

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the Chinese online readers' reading patterns of the Chinese online newspaper homepages. After a thorough literature review, theoretical reason one for conducting this study is that the usability study could not be directly quoted into the online newspaper research areas and the online readers' reading patterns are not thoroughly explored. Reason two is that Chinese online newspapers are significantly different in certain aspects of webpage designs from overseas Chinese online newspapers and English online newspapers, but there is almost no study done in such an area that shows how Chinese online newspaper homepages affect Chinese online readers. In practical terms this paper sheds light on the Chinese online readers' reading patterns and could provide advice to the Chinese online newspaper designers to revise the current designs.

Homepage in this paper is referring to all the pages set as the first page either to the whole newspaper website or to the every one of categorized pages (e.g. economical news homepage, political news homepage). In order to find out the significant difference among Chinese online newspaper homepages, overseas Chinese online newspaper homepages and English online newspaper homepages, a content analysis was carried out. The variables are the certain components of homepages. A fractional factorial experiment of 2^{6-3} 's design is to be done to test the hypotheses of this study. Independent variables are color number, graphic number, graphic size, abstract number, window sequence, multimedia number, page length and navigation bar position. Moreover, only the variable navigation bar position has three levels. All others have two levels each. The dependent variable is reading pattern, measured by the number of clicks, content (number of news headlines and number of initial words recalled), length of reading time and reading preference (to what degree readers agree with statements in the questionnaire and are satisfy with certain homepage designs).

Except for the hypotheses of navigation bar position, all the hypotheses testing

Chinese online readers' reading preference are supported (three of them are partially supported, two of them are reversely supported), which means the answers of readers' evaluations on homepage and of readers' self report likeness are either very much conformable with or collide with the current Chinese online newspaper design. A very strong psychological impact on readers can be found.

Five out of six hypotheses of news recall is partially supported (the one of graphic size and news recall is not verified). That it to say, the design of Chinese online newspaper does affect readers' memory of the contents of news headline either by quantity or by accuracy. We could say that readers' performance is also influenced by the design to some degree though not as greatly as their preference is.

Among twelve hypotheses devoting to investigate how readers' behaviors are according to different homepages, only two of them are supported (reversely). Moreover, the two are both of one independent variable page length. The design of Chinese online newspaper homepage design almost does not affect readers' reading behaviors or the time spent on these behaviors.

Totally, 13 hypotheses are supported, fully, partially or reversely. The rest of 17 hypotheses are not supported at all. We could see from all the results that Chinese online newspaper homepage designs affect Chinese online readers reading pattern in a more psychologically way than a behavioral way.

This paper argues a question from a very specific perspective. An online newspaper homepage with more color or more graphic or larger graphic or shorter page or more news abstracts or more multimedia files and pop-up window types and mixed side navigation bar would attract more readers, these could provide suggestions to designers of how to arrangement these elements separately. For instance, when encountered with a competitor of the similar condition in homepage design, designers of online newspaper may analyze

problems from these respects and modify their current design according to these data.

But as I mentioned before, this experiment only test the effects each independent variable has on online reading patterns, the interactions between each independent variables are not considered. If those are included, the results may be enriched a lot. There might be some more new questions worth testing, for example, would readers click more on a homepage with larger and more graphics at the same time? Will readers click more on a homepage with more color, more graphic and larger graphics? Even though these are just research questions or assumptions, they show how much work can be done continuously about this topic.