

Cross-media *within* the Facebook newsfeed: The role of the reader in cross-media uses

Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies
2017, Vol. 23(4) 425–438
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1354856517700383
journals.sagepub.com/home/con



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Abstract

This study investigates the role of interpretation in cross-media uses. Highlighting the specificity of cross-media uses within meta-media environments such as Facebook, we argue that interpretative processes play a crucial role in the formation of cross-media repertoires. The methodology relies on a reception analysis for which we conducted interviews with eleven expatriates using Facebook on a daily basis, in conjunction with a commented consultation of their newsfeed. In the analysis, we show that reading Facebook's newsfeed is an activity that contributes to the construction of the user's mediated lifeworld. Schutz's phenomenological approach allows us to explore how users develop reading strategies to typify their experience of the social world within Facebook, to maintain the relevance of their newsfeed and to negotiate the technological features of Facebook, shedding light on how users assemble their cross-mediated experience within meta-media.

Keywords

Cross-media use, Facebook, interpretation, lifeworld, meta-media, newsfeed, phenomenology, reading

Early research on cross-media environments has predominantly addressed questions of production, distribution and flow, based on the affordances and properties of media's form and content (Bolin, 2010; Erdal, 2009; Evans, 2015, 2011; Jenkins, 2006). There has also been an emphasis on transmedia storytelling, in which media producers pursue a strategic interest in developing a narrative over multiple media (Evans, 2015; Ibrus and Scolari, 2012; Klasttrup and Tosca, 2016;

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Scolari, 2009). Rather focused on the media, this literature explored the extent to which different platforms offer more diversity of content or complement each other.

A more recent but substantial body of literature has adopted a user-oriented perspective. Much of this research addresses the question of cross-media uses, but there remains also an interest in the circulation of content across multiple media, focusing on the users' contribution to it (Davis, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2013). Simultaneously, researchers have investigated cross-media uses as a process of selection and formation of media repertoires (Hasebrink and Domeyer, 2012; Hasebrink and Popp, 2006; Schröder, 2011).

This article develops further the user-oriented perspective by focusing on processes of reading and interpretation, which we believe need to be studied in order to shed light on the formation of repertoires in a complex cross-media environment. In the first section of the article, we develop the need to consider the interpretative dimension of cross-media use, present the specificities of meta-media as a cross-media environment, with Facebook being a prime example, and argue for the relevance of Schutz's theoretical framework in exploring the role of interpretation for cross-media use within meta-media. We then introduce the methodological approach of this empirical study, based on a reception analysis of the use of the Facebook newsfeed by eleven expatriates. The analysis reveals different reading strategies that users adopt to typify experience and maintain the relevance of their newsfeed. Finally, the article concludes by reflecting on the significance of these findings for cross-media research.

The formation of cross-media repertoires

As Schröder argues:

a genuine audience perspective on the contemporary media culture must adopt a cross-media lens, because people in everyday life, as individuals and groups, form their identities and found their practices through being the inevitable sense-making hubs of the spokes of the mediatized culture. (2011: 5)

Users assemble cross-media repertoires based on the 'perceived worthwhileness' of what the media have to offer (Schröder and Kobbernagel, 2010). The concept of repertoire reflects the totality of media content that a user consumes regularly (Hasebrink and Domeyer, 2012). The notion suggests that the audience has an important role to play in the flow of content and that cross-mediated experiences are to some extent uniquely articulated by media users. Arguably, audiences have gained more autonomy (Napoli, 2011) as their selective, attentive and interpretative engagement with the flow of content circulating across different media is becoming increasingly significant. Livingstone (2003) too argues that these processes, well known from the study of audience reception, are increasingly solicited in new, interactive and complex media environments.

Although the literature on cross-media use takes note of the importance of meaning in the formation of cross-media repertoire (Hasebrink and Domeyer, 2012; Klastrup and Tosca, 2016; Schröder, 2011), the emphasis remains on questions of use. In past decades, the study of technological media has seen an emphasis on questions of use to the detriment of questions of reception (Mathieu et al., 2016). The interest in the user of new, technological media, and in the 'producer' (Bruns, 2008) of participatory and interactive media, has tended to disregard the question of meaning-making as an old question (Livingston and Das, 2013) rather than developing it in these new contexts (but, see Pavlíčková and Kleut, 2016; Picone, 2011).

The double articulation of media as both ‘objects’ and ‘texts’ (Silverstone, 1994), however, urges researchers to consider both the material and symbolic aspects of media use. As Press and Livingstone explain:

to focus on the media-as-object is to invite an analysis of media use in terms of consumption in the context of domestic practices. On the other hand, to focus on the media as-text is to invite an analysis of the textuality or representational character of media contents in relation to the interpretive activities of particular audiences. (2006: 181)

It is the notion of the cross-media environment as-text that is missing from current understanding of cross-media repertoires. What role do the symbolic aspects of the cross-media environment as-text play in the formation of cross-media repertoires? How does the formation of cross-media repertoires relate to the interpretative activity of the audience? What meanings are attributed by the reader to these composed repertoires?

Meta-media as cross-media

In the current media environment, cross-media consumption increasingly takes place within meta-media, which Jensen (2013) defines as ‘media that potentially reproduce and integrate other types of media, old and new’. Some of today’s main players in a media landscape heavily permeated with technology, such as Apple, Google or Facebook, are meta-media. These meta-media are primarily organized around a cross-media logic, allowing audiences to be exposed to a wide variety of content at one single location.

This study concentrates on Facebook, which is a prime example of a meta-medium that seems to follow a cross-media logic. The relevance of seeing the newsfeed as a cross-media environment is evident when assessing the strategy adopted by Facebook in recent years in order to consolidate its dominance. Facebook has shifted from being a user-based network to being a meta-medium that relies on a controlled, networked flow of content. While Facebook is not a media producer itself, much digital content today converges towards its interface (Van Dijck, 2013b), which conveniently gathers the cross-media consumption of different content, sources and formats at one location. Facebook has become not simply a means of interpersonal communication, but a hub for news, a way for grassroots movements and corporations to communicate with their base via a proliferation of *pages* and *groups* that are thriving in its lands.

The Facebook newsfeed was launched in 2006, provoking initial concerns about privacy and exposure (boyd, 2008). Content appears in the newsfeed as a result of the activity of one’s connections (or friends) but also follows multiple algorithmic rules that are not fully transparent. These algorithms lead to the (in)visibility of certain content (Bucher, 2012). They favour images, or content based on the intensity of previous interactions between users and between users and content, within the platform itself and far beyond. They also introduce senders who presumably pay to reach users. The newsfeed provides a variety of content, from the interpersonal to institutionally produced news, and thus also rests on traditional mass-mediated communication flow (Jensen, 1995).

As a result of its effort to increase its reach, to emphasize its convenience and to maintain its relevance to its users, Facebook has expanded beyond the borders of its platform. As of 2012, Facebook was integrated with more than seven million websites and applications (Wilson et al., 2012: 203). This has been achieved, among other means, through Facebook’s exporting of its *like* and *share* buttons outside the platform itself, which allow people to share content from other media

outlets (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013). More importantly, it centralized Facebook's role as an aggregator of news and other content, and at the same time led to a relationship of mutual dependence between various content providers and Facebook. Facebook depends on them to provide free content that is then circulated on its platform, with user actions as the main means of distribution (Jenkins et al., 2013; see also Scholz, 2012, on free digital labour).

Meta-media as a site of construction of the lifeworld

Meta-media have recently attracted the attention of cross-media researchers, who see in the mobile phone a rich and convenient source of information about cross-media uses (Thorhauge and Lomborg, 2016). However, the study of meta-media as cross-media also requires a different analysis than in traditional cross-media environments. While research on the latter can be said to adopt a view of cross-media *across* different media, we suggest that meta-media call for a view of cross-media *within*, with its own significance, as well as methodological challenges and opportunities for cross-media research.

The study of cross-media *within* presents certain methodological advantages. A cross-media *within* perspective allows cross-media uses to be explored empirically as a single *act of reading* (or consulting) Facebook's newsfeed, and not as a practice of visiting different media sequentially, spread over time and space. This allows a more coherent exploration of the activity of reading or interpretation and of the processes of content selection that are involved in the formation of cross-media repertoires. Doing so also takes the focus away from the medium and its affordances, as the type of medium is not always the most relevant factor for assembling media use (Bjur et al., 2013).

If not to ease, then to organize the vast amount of available content and orient the 'burden of selection' that falls upon the users, meta-media are constantly developing algorithms and personalization features (Bozdog, 2013: 213). This also poses specific challenges for cross-media researchers, who need to address the way that cross-media uses emerge from these technological interfaces, bearing in mind that these are also being interpreted by audiences, and not simply used.

Not only is the media-as-text not properly considered in cross-media use research, but such research also lacks a theoretical framework that can explain the crucial role that interpretation plays in the constitution of cross-media repertoires. Until now, such a theoretical framework has only been implicit in the notion of repertoire: If users are selecting their media diet, understood as a symbolic environment, through their consumption of different media and contents, it is because they are articulating hierarchies between the different media and contents offered to them. They are bringing some content closer to their lifeworld and keeping other content at a distance.

Since meta-media are heterogeneous environments, combining a wide variety of content, formats and genres, we see this kind of environment as not only organized around a cross-media logic but also serving as a hub to organize one's mediated experience. We are not claiming that meta-media have, or will, replace traditional media, but the amount of content circulating on these platforms invites reflection on the extent to which these media offer an autonomous, self-sufficient experience, satisfying, *within* one meta-medium, many of the needs that the audience has traditionally fulfilled by consuming a variety of content *across* the media landscape. It thus becomes important to understand how the interpretative activity of the user is a source of organization of the flow of content that circulates on meta-media and how this interpretative activity interacts with the technological apparatus which, together with the activity of users, directs and organizes the flow of content on meta-media.

As Facebook becomes a hub through which different aspects of everyday life and the mediated world potentially enter the consciousness of its users, we argue that the activity by which users translate their cross-media newsfeed into a meaningful flow can be taken as a site of construction of the lifeworld (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973). This is not to say that the Facebook newsfeed has replaced other sites of lifeworld construction, be they mediated or not, but that the convergence and convenience of Facebook makes it a vital site for such construction to take place.

Schutz (1970) understands 'lifeworld' as a structure of meaning that organizes perception from direct to more indirect experience. He explains that, through our encounters, we typify novel experience in an attempt to make it familiar and intelligible. We argue that the interpretative logic driving cross-media use within meta-media consists in employing a system of organization and hierarchy in order to make sense of the flow of cross-media content.

Methodology

So far, we have argued that reading, or interpretation, is a central aspect of cross-media use in meta-media. The question is how meaning contributes to the constitution of cross-media repertoires, not only as an outcome of cross-media use but also as a driving force that orients the construction of these repertoires. To explore this question empirically, we rely on the framework of reception analysis that studies the meanings that people engage with and draw from their mediated experiences (Schröder, 2016).

To address the nature of the cross-media experience as an act of reading, we take our point of departure in the reader-response theory, in particular Iser (1978). Iser conceptualizes reading as a merging of horizons, an interaction between a text, with its elements of indeterminacy, and the reader, with her frame of intertextual as well as social references. The process of reading is thus a process in which the meaning of the text is realized. Importantly, Iser (1978) provides us with a distinction between text and work that we consider relevant to the study of cross-media use. While the former is the result of a production process, the latter is its realization in the interpretative situation. In our analysis, we are thus concerned with the reading practices that users employ with the Facebook newsfeed in order to actualize the cross-media flow of diverse contents seemingly unrelated and yet supposedly relevant to them (the text), into a meaningful cross-media experience (the work).

The text presented in the newsfeed is generated according to an algorithm that, among other purposes, analyses a user's previous actions and interactions with other Facebook users and with content, although we admit that the exact logic of this algorithm is unknown to us. This is, however, not a methodological obstacle in that we study the act of reading through the subjective practice of readers, not from an objective or perspectiveless position.

Investigating Facebook's newsfeed as a cross-media text inevitably means exploring its use, and how users rely on its different technological features in order to assemble their cross-media repertoire. We turn to reader-response theory, first and foremost, to emphasize that the practice of reading, as an interpretative practice, has not fundamentally been revolutionized, nor made obsolete by digital technology. Users do not simply react to the algorithm, and their relationship to the interface is not purely mechanical or technical but also interpretational. The technological aspects of texts should be understood as belonging to the horizon of the text – what is often today called its 'affordances' (see Van Dijck, 2013a), but also to the horizon of the readers, in terms of their familiarity with, and willingness to exploit, the technological features of the text. Users have specific ideas about Facebook's interface and what they want to obtain from it, and these ideas are

shaping the ways they interact with technology. Simultaneously, these practices of use are integrated within the interpretative practices orientated towards the content itself. The assemblage of the cross-media text is thus not simply a process driven by technology but is also a sociocultural practice that demands attention be paid to the cultural implications of cross-media use.

Expatriates, people living long term in a country other than their homeland, were selected as research participants. We considered that expatriates have particular needs when it comes to organizing their social world and use Facebook for that purpose. We looked for expatriates with extensive travel experience, reasoning they would use Facebook to keep in touch with their homeland, follow news from the places they have visited and use their network to establish new connections in their country of residence. We do not wish to suggest that expatriates are more likely to be cross-media users, but that their identity as expatriates may make the varied needs concerning their use of the newsfeed more recognizable, and provide fertile terrain for our analysis.

We carried out face-to-face interviews with eleven Facebook users, six in London and five in Copenhagen, between February and April 2016. We recruited them online, posting our call within various Facebook groups. We also created a webpage with information about the research, its aims, objectives, procedures and the researchers' profiles, available for consultation by the participants. Eight women and three men in the age range of 29–45 years old responded to our invitations, representing different walks of life and origins, yet for the most a middle-class, educated group of expatriates from Western countries: Austria, Brazil, England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, New Zealand and the United States. Our objective was not to identify possible contextual determinations of uses – typical of many reception analyses – but to explore a diversity of mediating experiences. Our focus on expatriates has encouraged us to look at how this particular identity – obviously imbricated with other identities – gives rise to varied uses of the newsfeed.

The interviews were a mix of semi-structured, open questions about their profiles as expatriates, their uses, routines and impressions of Facebook, as well as a 'guided tour' of their newsfeed. Interviews lasted approximately an hour and took place in their homes or at various public places according to their preferences. All the interviews were transcribed and then analysed by us.¹

The bulk of our methodology consisted in what we call a 'commented visit of the newsfeed' (for a similar application of this strategy, see also Gallant et al., 2015), in which we asked the interviewees to verbally comment a consultation session of their newsfeed. This form of interviewing is similar to – yet not as rigid as – the think-aloud protocol used in psychology and media studies (Mathieu, 2012; Schaap, 2001), a method that asks people to verbalize their thoughts as they perform a given task. In our case, we asked Facebook users to comment on and disambiguate the different posts appearing in their newsfeed. Specifically, we asked what caught their attention, how they made their selection and how they saw the relevance of the content that was presented to them. Recognizing that the method is rather intrusive, we gave ample chance for our participants to skip over any sensitive content or withdraw completely from the interview, opportunities that none of them found it necessary to take.

We interviewed rather enthusiastic users of Facebook, but that is not to say that they were naïve or did not resist the attempts of the platform to control or commodify them. In our analysis, we looked at people's reading strategies of the Facebook newsfeed considering how different functions and cues, both textual and contextual, were used to select and interpret content. We paid particular attention to people's interpretative practices of selection and attention with the aim of identifying the kind of 'work' (as opposed to a text) that is assembled as a result of those reading strategies. Using the vocalized thoughts of the informants, we were able to gain insights into their reading practices.

The newsfeed as a site of construction of the lifeworld

For our research participants, Facebook is primarily a site of entertainment, but this should not detract us from the seriousness of the investment that users make in it. They also emphasized the convenience of Facebook, both as a medium that can be used ‘on the fly’, and as a hub for reading different kinds of content and gaining new knowledge, thereby recognizing its cross-media qualities. Our informants used Facebook to keep in touch with family and friends, especially those far away, and to stay informed about their local communities, public affairs or various events, big or small, happening in their surrounding and distant world.

In the following analysis, we explore cross-media uses from the perspective of interpretation, and not from the perspective of flow or content, as has often been the case in the literature. We present the strategies by which readers organize, prioritize and hierarchize the reading experience of their newsfeed. These diverse strategies explain how readers maintain the relevance of their newsfeed, how they achieve a personal experience and how different configurations of the newsfeed emerge from the application of interpretative strategies. Our analysis argues that readers cope with the cross-mediated features of the Facebook newsfeed, understood as a meta-medium, by applying diverse interpretative strategies. Readers do not achieve a personal experience by simply actualizing the implied reader-user presumed by Facebook (van Dijck, 2013a) but bring attentive, selective and interpretative agency to their meeting with the text of Facebook.

The typification of experience from consociates to contemporaries

In his attempt to map the social world from direct to more indirect experience, Schutz (1967) establishes a distinction between consociates, that is people, places, events and institutions with which we share our time and space, and contemporaries, expressing more distant relations up to a degree of complete anonymity. This distinction plays a vital role in the ways participants navigate their newsfeed and assess the relevance of the content they seek or are exposed to.

One main use of the newsfeed by our expat group relates to the maintenance of the actuality of the world of consociates: their family and friends at home or those met and spread across different places in the world. One user organizes her newsfeed almost exclusively around the maintenance of the world of consociates applying a very clear distinction between the two and almost completely excluding contemporaries. She explains in those terms the criteria of her selection of content:

If someone I know, but I am not in touch with, if they, let’s say, have a baby, but I would not pick up the phone to speak to them and say congratulations or send them a gift, then I probably don’t need them to be in my feed.

This participant is very clear about her willingness to share her newsfeed only with people who are important to her life right now, which makes Facebook redundant compared to other media of interpersonal communication such as the phone or email. It was expected, given our focus on expatriates, that users would relate primarily to the world of consociates, but to our surprise, a few informants distanced themselves from this practice, seeing it as superficial, irrelevant, mainstream or an invasion of privacy.

The world of contemporaries is expressed in the newsfeed through the presence of news, memes, public figures, humour, content from groups and pages concerning different communities, causes or interests, and also through the distant connections of the user. Having about 700

'friends', which was the case for some of our interviewees, some are bound to be less familiar than others. To bring some order to this, users rely on different strategies to maintain a separation between the world of consociates and contemporaries, for example, by providing some connections with restricted access to their content or by employing tactics by which they decide not to follow a particular person, or systematically ignore their posts, because they belong to the wrong type, that of contemporaries (e.g. friend of a friend).

Importantly, the world of consociates is at times the starting point from which to engage with the world of contemporaries and, as a result, expands the lifeworld of users towards the less familiar world of contemporaries. 'When something really big happens you know someone's gonna post something about it', says one interviewee who relies greatly on her consociates to mediate the world of contemporaries. Some users pushed this rationale even further by getting their news, not through news articles, but via comments and analyses provided by trusted individuals, some familiar, but others pure strangers, some of whom had obtained the status of semi-public figures.

Keeping the newsfeed relevant

In trying to relate unfamiliar or novel experiences to the realm of the familiar, what Schutz calls 'typification', the individual agent makes use of three interdependent systems of relevances: topical, interpretational and motivational (Schutz, 1970). Relevance is central to the act of reading and to the actualization of the text of the newsfeed into a work by the reader. As relevance is assessed, hierarchies of distance and closeness are articulated as a result of the user's life history, to achieve a personal, tailored experience of the newsfeed. One informant expressed this with conviction when she said: 'If I had to go and live in someone else's Facebook page it would be like hell'.

To perceive something as belonging to a certain type brings it relevance, which is what Schutz (1970) identifies as 'topical relevance'. Interpretational relevance concerns the experience and impressions that we bring into our meetings with new phenomena. When something is encountered that has previously been attributed meaning, we can use this meaning to relate to the new encounter. Motivational relevance arises when one encounters a phenomenon that is relevant in relation to our goals and plans, be they immediate, in relation to what users want to obtain from Facebook, or distant, such as life projects.

The selection of content is well topicalized on Facebook. Such relevance is achieved by signing up to (liking and following) pages and groups that correspond to existing interests or by selecting posts and friends that correspond to these topics. Users easily recognize and exploit the cues provided by Facebook in order to assess topical relevance. As such, topical relevance seems to be a fundamental way to encounter content on the newsfeed, and at the same time it encourages the selection of posts that are anticipated, with which one is already familiar.

One way in which tailoring of the Facebook newsfeed is guided by interpretational relevance is, for example, when a user reads a news item on the basis of a recommendation from a familiar or trusted person. Our informants often articulate very clearly how some characteristics of the person (e.g. 'cool', 'intelligent') are used to prompt them to read further. We regard such cases of interpretational relevance as illustrative of an interesting cross-mediation made possible by Facebook, mixing personal and mass communication. One type, which is known (a person, a group), is used to bring relevance to another type (the content of the post), which is unknown. Consider this example:

That's a friend back home, posting something. (...) When I realise [that it is] someone from Austria [posting], or one of my old friends, my old community, I look a bit more, even if what they post doesn't interest me so much. It interests me in the context of their lives.

Motivational relevance organizes the main types that are populating a person's newsfeed and accounts for a lot of the stability encountered. Here, we can trace a broad distinction between users who rely on their newsfeed to maintain a network of closed, personal connections and those who use the newsfeed to cultivate an orientation to the outside world. The effect of motivational relevance can be strongly felt in one user, who makes sure to consult not only her newsfeed but also the Facebook pages of some of the groups she is signed up to, for fear of missing discussions or information potentially valuable to her, not putting much faith in the adequacy of the Facebook algorithm to do this work.

These systems of relevance are clearly interwoven, and one relevance can easily evoke another, which is particularly the case for topical and motivational relevance (Schutz, 1970). As a result, the relevance of a post will increase. A single post can be relevant because its topic is familiar, because it is recommended by a trusted source and because one has motivation, for example related to one's profession, to be interested in the post.

Anticipated typicality can also be frustrated (Schutz, 1970), challenged or even disconfirmed by an actual post. As one informant puts it, 'What are you doing in my newsfeed?' expressing discontent about seeing content from people who are 'not part of my life'. However challenging, such encounters raise the possibility of expanding one's horizon. As Schutz says, 'what emerges as a strange experience, then, needs to be investigated, *if it is interesting enough*, because of its very unfamiliarity. It had become questionable. And therewith new topical relevances arise' (1970: 69, emphasis in original). These new encounters can give rise to an attempt to further construct one's lifeworld around a newly discovered topic and our interviews demonstrated this on more than one occasion.

Reading strategies to tailor the newsfeed

We have identified various reading strategies that are all an expression of the control that is exerted by users to keep their cross-media newsfeed relevant. These strategies allow users to tailor their reading experience by taking advantage of the *textual affordances* of the Facebook newsfeed, in particular the many tools, such as *like*, *follow*, *hide* and so on that are made available by Facebook, in relation to what we would call *contextual strategies*, which reflect the interests, motivations and attitudes of the user towards Facebook. All users attempt to control their newsfeed, although their strategies to achieve this vary tremendously; no two users are alike. These strategies are not necessarily conscious, but some are deliberate.

We present these reading strategies in terms of dichotomies, but wish to underline that these strategies are not antagonistic, and that both a strategy and its 'opposite' can be used in combination by the same user to achieve different results. Similarly, these categories are not absolute but are applied with greater or lesser intensity in different contexts. The combination of different strategies helps to explain how reading involves multiple configurations of the newsfeed. This also reveals that the newsfeed can be dynamically adapted and can evolve over time.

One of the main reading strategies – *upstream* or *downstream* – concerns readers' attempts to control a priori or a posteriori their newsfeed based on their judgements of relevance. *Upstream reading* relates to an attempt to control the flow of content before it appears on the newsfeed. Such

strategy is performed by giving hints to the assumed algorithm of Facebook, by blocking or hiding content in the hope of preventing or minimizing its presence, or conversely, securing access, making more visible or encouraging the flow of certain kinds of content from certain kinds of sources, for example by the use of *likes*. *Downstream reading* relates to the selection of content or the attribution of relevance on a momentary basis during the act of reading or consulting the newsfeed. Here, the users do not attempt to control what they are exposed to a priori. Instead, they want to remain in control of their newsfeed by limiting Facebook's intrusion into what they consider relevant, and they refuse to allow Facebook to make such decisions for them. Through their downstream strategies they thus aim for their newsfeed to remain a flow of random, untailored content to which they assign particular relevance at every visit. Both strategies are an attempt to control the newsfeed, simply actualized differently, and both strategies nod to the Facebook algorithm, simply in different ways.

Users seem to negotiate a fine balance between giving Facebook enough information or hints to tailor the newsfeed to their own identity and needs, while restraining themselves from revealing too much about themselves. All but one informant (who appeared slightly illiterate regarding Facebook in comparison with the others) were concerned about revealing aspects of their private life on Facebook. Some readers adopted a *concealing strategy*, achieved by providing minimal or inaccurate information about themselves (name, age, location or other demographic information), or by using features such as *like* and *follow* with parsimony, in order to avoid giving too much of themselves to the algorithm. By contrast, others used a *disclosing strategy* by providing extensive cues to Facebook in order to control the relevance of their posts.

The typification of incoming posts is a process that can be adjusted depending on the types that are used to control one's newsfeed. Relying on *narrow or unique types* will limit the range of posts that can be placed within the type. In contrast, relying on *broad or anonymous types* will accommodate more diverse posts. As Schutz puts it:

As regards every type, then, anonymity and fullness of content are inversely related: the more anonymous the type the greater is the number of atypical traits which the concrete experienced object will show in its uniqueness; and the fuller the content of a type, the smaller will be the number of atypical traits, but also the smaller will be the number of objects of experience which fall under such a type. (1970: 57)

For example, one of our interviewees actualized very defined interests, that is, unique types, to tightly control the presence and recognition of posts during reading, whereas other users relied on more anonymous types, and thus their newsfeed appeared more inclusive and diverse.

These different distinctions, between upstream and downstream, disclosing and concealing, as well as unique and anonymous types, help explain a contrast we observed between the newsfeed of different users. Some users display a more specialized newsfeed, focusing on few and very unique types, whereas the newsfeed of other users was more general, with a broader range of less clear types. The specialized newsfeed can be the result of a user's interests in combination with Facebook tailoring features. Liking and following similar content privilege it over other content to the point where it comes to dominate the newsfeed. We should, however, note that such specialization does not completely erase the possibility of other types, but rather minimizes their occurrence. By contrast, other users maintain a generalist newsfeed, being open to see – and perhaps to cope with – a variety of content in its diversity. These users tend to be open towards the randomness, the unexpected encounters with content that can possibly expand their horizons. They want their newsfeed to remain an open place.

Conclusion

In its adoption of reception analysis, this article underlines the important role of interpretation in the formation of cross-media repertoires *within* meta-media. As such, this study expands our understanding of cross-media uses by considering them an interpretative practice and by moving the interests of user-oriented cross-media research from a perspective *across* media to a perspective *within* meta-media.

Interpretation affects the uses of the newsfeed, even its technological aspects, as users are not simply reacting or using these technologies but are actively making sense of them. We observe that the act of reading the Facebook newsfeed is therefore not only a question of content being ignored, skipped over or noticed, read and followed. Various Facebook features (like, hide, follow, etc.) allow its users to actively indicate their preferences and to manage the actual and future content that they read. The use of these features also demonstrates reading strategies – selecting, organizing and supposedly giving Facebook full or only partial control over the collection of texts that appear on the newsfeed.

The analysis revealed how users develop contextual reading strategies that involve their interpretation of technological interfaces, their perceptions of Facebook and the social relevance of the content offered to them. By relating these reading strategies to the life history of individual users, we have been able to identify a relatively diverse and contrasting range of repertoires among our participants, in spite of a rather small sample. Clearly, interpretative practices matter for the way Facebook is turned into a relevant mediated experience and play a major role in shaping different possibilities of mediation *within* Facebook.

The findings suggest that meta-media are sites for the construction of the user's mediated lifeworld, that is, hubs through which to organize their mediated relationships with consociates and contemporaries. In forming their repertoires, users are actively involved in the process by which media serve as an intermediary between individuals and society. This appears clearly in that, as users apply different strategies to keep their cross-media newsfeed relevant, they create and maintain hierarchies between different kinds of content, allowing or preventing certain content from reaching them. Indeed, the mediation made possible by Facebook represents a form of 'public connection' (Couldry et al., 2007), although the signifier 'public' and its opposition to 'private' do not adequately reflect what is taking place on Facebook. On the contrary, the movements between consociates and contemporaries suggest that increasingly the private – the identity of the users and their life history – is the gateway to the public, and vice versa.

Compared to traditional cross-media environments, cross-media use *within* meta-media is no longer an additive process in which users rely on different media to complement each other as a way to build a coherent narrative (Jenkins, 2006) or a diversified news repertoire (Schröder and Kobbarnagel, 2010). It is a zero sum in which users, in tailoring their mediated experience, select and exclude different possibilities of mediation from entering their life. What is interesting in the analysis of cross-media use on Facebook, understood as a meta-medium, is that the construction of the mediated lifeworld takes place at one location and in negotiation with technology. The algorithm forces users to actively construct their lifeworld, and while they exert some agency in the process, as the analysis reveals, the lifeworld that they construct is also situated within the horizon of the text.

Furthermore, the symbolic significance of what users achieve in reading their newsfeed, the construction of their mediated lifeworld, provides an important rationale with which to understand the formation of cross-media repertoires *within* meta-media. We regard Schutz's (1970) theory of the organization of social experience to be a useful framework with which to understand the

symbolic dimension of cross-media use *within* meta-media such as Facebook. The perception and organization of the social world provide a useful framework with which to understand cross-media uses, as the repertoires that users form are an expression of their mediated lifeworld. Our suggestion introduces a greater consideration for the sociocultural aspects of cross-media uses and the role of media in society than a purely psychological or individualistic perspective allows (see Schröder, 2011).

In light of these concluding remarks, we urge further research to explore more fully the role of user's interpretative practices in cross-media environments, in meta-media, and more generally, in their interaction with technology.

Note

1. Given the limitations of the format of this article, we will mainly convey our findings or conclusions, rather than extensively reporting the data we have collected; however, we can make our data, in the form of anonymized interview transcripts, available on request.

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