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**An Examination of Newsworthiness Indicators in Online Journalism:
A study of South Korean Online News Sites**

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Abstract

To examine the nature of news content in online journalism, this study explores how online media define newsworthiness in covering news events. We examine the effect of organizations on the news concept with two types of online news sites - portal news sites and the sites of traditional newspapers. The study used seven newsworthiness indicators as predictors of news content: statistical deviance, potential for social change deviance, normative deviance, political significance, economic significance, cultural significance and public significance. Studies of online journalism are numerous, yet the relationship between the newsworthiness of the content and the different formats of news sites. This study adds to our understanding of the predictors that determine online news journalism.

Key words: online journalism, portal news, newsworthiness indicators, deviance

An Examination of Newsworthiness Indicators in Online Journalism:

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The Internet changes the nature of journalists, sources, and news content. As different formats of news delivery develop, some of what we formally knew about news production has also changed. Anyone with access to a computer can create and deliver news on the internet. News, long the playground of journalists and their sources, has been opened to the contributions of many individuals – people who formerly were not represented in the news. Many scholars have established that, before the internet, news sources were overwhelmingly the representatives of organizations, especially governmental and business (e.g., Gans, 1979; Bovitz, G. L., Druckman, J. N., & Lupia, A, 2002; Hollifield, C. A., Kosicki, G. M., & Becker, L. B., 2001).

As the internet grew, the first news pages were generally the result of print newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, putting everything that was already in digital form up on a web site. In this study, we call that a *traditional news format*. In contrast, the *portal news site*, such as *Yahoo! News*, creates a home page that has headlines and short teasers for news that is on other web sites. For many traditional news sites, the same principles of newsworthiness were used to select stories as in the printed version of the newspaper. But what principles are used to select news items for the news portal's web pages?

Portal news sites have been popular in South Korea, one of the countries in which the dispersion of internet access has been both gradual and rapid. Portal news media re-mediate news content rather than create it. According to a journalism forum in South Korea in 2005, portal news media had become an important news source for internet users and the portal media affected the characteristics of news content. Others criticize portal news media as an entertainment activity. The debate centers on the assumptions behind the gathering and disseminating of news. Those who believe that the news media have a social responsibility to inform the public say that the portal news web sites are money-makers only, that they have no such sense of social responsibility. In online newspapers, personal and entertainment news are more popular than other topics (Gulli, 2005), whereas political and economic news are more newsworthy than other topics in the traditional newspaper (Gans, 1979; Paletz & Entman, 1981).

Early in the 21st century Korean businesses established portal web sites that re-circulate news from traditional news organizations. This re-mediating process does require the selection of the news stories that finally appear on the web sites, just as news events are selected for inclusion into the traditional news organization. What we don't know, however, is whether re-mediation uses different news rules than the original mediation process. In this study, we compare one traditional news site with a portal news site to discover whether such differences exist.

Theory

The media (and their many representatives) look at an event and decide if the event is worth becoming news. This gatekeeping process (Shoemaker, 1991) does not merely create a veridical summary of the day, but rather a substantially changed one. The gatekeeping process changes events and any issues attached to them. In the news making process, the entrance to the news media channel and to each of its parts is the entrance to each section of the media is a gate, and movement into the channel is controlled by one or more gatekeepers or by a set of impartial rules (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). There are some messages that are clearly more newsworthy than others. The more newsworthy a message is, the more likely it is to pass the gate. (Harriss, Leiter, & Johnson, 1985; Izard, Culbertson, & Lambert, 1973; Stephens, 1993; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996)

Organizational level of Gatekeeping

Not all news media report the same news messages with the same amount of exposure. Luttbeg's (1983) content analysis found that [the](#) front pages of more than 100 newspapers are dissimilar, and researchers [attribute this to](#) an organizational influence in the news making process (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Cohen, Adoni & Bantz, 1990).

Shoemaker & Reese (1991) explain the five levels of analysis of gatekeeping: individual communicators, routine-practice of communication, media organization, social institution, and the social system level. Usually, the influence increases from the individual

level to the social system level; for example, specific policies issued from the top of the organization can overrule lower routine level. In this study, we looked at the level of organization. Leaders make and enforce policy on behalf of the organization [to serve the](#) organization's goal (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

Organizations are social units deliberately constructed to seek specific goals (Etzioni, 1964, p.3). Especially, organizations hire gatekeepers and make the rules. [From](#) the organization's point of view, a successful gatekeeper is a person who can perfectly represent organization's interests. As a result, the organizational structure and power, including ownership and rules, affect to the online news making process; news content is different according to the organizational purpose.

Comparison of traditional online news site and portal site

In this study, we looked at how online media deal with social topics differently focusing on two online news sites. The two online media, traditional newspaper online sites and portal media, are different from each other in terms of the goal of organization and the trust as news media. Organizations' goal gives an influence on the products and services of the organization. Even though the first purpose of the business is to make a profit, journalism organizations have a social responsibility to deliver accurate and objective information, while portal media has less social responsibility. Also, trust and expectation on each online medium to serve journalism role are different by online users. That is, news consumers more

frequently blame [the](#) traditional newspaper online sites than [the](#) portal media when organizations fail to deliver objective news.

Although many have studied the characteristics of online media forms with respect to interactivity or personalization compared to off-line traditional media, organizational influence on news content among different types of online media has been [less](#) documented. So, we analyzed news content [on](#) two different online media sites: *Joins.com*, a traditional newspaper online site, and *Daum.net*, a portal medium. Both *Daum.net* and *Joins.com* are most visited news web site in South Korea and have similar online functions such as e-mail exchange. *Daum.net* has a news selection system and determines which news content is more newsworthy than others. As a whole, the study focuses on the difference between media organizations and their influence on the news selection.

Newsworthiness indicators of news content

Two types of newsworthiness were examined within the characteristics of online news: *deviance* and *social significance*. Shoemaker and her colleagues (1986, 1991) suggested three dimensions of deviance and four dimensions of social significance. In this study, we observed these seven indicators of newsworthiness of the news content on the traditional newspaper online media and portal media.

Deviance. Deviance is a variable to examine how a news event is unlike happened.

As one of the indicators, *statistical deviance* is used to see how unusually the news event

occurs in a real world. In the study of the newsworthiness of world events, researchers also distinguished *social change deviance* and *normative deviance*; social change deviance is measured by how a news event potentially threatens the social status-quo and normative deviance is measured by how much a news event breaks the laws or policies of a society. (Shoemaker et al., 1991).

Social Significance. Social significance variable is to indicate how a news event is important and it has a potential impact on a society. Among the four indicators, *political significance* considers an impact on a society related to the government system or international governments' relations, and *economic significance* considers an impact related to business or market issues. Moreover, *cultural significance* is used when a news event is related to social norms or traditions, and *public significance* considers how importantly a news event has an impact on public's well-being (Shoemaker et al., 1991).

Previous literature showed some differences on news content between traditional news media and online news media. Leon Sigal (1973) found that the traditional news sites prominently present government official news. For example, about 60% of news articles deal with government official routines in Washington Post and New York Times. Also, the result of Herbert Gans' study (1979) showed that prominent news deals with events which people already know. However, current research study of the characteristics of news content on the online media showed that alternative online journalism develops the user-oriented news, the

topics of news broaden to everyday life (Mussi, 2003). Portal media is influenced by the online media trend, and they present more entertainment or individual life news stories. This is the reason why some journalists argue that portal media can not satisfy the criteria for journalism. To study the difference between traditional newspaper online sites and portal media, we proposed two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Portal media sites' news stories are more deviant (statistically, social change, and normative) than traditional newspaper online sites' news stories.

Hypothesis 2: Portal media sites' news stories are more socially significant (politically, economically, culturally, and publicly) than traditional newspaper online sites' news stories.

Method

Over the past four years Korean portal news web sites have developed and re-circulating news content from traditional newspapers in Korea. By re-meditating news content, portal media also participate in the news selection process This study is designed to show the difference of news content between portal media and traditional newspaper online sites.

Content analysis of online news sites

To find out if there is a difference on the news concepts between two online journalism media, this study conducted a content analysis. We looked at news content of

online news web sites in South Korea; one news web site was from traditional newspaper online sites, and the other was from portal media sites. Traditional newspaper online sites are under the influence of the traditional off-line newspaper organization, and portal media sites are derived from expansions of online business models such as search engines, emails, or community service of portal business groups.

Sample and procedure

We select the most popular sites from the list of traditional newspaper sites and portal sites based on the market share. *Chosun* and *Joongang* are the two leading off-line newspapers in Korea, and their online sites, *Chosun.com* and *Joins.com*, are also highly ranked in news consumption. According to *Korean Press Foundation* (2001), the two traditional newspapers do not show significant differences in their news content. So, in this study, we looked at *Joins.com* as a traditional newspaper online site. *Joins.com*' news category and section display are similar to portal news sites.

Also, we defined portal news sites as one of online news sites which have their own editor group, and where the news service is one of the business profit models. As one of the leading portal media, *Daum.net* [is selected](#) which has its own news making team in the edit group.

Procedure

We analyzed [the news stories](#) during one week from November 7 to November 13 in

2005. Internet news sites update news content promptly, and keep previous news content. Our sample news sites also updated the news content several times a day. We needed to study news content when the news sites did not update news content any more to get rid of the influence of routine media activity (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

Hence, we collected news stories of the day before from each news site during the research period. Also, we kept the same time frame of a day to give same possibility of adjustment of news content and decide to set the time at noon for a convenience reason. For example, we looked at Sunday's news content at noon on Monday.

Each day, we opened the main news section of each news site and collected all news stories on the first page. Then, we measured the seven newsworthiness indicators in terms of deviance (statistically, social change, and normative) and social significance (political, economic, cultural, and public) by 0 and 1. All items are coded so that the existence of deviance and significance would have the value of 1 and the absence would have the value of 0.

Intercoder reliability

80 articles were randomly selected out of 686 sample news articles, and two people code the selected article using same guidelines. Intercoder reliability was calculated for all studies using correlation formula; intercoder reliability was .88.

Results

To explore the newsworthiness indicators of two online news media, traditional newspaper online sites and portal media, cross-tabulation were run to see the relationship between newsworthiness of online news content and the types of medium organizations.

This study analyzed a total of 686 news articles from two online news media in South Korea during the research period from November 7 to November 13 in 2005. The unit of analysis for the study was the news stories.

Table 1 shows that nearly the half of the news content were gathered from traditional newspaper online sites and the other half were gathered from portal media sites ($N = 686$). The next two tables show the percentages for newsworthiness indicators of news content and the cross-tabulation of the type of medium and newsworthiness of news content. Table 2 indicates what percentage of the sample news stories are newsworthy and are not newsworthy. In this study, we looked at newsworthiness in terms of deviance and social significance; deviance has three indicators such as statistical deviance, social change deviance, and normative deviance, and social significance has four indicators such as political significance, economic significance, cultural significance, and public significance.

Among the sampled news stories, we examined that whether the news story is deviant or socially significant for each newsworthiness indicator. In each indicator, about one third of the sampled news stories from the traditional newspaper online media and portal media ($N = 686$) is deviant or socially significant. More specifically, among the deviance indicators,

social change deviance (32 %) explains at least about the news story's newsworthiness of the news content followed by statistical deviance (41 %) and normative deviance (36 %). In the social significance perspective with the four social significance indicators, political (26 %) and economic (19 %) significance explains less about the news story's newsworthiness of online news content while almost one third of the news stories are explained by each cultural significance and public significance.

Table 3 shows the cross-tabulation result of the newsworthiness of news content by the type of online news medium. As we discussed, we divided the type of medium into traditional newspaper online media ($N = 342$) and portal media ($N = 344$). The result indicates the Chi-square for each indicator of newsworthiness and shows that each Chi-square is statistically significant or not. As a whole, seven indicators of newsworthiness are statistically significant. Except the economic significance indicator ($p < .01$), the relationship between newsworthiness indicators and the type of medium is strongly statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Overview of Hypothesis Testing

As a result of Chi-square tests, table 3 shows that the deviance and social significance indicators have a significant relationship with the type of online medium. Statistical deviance variable is lead by portal media (52%) than traditional newspaper online sites (30%) and social change deviance variable is lead by portal media (39%) than

traditional newspaper online sites (25%). Also, normative deviance variable is lead by portal media (46%) than traditional newspaper online sites (27%). The result shows that the news content on portal media is more deviant than traditional newspaper online sites in terms of statistical deviance, social change deviance, and normative deviance. Therefore, hypothesis 1, “portal media sites’ news stories are more deviant (statistically, social change, and normative) than traditional newspaper online sites’ news stories” is supported.

In the relationship between social significance variable and the type of medium, each social significance indicator has a strong significant relationship with the type of medium (see Table 3). However, the direction of the relationship is somewhat different from what we proposed. Table 3 shows that news content on traditional newspaper online sites are more socially significant than portal media in terms of political significance and economic significance while traditional newspaper online sites are less socially significant than portal media in terms of cultural significance and public significance. Traditional newspaper online sites (34%) have more news content politically significant than portal media (18%), and traditional media sites (22%) also have more economically significant news content than portal media (14%). On the other hand, portal media (47%) have more news content culturally significant than traditional newspaper online sites (19%), and portal media (50%) have more publicly significant news content than traditional newspaper online sites (16%). Therefore, hypothesis 2, “Portal media sites’ news stories are more

socially significant (politically, economically, culturally, and publicly) than traditional newspaper online sites' news stories is partially supported.

Discussion

The purpose of this current study was to investigate newsworthiness of online news content and to explore the influence of medium organization on the newsworthiness of news content. From the individual level to the social system level, gatekeeping has a various level's of influence and this study focuses on the organizational level of influence. We explained that the type of medium organization is one of the important influences on the online news gatekeeping process, and proposed the difference of newsworthiness of news content between portal media and traditional newspaper online sites.

A medium organization has the primary responsibility to manage news selection process. In this study, we explored two online newspaper sites and suggested the organizational role in their news selection process. Even though a news medium organization has a business goal to make a profit, a news medium organization has also been considered to have social responsibility. Traditionally, only journalists have a primary control power to decide what is newsworthy. However, when online media provide news content, dramatic changes occur in journalism practice and users' news consumption.

Interactivity and personalization have been considered as the major features of online media, and news journalism also takes an advantage of these online media characteristics

(Deuze, 1999). In the online media perspective, users are not only information receivers but also information providers. It points out the prospective influence of online users' power in online business and also in news production process. When news has been considered an influential online content in the business perspective, new paradigm has been emerging in online journalism. Portal medium is one of the examples of the new online journalism. Portal media provide news content as one of the content business model as well as search engines or emails; and interestingly, it became one of the major news sources for online users (Gulli, 2005) Regarding to the influence of portal media on the news consumption, we suggested that it is necessary to examine news content on the portal media. Hence, this current study proposed two hypotheses in the relationship between newsworthiness of online news content and the influence of organization.

In the two hypotheses, the type of medium was an independent variable and newsworthiness indicator variables were the dependent variables. There were three deviance indicators and four social significance variables. As the results show, the relationship between the deviance of a news stories and the type of medium organization was supported; portal media cover statistically deviant, social change deviant and normative deviant news more than traditional newspaper online sites. We also proposed the relationship between social significance variables and organizational influence. As we overviewed earlier, the relationship was significant; however, the direction of the relationship was different from our expectation.

Portal media cover cultural significant and public significant news more than traditional newspaper online sites while portal media cover political significant and economic significant news less than traditional newspaper online sites.

To explain the differences of the newsworthiness of news content on the two types of online media, we considered the origin of the business and the role of the organizations.

Traditional newspapers have taken the part of social message delivers for a long time, and usually government officials or economic events of a society have been major news sources.

Traditional newspaper online site is one of our selections of online news organizations and it

was derived from a traditional off-line newspapers. News content of traditional newspaper

online sites is largely overlapped with content of traditional off-line newspapers. Also, as the

result indicates in this study, traditional newspaper online sites consider political and

economic significant news stories importantly. However, news content service on portal

media was derived based on a business purpose to attract online users' intention quickly and

increase the number of visitors. Therefore, the entrance into news coverage is more user-

centered; the more unexpected, curious, individual and cultural news stories are more likely to

enter the gate.

Another implication of the current study is to explore the predictors that determine the coverage of online news. Shoemaker and her colleagues (1991) studied several

newsworthiness indicators and we applied those newsworthiness indicators to the online news

content. As a result, we supported that those newsworthiness indicators were successful to examine the organizational influence on the news selection process in online journalism.

Future research

We conducted this research study from November 7 to November 13 in 2005, and there is a possibility that the one-week time period was abnormal or atypical. During the research period, we were not reported a significant social changes; however, to reduce a possible news content affected by any atypical event and to generalize the findings, we can examine the news content for a longer period.

Also, in this study, we measured each indicator of deviance and social significance of news stories by nominal variable with the values *yes* and *no*, and we did not measure the intensity of each type of newsworthiness. If we figure out the intensity of deviance and social significance of news content, we can have a better knowledge about the degree of the difference of the newsworthiness characteristics between the two types of online media.

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Table 1*Percentages for types of medium (N= 686)*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>%</i>
Types of medium	
Portal media	50.10
Traditional newspaper online media	49.90
	100.00%
	(N= 686)

Table 2*Percentages for newsworthiness of news content variable (N= 686)*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>%</i>
Deviance	
Statistical deviance	
Yes	41.0
No	59.0
	100.00%
Social change deviance	
Yes	31.9
No	68.1
	100.00%
Normative deviance	
Yes	36.4
No	63.6
	100.00%
Social significance	
Political significance	
Yes	26.2
No	73.8
	100.00%
Economic significance	
Yes	18.5
No	81.5
	100.00%
Cultural significance	
Yes	32.8
No	67.2
	100.00%
Public significance	
Yes	32.9
No	67.1
	100.00%

Table 3*Cross-tabulation of type of medium and newsworthiness of news content*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Type of medium</i>		X^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Cramer'sV</i>
	<i>Portal news media</i> (<i>N</i> = 344)	<i>Traditional newspaper Online media</i> (<i>N</i> = 342)				
Statistical deviance						
Yes	51.7%	30.1%				
No	48.3	69.9	33.17	1	.001	.22
	100.0%	100.0%				
Social change deviance						
Yes	39.0%	24.9%				
No	61.0	75.1	15.69	1	.001	.15
	100.0%	100.0%				
Normative deviance						
Yes	46.2%	26.6%				
No	53.8	73.4	28.48	1	.001	.20
	100.0%	100.0%				
Political significance						
Yes	18.3%	34.2%				
No	81.7	65.8	22.39	1	.001	.18
	100.0%	100.0%				
Economic significance						
Yes	14.5%	22.5%				
No	85.5	77.5	7.24	1	.007	.10
	100.0%	100.0%				
Cultural significance						
Yes	46.8%	18.7%				
No	53.2	81.3	61.39	1	.001	.30
	100.0%	100.0%				
Public significance						
Yes	50.0%	15.8%				
No	50.0	84.2	90.86	1	.001	.36
	100.0%	100.0%				