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SCHOLARSHIP

JAMES FREDERICK TRACY

REKINDLING CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS: THE DUBUQUE LEADER, 1935-1940

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA 2002.

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This dissertation is a study of the Dubuque Leader (Leader) labour newspaper, its discourse and operation, and the role it played in the resurgence of the labour movement in Dubuque and eastern Iowa in the late 1930s. The study seeks to explore how the journalism of the Leader and the activities of its editors were central to the fostering of a working class consciousness in Dubuque. It also attempts to understand the various ways the newspaper functions as a medium of communication, representation, and meaning making within the local and regional labour movement, and how it emboldens the movement in Dubuque and eastern Iowa. Critical social theory is used as a basis to examine how the Leader participates in fostering working class consciousness in Dubuque and the region. Class consciousness, or a collective sense of common and shared purposes and goals, necessarily preceded and contributed to labour union organisation and activities. In 1930s Dubuque, the agenda of organised labour was at odds with the prerogatives of the ownership and management of elite interests dominating the city's economy. The Leader aided in facilitating the labour movement's political viability and realising its power at the workplace and in local government.

The dissertation critically examines historical documents, including oral histories, correspondence of the Leader's editors, and the discourse of the newspaper, to understand how during in this period the paper acted to raise the consciousness which fostered the Dubuque labour movement's important victories.

In late 1935 a small group of college-educated and working class intellectuals moved from various parts of Iowa to Dubuque and pooled their organising talents and financial resources to orchestrate the purchase of the Leader from its sole proprietor and editor. A major figure in this association, Archie Carter, whose background in bookkeeping, politics, and journalism, made him an informed and efficient business manager and editor, was also central to the Leader's success. Carter conceived of a plan whereby the paper would be operated by and answerable to a non-profit, worker-owned co-operative, the Iowa Co-operative Publishing Company. This very ownership, which was first seen in Dubuque and throughout Iowa in the late 1880s during the brief reign of the Knights of Labour, contributed to the paper's unusual journalistic freedom and appeal. Throughout the late 1930s Carter and his editorial assistant, Roland White, served Dubuque's labour movement and working class community with a combination of revealing reportage and fierce editorials critiquing the city's corrupt political and industrial leadership, which was comprised of a small assemblage of covetous factory owners and well-heeled

businessmen. The newspaper rode the tide of national labour organising characteristic of the period and contributed to a marked change in the city's retrograde political economy. For example, between 1936 and 1938 the Teamsters union organised the city's truck-drivers, the city's woodworking mills were fully unionised, and the National Labour Relations Board sent representatives to Dubuque at employees' behest to investigate employer interference with labour organisation. Carter also took part in organising drives, thus occupying the interstices between labour journalism and events covered by it. In addition, Carter and the Leader played key roles in orchestrating two city elections where — for the first time in over twenty years — labour consecutively ran its own ticket of representatives and seized control of the city council from a business-friendly and subservient political machine. Between 1935 and 1938 the Leader's readership had grown by almost ten times, to over 3,000, and was the second-highest readership of any labour newspaper in Iowa. In early 1938 the Iowa Co-operative obtained the deed to the newspaper. Also in 1938 Carter, who was a possible choice to be appointed city manager, was arrested on a sodomy charge and given a ten-year sentence in state prison.

The labour community soon rallied to Carter's defence, contending that he been framed and railroaded through the court system. Carter's cohorts used the Leader to plead Carter's case in the court of public opinion, observing that Carter's case was one, which involved the very basic civil liberties guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

In late 1938 Carter was temporarily released from prison pending a court appeal or pardon. Throughout 1939 Carter wrote as a correspondent for the Leader, as he and White collaborated further on building the Leader's readership; an Eastern Iowa edition of the weekly was launched in March of that year. Despite national support and requests from individuals and labour unions for Carter's official vindication from the charge, which allowed the state to put him behind bars, he returned to prison in late 1939 to serve five years of a ten-year sentence. Excepting over two years of military service, White continued to work at and serve as editor of the Leader until 1962. Although the Iowa Co-operative Publishing Company was dissolved in the 1980s, the Dubuque Leader issues a weekly edition to this day.

Several conclusions pertaining specifically to journalism and mass communication in late capitalism may be drawn from such a historical analysis of a co-operatively-owned labour newspaper. Most important is the observation of the present plight of advertiser-driven journalism, particularly in the United States, which purportedly seeks to serve the public through projects of "civic" or "public" journalism, while neglecting to address the many constraints on editorial and investigative freedom private ownership and commercial orientation pose.

ULLA BUNZ

USABILITY AND GRATIFICATIONS: EFFECTIVE WEBSITE COMMUNICATION THROUGH AN AUDIENCE-CENTERED WEBSITE ANALYSIS MODEL

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS, DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION, 2002

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The fast transmission of information across distances has always been of great importance, especially in times of crises or war. It was the idea of being able to exchange information even if common communication channels broke down that spurred the development of a network of networks, the Internet. Just as the Internet itself is composed of several different technologies, including the web, usenet, chat, email, etc., so are these components utilised for a variety of purposes.

Focusing on the web as one Internet technology, the purpose of this dissertation program was to investigate effective website communication. The approach taken was to look at users' website assessment and the factors that affect this assessment. Specifically, usability based on literature defined criteria, user perceived usability, technological fluency, personal needs, social constructivist influences, and overall human communication factors were examined. Final conclusions showed that all of these factors influence effective website communication to varying degrees.

For the purpose of this dissertation, six studies were conducted, using multiple methods including Q-methodology for item development, scale development, heuristic usability testing, thinking-aloud usability testing, concurrent written protocol usability testing, content analysis, and survey research.

In this series of studies, the fluency research was conducted first. A review of related literature showed a lack of instruments devoted to measuring email, Internet or web skills. Three fluency studies were conducted to construct and validate a Computer-Email-Web (CEW) fluency scale. Initial research showed the 21-item scale to be reliable and valid. However, the scale might be better described as a "Basic CEW fluency" scale as it does not test advanced skills. Throughout the research process, fluency emerged as an issue that warrants further investigation on its own.

Following the fluency research, two usability pilot studies were conducted. The purpose of the non-expert pilot, conducted using thinking-aloud methods, was to provide an evaluation of websites based on personal and informal usability criteria, from which the open-ended questions for the main study's questionnaire were developed. The purpose of the expert pilot, conducted using heuristic and survey methods, was to evaluate websites based on literature defined and formal usability criteria, and to rank websites according to their usability levels. Secondly, the purpose of the expert ranking was to verify the researcher's own ranking of the websites, and to investigate whether experts and non-experts evaluated the usability of the websites similarly according to perceived usability level.

The main part of this dissertation research utilised a two-part questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire investigated subjects' CEW fluency, technological expertise, and computer-mediated communication competence. The second part investigated subjects' website assessment, combining quantitative and open-ended questions. Taking an audience-centred approach, analysis explains that a user's perception of website usability and/or a user's website evaluation depends on several factors. Personal audience needs influence search and browse behaviour, and web users' willingness to read provided information rather than responding to visual cues. Actual usability level and perceived level of website usability matched for seven out of nine tested websites. Results showed that website assessment is negatively affected for web users who score low on technological fluency indicating that usability level of a website makes no difference for web users with medium or high fluency skill. Only web users with low technological fluency are affected by website usability levels. Factors such as gender and length of Internet use had no effect on website evaluation.

However, results showed that usability level does influence involvement and motivation a user feels towards a website. Motivation and involvement scores tended to be higher for the websites with high usability level. Thus, one could say that higher usability level of websites might make a difference in users' ability to use the website only for low fluency people, but does make a difference in overall willingness to use a website, or enjoyment of using a website. It can be hypothesised that higher motivation and involvement with a website are better predictors of returning to a website than ease of use. This hypothesis requires additional testing.

Regarding specific usability criteria, subjects, for example, praised the existence of photographs, but still criticised the kind of photographs provided. Similarly, though depth of information was generally considered a very positive attribute of a website, at times the amount of information was called overwhelming. Not surprisingly, web users want just the "right" kind and amount of information presented in just the "right" way and supplemented by the "right" kind of pictures. Audience-centred usability research dedicates itself to finding out what this "right" entails. An additional important criterion was personal interest. Personal interest needs to be considered, and personal interest might be the criterion that decides what is "right" or not. It is quite possible that we will never be able to develop an ideal website through which we can communicate effectively to every member in our intended audience.

The usability literature acknowledges that people use the web for different purposes, and that different tasks lead to different usability evaluations. Overall, the research of this dissertation program expands on literature that focuses on technological, website related factors determining website assessment. The dissertation research proposes that effective website design and effective website communication depend on communication related factors, such as involvement, motivation, interest, fluency, perception, construction of meaning, and need gratification. This work assumes that websites differ from other communication tools in that they are interactive, constantly change, and, while there are guidelines for effective website design, usability principles alone are not enough to assure that users obtain what they need, and that website audiences are communicated to and with effectively.