

The theory behind clickbaits...

Commercialized Journalism in today's view

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Clickbaits as a phenomenon of online journalism to increase reach in audiences is topical and already addressed by academia.

(Blom and Hansen 2015; Rony et al. 2017; Dvorkin 2016; cf. Potthast, Köpsel, Stein and Hagen 2016; Chakraborty, Paranjape, Karkarla & Ganguly 2016; Anand, Chakraborty and Park, 2017)

- Content driven new media, such as BuzzFeed or Huffington Post (**Smith 2015**; Ajani 2015, Mizrahi 2015, for a general view El-Arini & Tang 2014)
- Technical aspects (Eidnes 2015, Blom & Hansen 2015; Gianotto 2014)
- More pragmatic issues, e.g. browser plug-ins such as „downworthy“ (Gianotto 2014), or websites such as „clickbaitspoiler.org“ (Kempe, 2015)

Usual explanation: psychology of curiosity (Loewenstein, 1994) and it's implications (Potthast, Köpsel, Stein and Hagen, 2017).

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Hypothesis of adaptive Journalism
(Adaptation)



„Increasing commercialization leads to an adaptation to ‘lower’ wants of mass market, resulting in a decline of quality for all media content.“

(Prokop 1972a; Prokop 1972b; Prokop 1972c; Prokop 1973; Knoche 2001; Kiock 1974, Holzer 1968;
Holzer 1969, Holzer 1972; Rau 2008; Rau 2005)

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Our findings suggest that the 'trap' of adaptation is not linked to a media channel or a platform (Lockwood 2016) – it seems to be valid for all environments where media is trying to maximize audience by content customization.

Usual modes of verification – the most valid and successful ones (Rau 2007) use game theory – help facing clickbaiting.

By using clickbaits as proof, this contribution transfers one of the most fruitful (polit-
)economic debates into internet age's media management.

Clickbaits

Manipulation and the downward spiral

Clickbaiting is commonly perceived as a “*perverse effect on the quality of a medium*” (Palau-Sampio, 2016), characterized rather as “manipulation than stimulation” (Blom und Hansen 2015).

It’s long term effects on digital content – namely the “tabloidization” (Chen et al. 2015; Hurst 2016) – are not limited to online journalism, but is also valid for all environments where media is trying to maximize audience by content customization, such as academia (Bolton and Yaxley 2017).

Attempts of countering this ‘downward spiral’, especially in terms of quality, are developments in automatic clickbait detection (Chakraborty et al. 2016):

- Binary approaches (Bourgonje et al. 2017)
- Algorithmic approaches (Kwartler 2017, Ferro et al. 2016)

Adaptation

Theoretical approach based on the Frankfurt School of Sociology

Led by Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas, the theory of adaptation is an approach mainly influenced by the media and their markets in post war Germany.

- In Europe: After the transformation, many countries had consistently aligned their media regulation along western examples.
- New push of commercialization in media realities of Europe right after the turn of the millennium. (cf. Sujets 2004; Friedrichsen/Schenk 2004; Friedrichsen/Kurad 2004; Ludwig, 2004)
- The hypothesis of adaptation was until now not freed from the class aggressive vocabulary of the 1970s.

Reminder:

In it's beginning, the thesis lead to the heart of fundamental criticism in central Europe:

Increasing commercialization leads to an adaptation to the lower wants of the mass market.



Decline of Quality is the outcome

Adaptation and it's criticism

Problematic validation and the question of quality

Problem:

Indeed, there is only little hard evidence for the theory's validation.

- Most problematic: Poor definitions of media/journalism quality

Solution:

- No need for hard facts, define quality in a dynamic way!
- Still, where there is no common ground, there can't be a reasonable discussion: Set standards situative and define categories for journalism quality
- The question of good vs. bad remains: Include the concept of merit quality

Adaptation and it's criticism

This raises questions ...

- Is adaptation *really* influencing quality in a negative way?
- What about the sovereignty of the recipient?
- Does the conflict between investigative and adaptive journalism still exist?

Verifying the thesis of Adaptation

A game theoretical approach

		Protagonist B = Journalist	
		Cooperation production of "quality journalism"	Defection production of "low" "mass taste"
Prota- gonist A = Recipient	Cooperation "buy"/reception of content produced	A 4/4	A/B 5/2
	Defection no "buy" no reception of content produced	-3/-2	B -2/-1

Verifying the thesis of Adaptation

A game theoretical approach after iteration

		Protagonist B = Journalist	
		Cooperation production of "quality journalism"	Defection production of "low" "mass taste"
Prota- gonist A = Recipient	Cooperation "buy"/reception of content produced	A 4/4	A/B 3/2
	Defection no "buy" no reception of content produced	-3/-2	B -2/-1

Findings and Outlook

- The hypothesis of adaption is still a noteworthy concept for the interpretation of commercialization's impact on media content.
- The hypothesis itself could be freed from its leftist history – therefore one has to concentrate on media quality. The new four column concept of merit quality and the new distinction between different quality levels in a recipient based approach – depending on wants and needs of the media content consumer – delivers the ultimate basis for a new analysis of the hypothesis.
- The new research on journalism quality, such as clickbaits, with its dynamic approach to defining quality could give the possibility to critically view so-called „quality media“ by using the categories of this dynamic concept to formulate subjective quality criteria (Chen et al. 2015; Hurst 2016; Palau-Sampio 2016)
- The contribution showed, that economically based models (e.g. game theory) could help to explain social behaviour. The advantage of models like the one introduced here lies in its' ability to reduce the complexity of environmental influences. (Rapoport/Chammah 1965; Axelrod 2000)

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Thank you very much for
your attention!