

losses in penetration of the print product and share of the advertising pie, and difficulties in attracting and retaining younger readers) have not gone unnoticed by decision makers. These indicators have been linked to broader socioeconomic trends that have compromised the long-term viability of ink on paper as a delivery vehicle since the 1960s, such as rising newsprint and distribution costs, growing segmentation of consumption patterns, and the increased appeal of audiovisual media among younger generations.

In this socioeconomic context, it is not surprising that in the early 1980s American dailies began to experiment with personal computers, television, facsimile, and even regular telephones as alternative means of providing information to the general public. But none of these initiatives moved far beyond the experimental domain for more than 10 years. It was with the popularization of the World Wide Web around 1995 that millions of Americans began to get the news online, thus furnishing a hospitable context for the first widely adopted nonprint newspaper. This congruence of pressure to exploit the print business and pressure to innovate in the nonprint domain makes online papers a decisive case of how established media deal with new technologies.

The main thesis that results from this inquiry is synthesized in this chapter's title, "Emerging Media." It is that new media emerge by merging existing social and material infrastructures with novel technical capabilities, a process that also unfolds in relation to broader contextual trends. More specifically, online newspapers have emerged by merging print's unidirectional and text-based traditions with networked computing's interactive and (more recently) multimedia potentials. This has occurred partly as a reaction to major socioeconomic and technological trends, such as a changing competitive scenario and developments in computers and telecommunications—trends that, in turn, online newspapers have influenced. In contrast with the discourse about revolutionary effects that has been prevalent in the dominant modes of understanding online technologies and the web, my analysis shows innovations unfolding in a more gradual and ongoing fashion and being shaped by various combinations of initial conditions and local contingencies.

Beyond the specifics of online newspapers, this book's main thesis underscores the heuristic value of looking at history, locality, and process in the emergence of a new medium. A historical perspective helps the analyst to elicit the influence of extended longitudinal patterns in the ways actors deal with new technologies, thus achieving a more sophisticated assessment of continuities and discontinuities in media evolution.

A focus on local dynamics invites scrutiny of the contextually contingent factors that shape actors' appropriation of novel artifacts as well as their experience of the relevant trends in the larger socioeconomic and technological milieu. An emphasis on process contributes to making more visible the ongoing practices that generate the occasionally anticipated but more often unforeseen consequences of technological change.

In one of the earliest sociological accounts of print newspapers, Robert Park wrote: "The first newspaper in America . . . was published by the postmaster. The village post office has always been a public forum, where all the affairs of the nation and the community were discussed. It was to be expected that there, in close proximity to the sources of intelligence, if anywhere, a newspaper would spring up." (1925, pp. 276–277)

The once-new technology that evolved to become an established mass medium has recently begun to appropriate the first widely adopted nonprint publishing alternative in almost 300 years, and the first major new medium since the advent of television. This has triggered all sorts of speculations about upcoming transformations, such as the death of print, the replacement of newspaper companies by multimedia firms, the demise of gatekeeping, and the rise of nonlinear storytelling. However, what will ultimately spring up out of this appropriation is to us hardly as foreseeable as subsequent transformations in the postal system and the then-nascent mass medium were to readers of the first American newspaper at the dawn of the eighteenth century. What is certain, though, is that analyzing the practices that enact these transformations will help us understand how they occur, as well as the consequences they may have for the media industry and the society in which it exists.

In the remainder of this chapter, to further situate this book's argument, I look more closely at the object of inquiry, introduce the theoretical and methodological tools employed to study it, and outline the content of the chapters to come.

From Ink on Paper to Pixels on a Screen

The print newspaper is one of the oldest elements of the contemporary media landscape. According to Smith (1979), the first daily publication was *Einkommende Zeitung* [*Incoming News*], established by the bookseller Timotheus Ritzsch in Leipzig in 1650. The first issue of a print paper in what would become the United States was published 40 years later, when Benjamin Harris launched *Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestick* in Boston (Mott 1962). That was also the last issue of *Publick Occurrences*.