

The Mutual Shaping of Technology in a News Establishment:
Social journalism and organizational change

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Abstract

Efforts to understand the relationship between technological change and organizational change in the journalism industry have taken on a new meaning over the past decade. The survival of professional news organizations may rely on their ability to manage technological change. This dissertation proposes the use of the mutual shaping of technology (MST) construct, based on the Diffusion of Innovations theoretical paradigm, as a means to examine the relationship between technological and organizational change in a newsroom. The MST construct imagines a dynamic relationship between efforts to diffuse technological innovations and efforts to shape those innovations, both in terms of physical design changes and abstract, socially constructed meanings.

The MST construct is applied to the introduction and development of an innovative journalism platform, featuring social networking tools and a level of citizen participation that is rarely seen, in a news organization with more than 100 years of experience publishing a newspaper. I use the five levels of analysis from Shoemaker's hierarchical model to organize my discussion of this extreme case. Using data from in-depth interviews, I explore the introduction, adoption and iterative development of this news platform and related organizational change. I then ask if such a platform is sustainable economically and analyze institutional influences that may aid or inhibit growth. I also compare the model to the ideal models discussed and tested in the public journalism movement and to the model some scholars consider the highest ideal—Habermas' public sphere.