principles of Virtual Face to shape the technology of the Internet to its own advantage.

Convergence between screen and print

The visual connection between newspapers, the Internet and television news have already been discussed, here the correlation between journalistic integrity and the three forms will be examined.

Television has always been believed by the public, Gibbons and Reimer (1999) describe it as being no more real than print media, but being ‘More reminiscent of reality’. When television news remediated onto the web, its form may have changed but it still remained screen based. Television news believes in upholding the ideals of the fourth estate, that is, being detached from political, or any other principles that may prejudice reporting. These ideals are naturally transferred to its web incarnation. When newspapers remediated to the web they changed from print to a screen based form, the same screen culture occupied by television news. If screen is reminiscent of reality, and television news is a trusted medium within our culture, then there are possible political implications to consider when remediating print to web/screen. Consider the Kilbracken controversy of November 1989. Lord Kilbracken made an ill founded claim about the transmission of HIV. British daily newspapers used his comments to fuel their own moral crusade. The front page of one paper on 17 November 1989 declared, “**STRAIGHT SEX CANNOT GIVE YOU AIDS – OFFICIAL**”. The editorials were not quite so reticent: “They [Homosexuals], and they alone are responsible for people dying from AIDS” (Miller *et al.*1998). Such hysteria is potentially damaging, in November 1989 this example was constrained within the identified and relatively safe context of the printed newspaper. However, there now exists the prospect that such reporting could be displayed on the web in a ‘Reality’ screen environment, very much like the believable medium of television news. Could newspapers have found a fresh medium that embodies the innocence of screen, whilst allowing them to escape their stigmatised past? Further, could newspapers use the screen element of the Internet to lever their moral and political opinions onto unsuspecting consumers?