DECODING
LIBERAL
NEWS MEDIA

Finding healthy news consumption intervention by looking at
New York Times, Washington Post, HuffPost

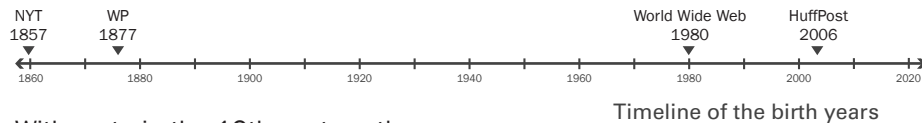Amanda Sanchez
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Table of Contents

Introduction

Our group was assigned three liberal media news outlets: **The New York Times** (NYT), **Washington Post** (WP), **HuffPost** (HP).

To begin decoding these left-wing news sources, we analyzed structure, visual form, and content. We then analyzed the connections

NYT 1857
WP 1877
World Wide Web 1980
HuffPost 2006

1860 1880 1900 1920 1940 1960 1980 2000 2020

Timeline of the birth years

With roots in the 19th century, the NYT and WP are established papers that have broken major news on a global scale and have many journalistic awards to support their efforts. The HP, on the other hand, had its humble beginnings in 2005. Founded during the Digital Age, this digital-only source combines news and opinions.

NYT and WP function like a library. They contain a wealth of content that is created, curated, and kept in house. **HP functions like Times Square.** It's full of interesting links that may take readers elsewhere across the worldwide web.

between audience and platforms of consumption.

With a plethora of information available 24/7 across multiple platforms, it takes a lot of time and attention to participate in today's news world. Studies show that young adults value convenience over content. They predominantly get their news from social media, even though they question the accuracy of what they may be reading (Matsa, & Elisa Shearer,2019).

This is problematic because social media doesn't present news equitably. It reinforces bias, ultimately keeping citizens from being well-informed with diverse perspectives.

We want readers to visit reliable, trustworthy websites like The New York Times and the Washington Post. The layout of these sites, however, present a cognitively overloaded and inconvenient experience.

How might we:
- Get readers to think more critically about their news consumption?

- Create a space in which readers can enjoy reliable content that's still convenient and consumable?

Analysis of Visual & Text

In an effort to present reliable news, the NYT and WP highly contextualize their content using chunking and whitespace. In an effort to mimic social media, HP presents loosely categorized, decontextualized content.

Chunking

The NYT and WP string a connective thread across their website by grouping pieces of related content together. These chunks include informative titles, introductions, and pathways to more comprehensive coverage. These blocks are standardized into a design system.

Chunking occurs when similar items, topics, or words are connected. This allows these papers to present **a richer, more reliable picture.** The downside, however, is how often this visual chunking is repeated throughout the page. This leads to a massive amount of seemingly dense descriptions extending throughout the site.

The HP, on the other hand, does not use chunking to group related content. Instead, their page operates like a loosely organized social media feed. Articles appear together based on popularity. Moreover, hierarchy of components is competing. Each article is the same thumbnail size and lacks the same descriptive context that the NYT and WP provide.

Whitespace

Whitespace can be used to clarify relationships and give readers a place to rest amidst text, links, and content. **The NYT and WP utilize whitespace to indicate relationships.** Extra whitespace is included around elements that are chunked together. These elements, however, are repeated multiple times throughout the page – creating a dense, content heavy website.

HP uses more whitespace. At first glance, this makes the site seem more readable and consumable. The relationships and connections between content, however, are less clear and content appears to compete because of lack of hierarchy.

NYT chunking of Hong Kong protest provides the pathways to comprehensive coverage but it can seem dense. (Screenshot of "The New York Times", Aug 30).
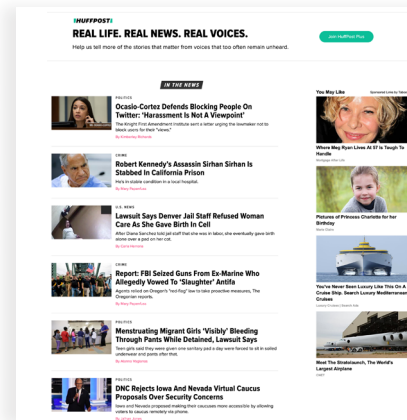
HP uses more white space but lack connection and hierarchy between the contents (Screenshot of "HuffPost", Aug 31).

Content Framing

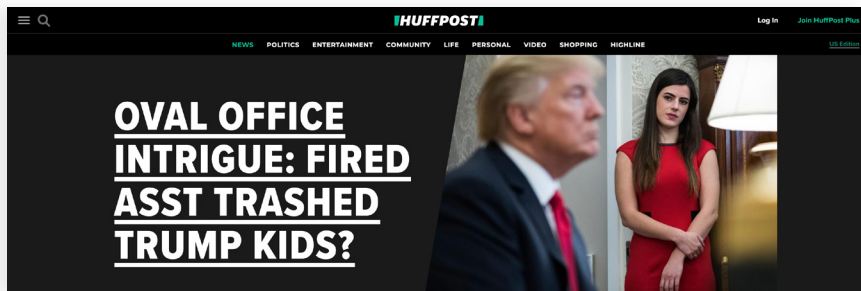**The NYT and the WP present headlines with carefully selected words and highly curated documentary-style photographs.** Both papers convey information in a calm and neutral tone. Furthermore, the NYT and WP provide more factual information about news events. Although NYT and WP do a good job of contextualizing their articles and providing facts to maintain their credibility as news sources, the information becomes dense as this descriptive style of text is used for all articles that are presented together.

One the other hand, **the HP's homepage contains all-caps headlines, emotionally-charged, hyperbolic words and provocative photos,** lending itself to be more social-media like characteristics. Each article is decontextualized--containing few supporting facts, descriptions, or related content. However, HP aims to draw attention. The source effectively mixes news and entertainment in a more informal style. Which is shown in their high reader traffic.

HP's all-caps headlines are emotionally-charged, hyperbolic, and provocative (Screenshot of "HuffPost", Aug 31).

"News avoidance, news fatigue, and other pathologies of our contemporary digital era are symptoms of larger problems concerning the health of our media systems and democracies."

Nieman Lab

Discoveries

Social Media

Let's face it; younger generations are predominantly using social media as their main source of news. A recent Pew Report details that about two-thirds of Americans get their news from social media, even though they question the accuracy of the content they are reading there (Matsa, & Elisa Shearer,2019). Additionally, these sites have notably higher view and retention rates than news sites; Facebook being the highest with an average visit of 11 minutes.

27% Sometimes

20% Often

21% Hardly ever

32% never gets news from social media
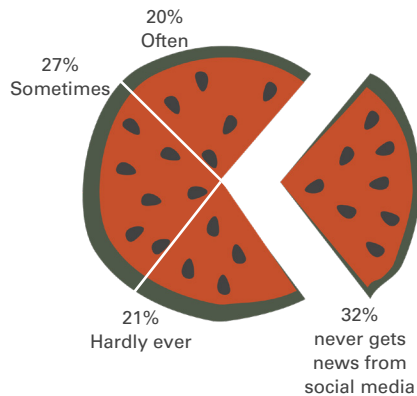
Cognitive Overload

We want younger generations to visit news sources that present reliable, contextualized content; news sources like The NYT or WP. These websites, however, present a cognitively overloaded experience. **They are filled with too much information that compete for a user's attention.** NYT and WP attempt to combat cognitive load by keeping content and the relationships between content clear. The NYT and WP take things further by also attempting to clearly communicate news events using descriptive, factually-based words or phrases and provide supporting information in a readily accessible manner (contextualized headlines). The density of words, pathways, and competing elements present on their pages, however, make their attempts unsuccessful and inconvenient.

Downsides of Social Media

Younger generations are predominantly getting news from social media. They value convenience over content. This is problematic because social media presents content that is first and foremost a collection of opinions. Social media feeds are architected to capture user attention. Algorithms surface content not based on chronology, but on likelihood of engagement. More often than not, content that is more emotionally charged, relevant to a user, or controversial gets stronger engagement (Rose-Stockwell, 2019). **This results in content that reaffirms a user's existing bias, is divisive, decontextualized, not served equally, or subjective.**

HP has tapped into this pull to social media through their visual formating and content curation, evidenced in the fact that the source has higher website traffic than both the NTY and WP ("Most popular news", 2019).

Question we want to focus on

▪ How can we get the younger generations to think about their news consumption habits?
▪ How can we get them to visit reliable sources of news, while also providing them with a convenient experience?

Intervention

Introducing 'Fruitful'

Fruitful is an app that nudges users to be mindful of their news consumption habits and strive for a more balanced perspective. We believe a more informed outlook is one that is exposed to diverse ideas, concepts, and opinions. Getting a good balance of diverse viewpoints is important. We can better understand other people's beliefs and work together to make a difference.

Fruit Labels

Users will encounter our intervention at grocery stores. We hope to either partner with produce sellers or use guerrilla-style marketing tactics to place fruit labels on produce items. These fruit labels aim to pique curiosity and get people to download the app.

Users will encounter our intervention at grocery stores, as a placed fruit labels on produce items. (Photo by Diana Chun, Sep 23)

Fruit Sticker Designs

Let's get started!

With a plethora of information available 24/7 across multiple platforms, it takes a lot of time and attention to participate in today's news world.

It can sometimes feel like the news isn't being presented equitably. Platforms like social media can often present biased news.

Getting a good balance of diverse perspectives is important. We can better understand other people's beliefs and work together to make a difference.

As Thomas Jefferson once said "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be. If we are to guard against ignorance and remain free, it is the responsibility of every American to be informed."

Balance you diet!

Variety is just as important as quantity. For a fresher pear-spective, we recommend choosing a variety of sources

Mother Jones
Investigative journalism, politics, chart-tastic, sometimes sarcastic.
INDEPENDENT

BBC News
News, features and analysis from the World's newsroom
INTERNATIONAL

AP News
News from the Associated Press, the definitive source for independent journalism from every corner of the globe
NEUTRAL
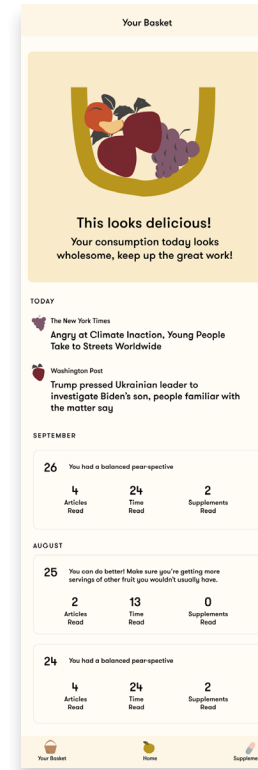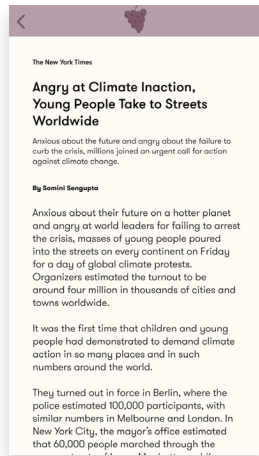
The Blaze
More speech, louder speech

Onboarding

Onboarding will explain why it's important to be mindful in today's world and why a balanced perspective is important.

Set Up

Users will then be able to choose news sites they normally follow. Based on what they choose, they'll see recommendations to follow other diverse news sources depending on the bias presented in their previous choices. This is based on the idea of a balanced diet. A healthy "diet" means consuming a variety of news.

Daily Use

Users will see 3-5 articles from their sources each day.

Once they read each article, a fruit representing that article will be added to their fruit basket.

If a user is not able to read their full list of articles, they'll receive "supplements," which provide brief summaries of the news for the day.

Fruit Basket

This represents the progression of their news consumption habits. Daily: as they read articles, new fruits will appear in their basket. As they read a more diverse set of articles, a more diverse set of fruits will appear in their basket. Over time, they'll be able to see visualization of their journey.

Reflection

Moments of mindfulness are baked into the experience. These pauses are meant to help users reflect on their consumption habits.

Stay fruitful.

Many thanks to Stacie and Brett.

And always to our honorary member, Fern, the dog.

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