

Research Shows Multimedia Can Help Report Complex News

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Assistant Professor Ron Yaros paid his dues as a journalist - working in the midwest from Michigan to Wisconsin and Missouri. He covered science, technology and health. But he wanted more. "I realized that there might be additional opportunities to learn better ways to communicate this complex information to the public," he says.

So he returned to school, got his Ph.D. in 2005, and landed at the University of Utah where his Lab for Communicating Complexity with Multimedia was born. This past fall, Yaros moved to Maryland and brought his research and lab with him to the Philip Merrill College of Journalism.

Yaros says that while there's some really interesting technology out there today, he's much more focused on the future.

"I'm really looking at the next generation," he says. "They're much more comfortable now with much of this technology, if not all of it... And I'm really intrigued about how they are going to contribute to the development of this technology and how it will morph in the future to better inform the public."

Prof. Yaros says the future holds the promise of larger amounts of news with multimedia content - everything from video to audio podcasts, blogs and more - done in many cases by a single reporter on the street. But will consumers have the time to read, listen and view all this material? Yaros says the key there is personalization of the news -

personalized delivery of content. "It really hasn't taken off in the sense that the mass media are embracing it, but there are clear indications in my research that personalization will continue to grow and that in time, it will be expected - perhaps demanded by an audience that really wants fine-tuned information to their interests and their timeframe."

Some of the take-aways from recent research:

- Health reporters are doing a great job - but need to use more graphics and other multimedia to explain complex topics.
- Less text may actually be more when including multimedia in stories.
- The financial crisis points to the need for media to do a better, more comprehensive job describing and personalizing what is happening and why.
- There's a need for even more research on how to structure complex news.

Provided by University of Maryland

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