BBC Feed

A Novel Interface for News Consumption Inspired by Social Media

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1 Research Question

How could social media delivery techniques be used in a digital news consumption platform to increase user engagement?

2 Aims and Objectives

2.1 Project Overview

This project aims to improve upon the flexibility and user engagement of traditional online news platforms, specifically those used by BBC News. The digital news landscape is changing rapidly, a report from Ofcom found that people in the UK are increasingly using digital platforms to consume news, often through the use of social media. This project proposes that adapting user interface techniques from social media and applying them to a news app would help to keep users on the news platform. The system created will also aim to be flexible so that it can adapt to future changes in the digital news world.

The project will be content-agnostic so that it can work with any future media that may be devised. To achieve this the project will be divided into three parts: the feed, the catalogue and the scrapers. The feed will be an app that users can interact with. It will need to intelligently select content from the catalogue and present it to the user for consumption. The catalogue will store content that can be displayed, this will aim to be fast to access, and well organised to ensure a smooth flow of content to the users. The scrapers will create the content for the catalogue by connecting to various BBC news data sources. They will read this content, translate it into a form suitable for the catalogue and store it. Each one will have to be custom made for the various content sources.

2.2 Key Terminology

2.3 Deliverables and Goals

The deliverables for this project will be the three components highlighted above, as well as all documentation require to understand, maintain, deploy and use

the system. The documentation will be provided as HTML pages alongside documentation within the codebase. All code produced will be written in Python.

2.3.1 The Feed

This deliverable will be a Python Flask application that can either be run locally or deployed to a web server. It will have accompanying scripts that install any pre-requisites for running the application. This deliverable will depend on having a valid catalogue to read from. If the hosted catalogue is unavailable there will be options to read from a local version.

2.3.2 The Catalogue

This deliverable will take the form of an SQL database schema. The database that it describes will be hosted on an AWS RDS instance. As this may not be available at all times the feed deliverable will have the ability to deploy a local database the read from instead.

2.3.3 The Scrapers

This part of the project consists of several independent scripts, each will be tailored to a specific BBC data source. The specifics for language, running and hosting will vary between the scripts. They will each come with appropriate documentation.

2.4 Out of Scope Issues

This project is primarily focused on the engineering challenges of developing this system, as such it will not be attempting to measure user experiences in any way. The project will also not explore algorithms for choosing which content to display to users, it will however provide capacity for this functionality to be added at a later date. These topics are highly important to the problem space being explored, however they each could constitute a project in their own right and would spread the focus of this project too thin. These two issues would

make for excellent follow up projects however so some comments may be made where relevant to future research.

3 Background and Rationale

3.1 Overview of the Problem Space

Modern news consumption started with the newspaper. Despite moving to online platforms these roots can still be seen in the user interfaces of digital news platforms such as the BBC News website and mobile app. These interfaces broadly function by providing categories of content to browse, this makes these interfaces good for researching topics and for getting an overview of recent news within a topic [1]. Social media instead often delivers content to users through an infinitely scrolling feed. This style of interface fits well with short bursts of interaction, such as while waiting for a kettle to boil or waiting for a bus. In these scenarios users often want to consume content without having to choose a category or risk running out of content.

This style of interface removes the need for the end user to decide what content they consume at the point of consumption, instead they control what content is presented to them by following, liking, subscribing to or otherwise choosing to receive content from a number of sources. From this user input a social media platform will choose exactly which content to provide to a user, and in which order. The specifics of how these decisions are made are closely guarded secrets, and as such will not be investigated here.

It is preferential to deliver news to users on a first party platform, such as the app or website of the news producer. This gives the producers of the content more control over how it is presented and consumed. T

3.2 Previous Work in the Field

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References

[1] dummy. dummy, dummy.