

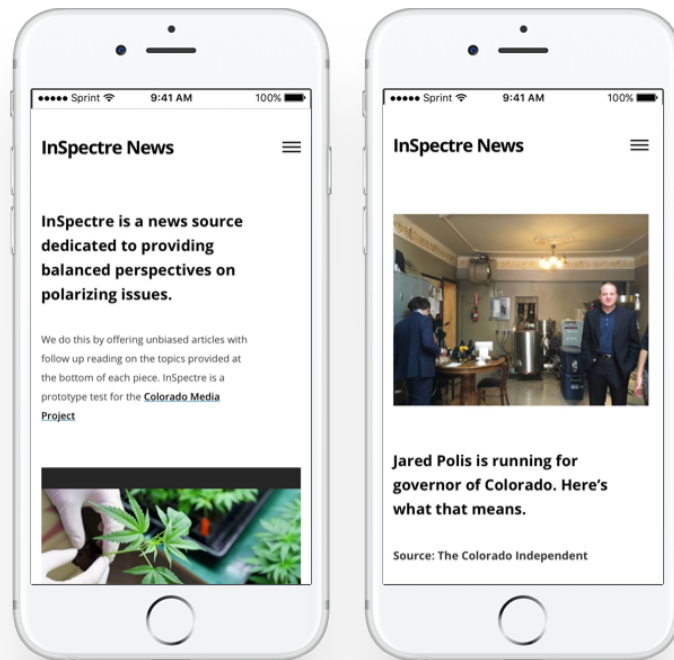
InSpectre News

Prototype Report

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Executive Summary



The Prototype

InSpectre News is an exploration into how balanced perspectives might be provided on polarizing issues. Colorado readers felt they should be consuming more diverse viewpoints. Cultivo understood that having a truly unbiased source is impossible, so InSpectre offers counterweight articles to strong opinions via a website featuring Colorado news stories with several follow up articles written from differing perspectives linked for each.

The Results

While test users felt the platform made sense and the idea of providing follow up reading from different perspectives both interesting and beneficial, the users observed on the InSpectre website actually engaged with only one piece of follow up reading or none on average before navigating to a new topic or leaving the prototype. Data collected on 252 users' behavior (tracked through Google Analytics and Hotjar) revealed the same trend.

The Recommendation

Given consistent user behavior of only engaging with one piece of follow up reading if any, our conclusion is that people feel like they want politically balanced perspectives, yet tend to not actually take action. Further research and testing into different ways to present continued readings or multiple viewpoints side-by-side may be interesting, but the learnings from the InSpectre prototype tests revealed this might not be worthwhile.

The Opportunity

Overview

News Landscape Research

The news and political landscapes today are increasingly polarized. According to research by Solutions Journalism, Americans need a nudge to get outside of their political bubbles - this is not a natural action whether or not there is a desire to do so.

We need to find ways to help our audiences leave their foxholes and consider new ideas. We have a responsibility to use all the tools we can find — including the lessons of psychology.¹

However, most interactions and discussions around hot issues today are heated and wrapped up in strong beliefs so motivating people to leave these foxholes isn't easy. Changing peoples' political positions is nearly impossible, but can we help cultivate their interest in being exposed to other perspectives?

In today's political dynamic, people's encounters with the other tribe (political, religious, ethnic, racial or otherwise) become more and more charged. It's impossible to feel curious while also feeling threatened...we feel an involuntary need to defend our side and attack the

¹ Solutions Journalism, "Complicating the Narratives", 2018

other. That anxiety renders us immune to new information. In other words: no amount of investigative reporting or leaked documents will change our mind, no matter what.²

Neiman Lab looked into the origins our trust for news sources today and how political bias impacts this trust. One of their key findings aligned with a theme Cultivo heard from several empathy interviewees - people are afraid of tension in their circles and communities if they open themselves up to other views.

Beliefs are often tied up with personal identity, and changing beliefs may put people at risk of rejection from their communities.³

Empathy Interview Findings

To identify themes in news consumption in Colorado, Cultivo conducted a six week period of empathy interviews and synthesis. We spoke with people from different ages, places and backgrounds all around Colorado, distilling the interviews into actionable insights.

Our empathy interview process asked readers questions about what they felt their news consumption habits lacked and what they felt they would like to see.

We spoke with Chris, a young Coloradan and recent grad from Fort Collins, who shared he is afraid to share articles from non-liberal leaning publications on social media and avoids his friends know he is interested in reading conservative views sometimes.

The interviews provided a lot of interesting themes, and one of the most frequent themes to appear was that people felt they wanted more balanced political opinions. This aligned with the initial research discussed already in this report. People recognize their preferred sources are biased and want some form of a counterweight to the bias in their preferred news sources. At the same time, people have a tough time trusting sources they disagree with.

“There is real value in conservative counter weight opinions for our democracy. I wish we could bring things back to civility so I could appreciate this perspective more.”

² Solutions Journalism, “Complicating the Narratives”, 2018

³ Neiman Lab, “How can we restore trust in news?”, 2018

- Chris

It's hard to imagine frequent NYT readers looking to Breitbart for a different perspective. That being said, we did have an interviewee use Fox News and CNN almost equally as their preferred sources, indicating it is in fact possible for readers to actively seek out balance without becoming upset or developing mistrust.



Chris—Denver

Recent Grad, Tech Consultant

- Age: 24
- About Chris: Loves park days and social justice events



Jen—Steamboat

Real Estate Agent, Wyndham Resorts

- Age: 32
- About Jen: She has lived in CO for the last 8 years, originally from DC area

“

“There is real value in conservative counter weight opinions for our democracy, I wish we could bring things back to civility and that I could appreciate this perspective more”

Chris

“

“There needs to be a group in the middle that's committed to presenting both sides”

Jen

The Problem to Solve

During the community ideation session, the following problem was presented to the group: going to other sources could cause readers to get angry; people tend to be cautious bringing up controversial opinions with friends, and users have a tough time trusting sources with opinions different their own. Especially in social contexts, people are mindful of group political bias and are averse to bringing up controversial opinions.

The community ideation session attendees were asked to develop potential solutions to this problem prompted by two “How Might We” (HMW) statements developed by Colorado Media Project teams who articulated the objective for the solutions. The two HMW statements addressing this problem were as follows:

How might we help people get outside of their bubble by making a source they disagree with trustworthy?

How might we help people get views outside of their bubble without creating conflict for them with their friends?

After the July 21st ideation session, Cultivo held several smaller ideation sessions with Coloradans in the 18-35 target demographic before finalizing a vision for the solution to be built to help Coloradans get out of their bubbles when it currently seems like more trouble than it's worth. Cultivo wanted to prototype around existing news consumption habits, so users did not feel they needed to drastically change their reading but still received the diversity of perspective they expect.

Prototyping Process

The Final Idea

Because no source is unbiased, InSpectre presents counterweights to strong opinions via a website featuring Colorado news stories with several follow up articles written from differing perspectives linked for each.

As a measurement of success for this prototype, Cultivo chose to see if readers would actually actively consume different opinions on topics they read about. In order to do this, offering the counterweights easily and quickly would be key. The success metric however, was not basic engagement, but instead how much follow up reading from both sides of the aisle was taken.

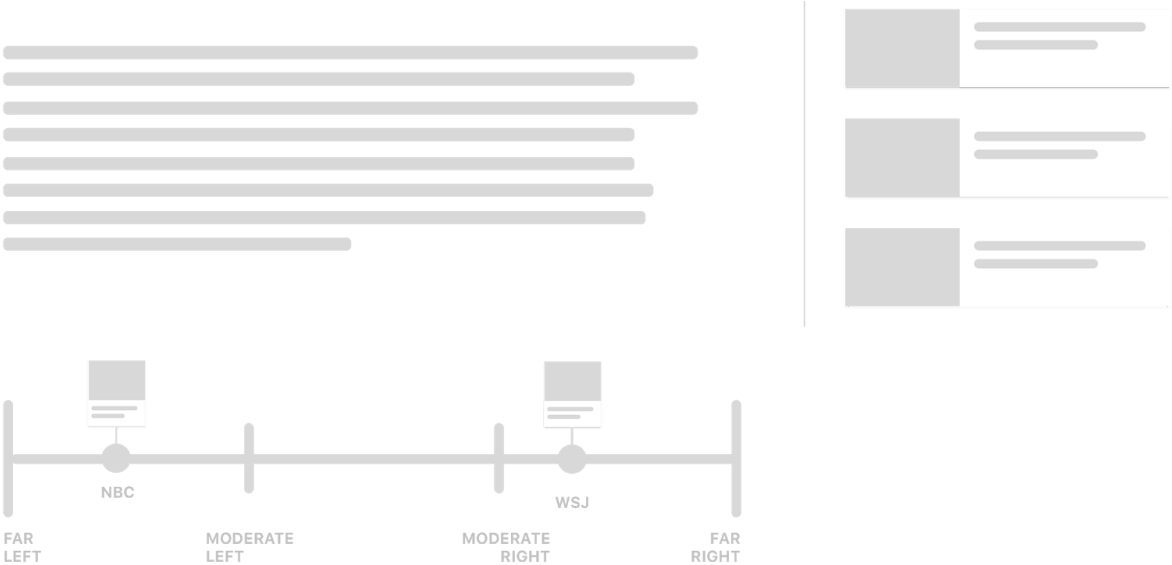
The Building Process

After determining the final prototype concept, Cultivo's process involved first discussing and asking the potential user group for specific feature feedback. The team sketched many potential iterations of the user experience, and then created digital wireframes before building out the final designs at the final resolution.

User Experience and Wireframes

When using InSpectre, a political scale featuring more articles on the same topic written from different perspectives appears at the bottom of an article on the news site a user is already using. The user can click the stories on the scale to be taken to read/watch them or to save for

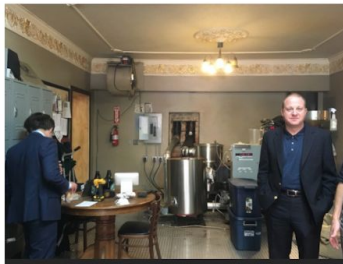
later reading. While reading an article on wsj.com, for instance a user can easily see the scale appear and hop over to nytimes.com to see an article regarding the same topic. Cultivo developed wireframes to represent this user experience placing follow up stories on a spectrum of perspectives pictured below.



InSpectre Wireframe

Final Prototype Design

To deliver these balanced perspectives, Cultivo wanted to create a way readers can automatically have options for follow up reading along the spectrum of opinions on any article they consume. A simple bar with three articles, ranging from left, (relatively) neutral and right would make it easy for readers to learn more when they are already thinking about a topic.



Jared Polis is running for Governor of Colorado. Here's what that means

[read more](#)



Tax Payers Bill of Rights (TABOR) explained

[read more](#)



Candidate for governor Walker Stapleton, Republican, on the record

[read more](#)

Articles on The InSpectre Homepage

Cultivo initially thought a google chrome plugin would be a great format for this, so readers could use their preferred sources and get follow up reading to articles. After talking with some specialists at Spire Digital, it was discovered Chrome plugins have low download rates and tend to confuse users however.

With this information, Cultivo moved forward on a news site aggregating content from several sources. To build the site, a WordPress design kit called Semplice was used. Semplice uses a grid and column system, making it easy to design cards to display stories and follow up reading. www.Inspectre.news displays cards with six polarizing issues, with each story giving a basic rundown of the topic and then linking to three pieces of follow up reading, as well as the original article.

OTHER PERSPECTIVES

Left Perspective

Learn more about Jared Polis from a left leaning perspective

[read more](#)

Full Story

See the original story from the Colorado Independent here

[Read More](#)

Conservative Perspective

See what Polis' opposition has to say about him from the Gazette

[read more](#)

Follow up reading at the top of an InSpectre article on Jared Polis' campaign for Governor

OTHER PERSPECTIVES

Advantages to Colorado Education

Read about some Pros to education in Colorado from the Denver Post

[read more](#)

Read the Full Story

see the full story here

[Read More](#)

Problems in Education

Read about some challenges to Colorado's Education system from CPR

[read more](#)

Follow up reading at the top of an InSpectre article on poor Colorado school performance

The Test

InSpectre was the first publicly available prototype, as in addition to interview feedback, Cultivo wanted to measure how a large group of users were actually using the site. In addition to collecting informal feedback and tracking analytics on the website, interviews were conducted with users on their current news consumption and their experience using the InSpectre website.

Test-users to be interviewed were selected from the CMP target demographic for in-person qualitative user experience interviews about the StoryHound prototype:

Test User Requirements:

- Colorado Residents
- 18-40
- Employed

Some of the interview questions asked are listed below:

- Have you ever considered subscribing to a local news outlet?
- Are there any other things you subscribe to or pay for on a regular basis?
- What is an appropriate price to pay for this (outrageous, high, preferred price)?/how would you imagine paying for this (model)?

- When you think about news in Colorado, what comes to mind?
- What is your favorite way to read the news? Apps? Online? Emails?
- Did you navigate to any follow up reading listed on the articles? If so, which articles?
- How much time did you spend on the InSpectre website?
- How did you feel about the political leaning/ perspective labels and designations (i.e. Conservative, In Support of/against, Left etc.)?

The goal was to discover whether people reading stories were interested enough to navigate to several pieces of the offered follow up reading. This was done by installing Google Analytics and Hotjar on the site. Google analytics would show us how users navigate from page to page and what follow up reading they engaged with. Hotjar produces heat maps, showing user clicks on the website, and records user screens on the website, so Cultivo can actually see how individual users navigate through the content.

Results

Overview

Overall users felt the platform made sense and the idea was interesting, however, users observed engaged with only one or no follow up reading before navigating to a new topic or leaving the InSpectre website.

Key Findings Summary:

- 1. Users engaged with zero or very little follow up reading from additional perspectives.**
- 2. People are more inclined to only want to hear one or two perspectives on polarizing issues.**
- 3. While there is an expressed desire to hear a diversity of perspectives, users did not actually take action when given the opportunity.**

Interviewee Feedback

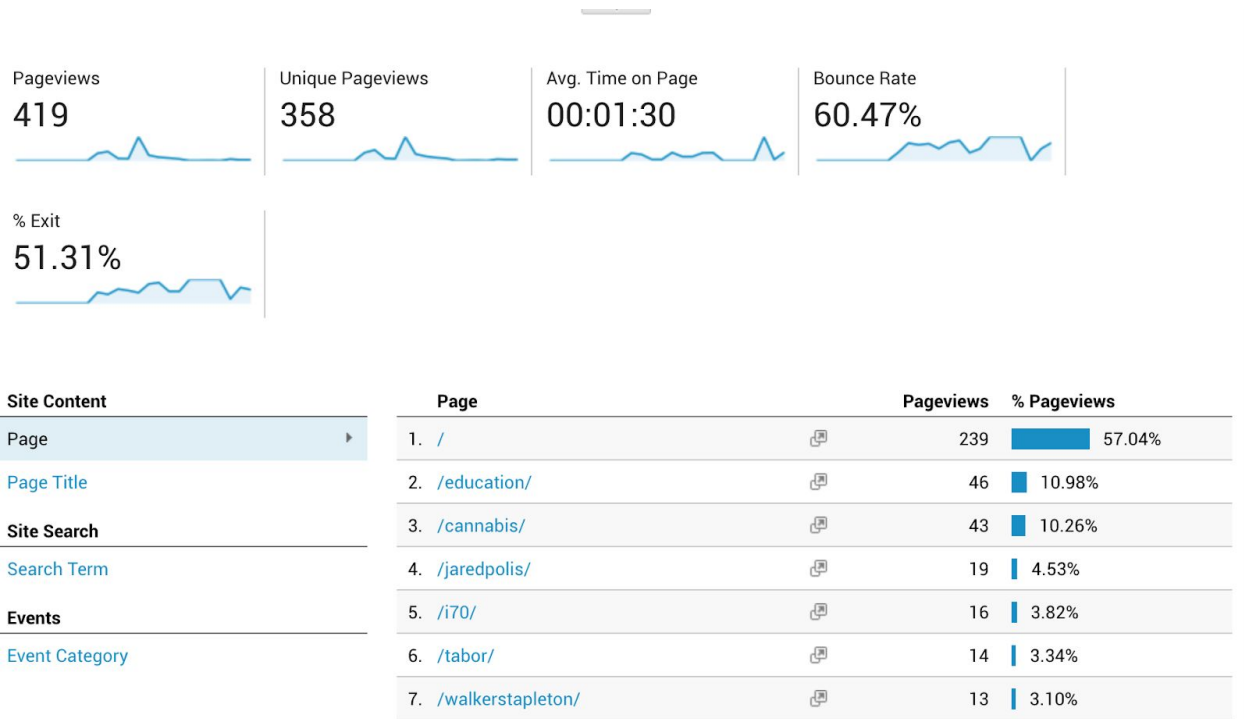
In addition to collecting data through Google Analytics and Hotjar, Cultivo conducted a number of in-person interview sessions where we observed users on the site and then debriefed with questions about their experience. The general feedback indicated the platform made sense and the idea was exciting and interesting. However, observed users would typically engage with only one piece of follow up reading before navigating to a new topic.

Not once did a user consume follow up reading then go back to the story to get more follow up perspectives. In a few of the later interviews, we tried to explain a bit further the idea was to consume follow up material from both sides of the aisle, yet users continued to click to follow up content 0-1 times per story. This gave us an interesting insight; navigating towards an existing political bias may be a deeply ingrained habit and users are not likely to change. This proved to be true even when the users recognized it would be beneficial to read other perspectives, expressed support for the idea and had an easy option to do so.

Google Analytics

Google analytics data gave us some interesting insights. 252 users were recorded on the site. The Taxpayers Bill of Rights page got by far the most clicks from the landing page, yet had the

least people clicking follow up reading at 22%. Every other topic ranged from 45.45%-62.96% in users navigating to follow up reading. While these numbers are surprisingly high, bounce rate ranged from 60-87%, indicating the vast majority of users were only engaging with one piece of follow up reading, if any, before leaving.



Google Analytics user page views for InSpectre prototype

Google analytics also told us users would only spend about 1-3 minutes on each page, which may be due to the content being too lengthy, encouraging users to opt for follow up reading before consuming the full article.

Heatmap

The heatmap delivered insightful, albeit statistically insignificant, data confirming significant portions of Cultivo Google Analytics analysis. Most users would choose a topic, before either navigating to one piece of follow up material or exiting. While the scope of our test was limited by having only six pieces of content with follow up reading, this behavior indicates people are more inclined to only want to hear one or two perspectives on polarizing issues.

August 15th Community Session Feedback

In demoing the prototype to industry stakeholders on August 15th, only a few general questions were asked, and watching users use it showed us similar behavior to the heatmap and google analytics.

Recommendation

Conclusion

Given consistent user behavior of only engaging with one piece of follow up reading, if any, our conclusion is people feel they want politically balanced perspectives, yet tend to not to actually take action. Further research and testing into different ways to present follow-up reading or multiple viewpoints side-by-side may be interesting, but the learnings from the InSpectre prototype tests revealed this might not be worthwhile.

Recommended Product Iterations

Going forward, it may be possible to build a platform offering counterweights that do not require navigation to a new page, and possibly could have different results with shorter content. That being said, testing up to this point indicates users do not want to receive different perspectives and we would be cautious building it into any platform as an included feature.

An explicit opt in for a feature could mean users who specifically want to have balanced follow up reading could have the option and this could be a great selling point for a premium account on a larger news platform. Given inconsistency between the sentiment of users and the results from our interviews and data analytics, Cultivo recommends formatting this as a premium feature if it is included at all.

It would be interesting to investigate including designations of a story's leanings or bias using artificial intelligence (this is currently being utilized within some news platforms). This could be incorporated as an icon or tag label on stories on a new Colorado news website or product.

Potential Monetization

STANDALONE

As a standalone platform, this may be hard to monetize given unreliable user behavior. The test results indicate the platform doesn't change how individuals consume their news too much from a normal site, so as its own platform, it would be unrealistic to assume people would move towards it as a regular use source. As a standalone platform, however, there are a few options for monetization.

ADS

The first option would be ads. As a standalone news site, there could be some value in dropping relevant banner or sidebar ads on stories, and it could be targeted based on what frequent readers of the selected topic tend to like.

LEADS

If we continue the model of using content from other sources, a pay per lead model like most aggregators would be an appropriate option. Given the frequency of clicking through to follow up content is low, however, this would not likely be a stable revenue stream.

SUBSCRIPTION

For the extra politically conscious, a subscription to an aggregator built around this feature could potentially work. This would require identifying an extremely narrow market of very politically conscious individuals, perhaps students, government workers, or professors. This may also be an interesting site to test during election cycles for undecided voters.

PREMIUM FEATURE

Since users seem to overwhelmingly opt for just content that aligns with their current political opinions, one thought is that InSpectre could be one feature a user can opt into on a premium version of a larger app. On a subscription news source with extra customization as a premium feature, having the option to let users opt into a feature offering balanced follow up reading could work.

Cultivo Media Information



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Work With Us

Cultivo is a marketing and product development agency focused on providing innovative digital solutions to any problem your business is facing. Ranging from websites, apps and software, brand development, and marketing solutions.

Looking to work with us? Email scott@cultivomedia.com and check our work out on cultivomedia.com