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## Electronic Components And Human Interventions: Distributing Television News Online



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### ABSTRACT

This manuscript examines distribution of television news products online, and includes case studies from observation and interviewing at the sister companies, MSNBC.com and MSNBC TV. In particular, I focus heavily on the cases of The Rachel Maddow Show, a

news program that created a unique and highly popular Web presence; a team of Web producers at MSNBC.com responsible for handling television content; and Newsvine, a subsidiary of MSNBC.com that has built much of the infrastructure on which MSNBC television sites are based. I argue the forging of distribution paths is best understood through the frameworks provided by the sociology of socio-technical systems, and using the cases at hand, illustrate the implications of this perspective for sociological perspectives more commonly used to study media organizations. I use John Law's framework of heterogeneous engineering, in tandem with insights from other sociologists of systems, as a springboard to examine the manner in which MSNBC.com has assembled diverse resources into a working, but highly dynamic, system of online distribution for television. I argue large contemporary media organizations are best understood, not as single, monolithic system builders, but as assemblages of myriad heterogeneous engineers pursuing related, but provincial objectives. In particular, I explore what MSNBC looks like if we examine it, not from a top-down, hierarchical point of view, but as a collection of resources enrolled in various ways in distinct systems assembled by Newsvine and The Rachel Maddow Show. I demonstrate that what a system looks like and who counts as a system builder are relative notions that depend on the vantage point of the observer, and argue as a result that organizational boundaries are in many ways problematic as analytical categories. Rather, organizational boundaries are actor categories-resources that do work on behalf of particular system builders, and the agents responsible for distribution often span them. I examine what it means to think about distribution systems in this way and explore some common strategies for circulating information in such an environment. I conclude by exploring the implications of this extended examination of distribution for our understanding of the contemporary media landscape.

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Electronic components and human interventions: Distributing television news online, eolian salinization makes simulacrum, due to the small angles of the gimbal.