“Making ‘The Daily Me’: Technology, economics and habit in the mainstream assimilation of personalized news”

IAMCR Annual Conference, Portugal, 18-22 July 2010

Neil Thurman
Definitions


News Personalization: A Definition

“A form of user-to-system interactivity that uses a set of technological features to adapt the content, delivery, and arrangement of a communication to individual users’ explicitly registered and / or implicitly determined preferences”
‘The Daily Me’: has its time come?

“The new heart of the homepage is something we call ‘News for you’: a stream of headlines automatically tailored to your interests.”

—The Official Google Blog, June 2010
‘The Daily Me’: has its time come?

"World's First Individualised Newspaper to Launch"
—MediaBizNet, October, 2009
Lack of scholarship

“work has yet to address fully the more contemporary trends towards . . . personalization”

Barbie Zelizer, 2009
Qualitative Interviews
Two forms of personalization

1. **Explicit personalization**—readers register their own content preferences

2. **Implicit personalization**—readers’ content preferences determined for them, by software
Explicit Personalization: RSS feeds

Three in four UK voters believe climate change is important problem – poll

17:02 15/12/2009, Tom Clark, climate change, climate change scepticism, conservatives, copenhagen climate change conference 2009, david cameron, editorial, environment, global climate talks, gordon brown, green politics, labour, opinion polls, politics, the guardian, uk news, Politics: Labour + Climate change | guardian.co.uk

New Guardian/ICM survey shows Britons overwhelmingly reject view that Copenhagen conference is panicking about an exaggerated threat

Three in four British voters believe Gordon Brown and world leaders are on an important mission at the climate change conference in Copenhagen, according to a new Guardian/ICM poll.

Voters overwhelmingly reject the view of climate change sceptics that world leaders "are panicking about an exaggerated threat". But close to half of the electorate believes that the leaders – including Brown, who arrives at the summit today – need to worry about economic growth, too.

When ICM asked voters to say which of three statements most closely represented their view, 45% agreed that "world leaders are trying to tackle an important problem but they must not lose sight of the need to maintain human prosperity".
Explicit Personalization: RSS feeds

Drive 3% of traffic at BBC News website

“Poor quality . . . lumpy feeds”, problems with the accuracy of publication times, some didn’t work—Ed Roussel, Telegraph.co.uk

“The heat and light has been created by consumers of vast amounts of information who want to keep track of 250 sites a day . . . Levels of consumption among normal people are completely different”
—Neil McIntosh, Guardian.co.uk
Explicit Personalization: Email newsletters

Manage all alerts sent to you by the Financial Times in one place

Keyword alerts  Company news & price alerts  Portfolio & index alerts

Welcome to the Alerts Hub

Please confirm your delivery preferences before setting up alerts.

Keyword alerts  Create a keyword alert

Alerting by keyword allows you to keep track of FT stories published about specific topics. Get notified via email when articles are published.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Delivered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Green Stimulus” AND Obama</td>
<td>Immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vodafone AND iPhone NOT AT&amp;T</td>
<td>Immediately</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Alerts will be delivered within the hour of the requested time
Paddy Allen, Jessica Abdel and Roger Teeth
guardian.co.uk, Friday 29 January 2010 12.13 GMT

Wren

The wren has a powerful voice for its tiny size - when it sings its whole body quivers with the effort. Individual songs and volumes vary, but generally the song begins with a few preliminary notes, then runs into a trill, slightly ascending, and ends in full clear notes or another trill.
Photograph: Getty
Explicit Personalization: ‘Non-linear interactives’

How Would You Cut $591 Million From the D.C. Budget?

The District of Columbia is in the process of balancing its budget for fiscal 2010 in a year when, because of the poor economy, it will collect 13 percent less revenue than the $5.8 billion necessary to keep spending on services at the current level. Mayor Adrian M. Fenty (D) recently proposed a budget of $5.4 billion that combines spending reductions with increases of some taxes and fees to close the city’s $777 million revenue gap. So how would you handle the budget? Set your revenue and spending priorities below — balancing the budget to within $50 million — then save it and compare it with other readers’ decisions. (Note: Potential budget impacts are meant only as examples and may not reflect city budgeting priorities.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenues (In millions)</th>
<th>Proposed Budget</th>
<th>Your Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income Taxes</td>
<td>$1,486</td>
<td>$1,412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,486</td>
<td>(-$74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Taxes</td>
<td>$1,854</td>
<td>$1,854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and Excise Taxes</td>
<td>$870</td>
<td>$870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>$1,021</td>
<td>$1,021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$5,231</td>
<td>$5,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(-$74)</td>
<td>(-$74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Income Taxes**

This includes taxes taken out of personal income, taxes on corporations, and the franchise tax on unincorporated businesses. It generally is the most progressive (or least flat) tax.

*2009 Budget for this Area: $1,487M | 2010 Preliminary Budget: $1,486M*

- **MAJOR DECREASE**
  - **Cut to $1,263M**
    - City could drop the franchise tax entirely.
    - Alternately, it could apply to personal and corporate taxes. It could encourage consumer spending and make the city more enticing as a place to locate a business.

- **MINOR DECREASE**
  - **Cut to $1,412M**
    - A 6 percent cut would require trimming another $74 million from the budget, and might increase city layoffs.
    - It might also prevent some small businesses from closing and could reduce consumer spending and cause more businesses to leave the District.

- **MINOR INCREASE**
  - **Increase to $1,560M**
    - An additional $74 million would allow the city to retain more employees and programs currently facing cuts, such as health clinics in northeast Washington.
  - **Increase to $1,709M**
    - Increasing income taxes by 15 percent would cover more than a third of the District’s budget gap.
    - Increasing the income tax burden significantly could negatively impact the city’s middle-class residents.

**Current Funding: $1,487M**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REVENUES</th>
<th>EXPENDITURES</th>
<th>BALANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$5,157M</td>
<td>$5,822M</td>
<td>-$665M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You have a deficit.
Explicit Personalization: ‘Non-linear interactives’

“Enormously popular”—Steve Herrmann, BBC News website

‘A priority’—Guardian.co.uk, Sky News online

‘Flash skills in demand’—Neil McIntosh, Guardian.co.uk
Explicit Personalization: Personalizable mobile editions
Explicit Personalization: ‘Widgets’

Build Your Times Widget

1 Select from the list of options below.

Browse
Home Page

Search 10,000+ NYTimes feeds
/topics.nytimes.com/top/news/national

2 View your widget.

- Recombobulate America
- Bringing Sexy Back
- In Speech, Obama to Admit Missteps in First Year
- Opposite of Cold
- Adults Only, Please
- Lawmakers Hunt for Ways to Rekindle Hiring
- Democrat Put Lower Priority on Health Bill
- Obama’s Measures for Middle Class
- Bernanke’s Gaining Supporters
- Obama to Seek Spending Cuts to Trim Deficits
Explicit Personalization: ‘SMS alerts’

Create Keyword Alert

**STEP 1: DEFINE YOUR ALERT**

**WITH ALL** of the words or phrases

- Soccer
  
  Example: If you are interested in jazz music, enter: Jazz

**AND WITH ANY** of the words or phrases

- Norwich City
  
  Example: Specifically, about live jazz performances. Enter Birdland, "Blue Note"

**AND WITHOUT ANY** of the words or phrases

- Arsenal
  
  Example: But you don't want any articles about the Utah Jazz. Enter basketball, Utah

**Narrow your topic to articles in one or more sections:** (optional, but recommended)

- International
- National / Washington
- Business / Technology
- Science
- Health
- Sports
- New York Region
- Education
- Obituaries
- Editorial / Op-Ed
- Letters
- Arts / Movies
- Books
- Travel
- Dining & Wine
- Home & Garden
- Fashion & Style / Weddings
- Magazine
- Week in Review
- Automobiles
- Real Estate

---

**My Account FAQs**

- How to Read Your Password
- How to Change Your E-Mail Address
- How to Subscribe / Unsubscribe to E-Mail
- Order Home Delivery
- How to Update Your Personal Information

**Contact Us**

- NYTimes.com
- Home Delivery

**Tips for Defining Your Alert**

- Use quotes around phrases and names.
- Avoid common words like “and”, “the” and “or”.
- Commas are optional. (If you use commas with the quotation marks, put the comma outside the quotation marks).
- Any field you leave blank will be ignored.
Explicit Personalization: ‘Homepage customization’
Explicit Personalization: ‘Homepage customization’

“Probably the most popular thing we’ve launched over the last year or so in terms of user feedback”—Pete Clifton, BBC News website
Implicit Personalization: ‘Aggregated collaborative filtering’
Implicit Personalization: Contextual recommendations—from links to...

FROM OTHER NEWS SITES
- Globe Investor China's economy soars - 3 hrs ago
- People's Daily Online Economy soars, sets stage for more tightening - 5 hrs ago
- Yahoo! News China economy soars, sets stage for policy tightening - 7 hrs ago
- South China Morning Post China GDP growth hits 8.7pc, becomes world's second largest economy - 8 hrs ago
- Sydney Morning Herald China's turbo growth fans inflation fears - 9 hrs ago
- About these results

moreover technologies
more news more social more often

The University for business and the professions
Implicit Personalization: Contextual recommendations

...full ‘topic pages’

**daylife** Organizing and distributing the world’s news
Implicit Personalization: Contextual recommendations

Full ‘topic pages’
Implicit Personalization: Contextual recommendations
Qualitative research interviews

Uptake of explicit personalization:

“Single digit take-up”—Guardian.co.uk

“Hard to quantify”—Telegraph.co.uk

“Very, very little update”—WashingtonPost.com & NYTimes.com
Qualitative research interviews

Uptake of explicit personalization:

“deeply ingrained habits of passive, half-attentive media use”
—Neuman (1991)

Implicit personalization is “more likely to be used and . . . Perform as well or better than those that require . . . explicit feedback to be collected”—Gauch (2007)
Qualitative research interviews

Readers’ ability to predict their content preferences:

“If you determine in advance who ‘The Daily Me’ is . . . Then you may miss some of the important things that you didn’t know you were”
—Rich Meislin, NYTimes.com

Because news topics emerge continuously, readers’ interests change frequently, therefore explicit profiles tend not to work well
—Billsus & Pazzani (2007)
Qualitative research interviews

Journalists’ editing function

“Readers want someone to do some of the filtering work for them”
—Neil McIntosh, Guardian.co.uk

“If there’s anything we have its our judgement about what people are interested in”
—Anne Spackman, TimesOnline.co.uk
Qualitative research interviews

Personalization: positive attitudes

“Extremely important”
—Steve Bennedik, Sky News; Almar Latour, WSJ.com

Will become “as big as blogging”
—Ed Roussel, Telegraph.co.uk

Personalization: commercial drivers

“The Daylife platform offers unlimited, high-quality, and advertiser-friendly news and content for your website . . . all with little or no staffing.”
—Daylife

“We will deliver the best campaign . . . and the most relevant content individualised to the tastes and needs of every consumer”
—Aggregate Knowledge
Implicit Personalization

Data on individual user behaviour

Story content  
User profiles  
User demographics  
User location  
Data on aggregated user behaviour  
Classification / indexing decisions

Algorithms

Web page display

The University for business and the professions
Implicit personalization: increasing content diversity?
Neil Thurman