

Digital Publishing Age: Mosaicking your fragment Information

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Abstract: Mosaic is originally used in architecture. As the digital publishing age comes, a number of specialists emphasize that knowledge should be broken into fragments for convenient usage. However, to break up knowledge is mere a process, not a purpose. Some measure must be taken to piece all of the fragments up for individualized construction of one's own knowledge system. This paper introduces the concept of mosaic into communication study and brings forward some principles of mosaicking one's fragment information into a whole knowledge system.

Keywords: Digital Publishing, Mosaic, Fragment Information, Individuation, Knowledge System

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Suppose that it was the autumn of 1890. One day, "a very stout, florid-faced, elderly gentleman with fiery red hair" came to visit Sherlock Holmes. Holmes's loyal friend, Dr. John Watson, accompanied him.

Watson "did not gain much" by his inspection. To him, "there was nothing remarkable about the man save his blazing red head, and the expression of extreme chagrin and discontent upon his features."

Holmes, on the contrary, made convincing reasoning after careful observation, most importantly, he was sure that some uncommon thing would happen though everything seemed common at present.

And he was right.

Watson was puzzled. "I trust that I am not more dense than my neighbours, but I was always oppressed with a sense of my own stupidity in my dealings with Sherlock Holmes. Here I had heard what he had heard, I had seen what he had seen, and yet from his words it was evident that he saw clearly not only what had happened but what was about

to happen, while to me the whole business was still confused and grotesque."^[1]

In my opinion, what Watson lacked was a kind of ability to mosaic the information he had heard and seen (it is also important for him to get enough experience and knowledge relating to the crime scene) to make a final conclusion.

Holmes said that he was not a genius but a man who took pains to work. Yes he was outstanding in reasoning, but he must have thousands of materials in hand, renew his knowledge system everyday and investigate the crime scene with great scrupulousness. He set up archives for everything, skimmed over agony columns on several newspapers daily, studied the distinction of many kinds of tobacco ashes and mud, and researched people of different social status, jobs and backgrounds...

^[1] All of the above quotations, see Doyle, Arthur Conan, (2003), *Sherlock Holmes, The Complete Novels and Stories (Volume I)*, Bantam Classics, Pages 263-279.

That is, Holmes collected the fragment information he needed and patched them up into systematic knowledge to fulfill his brain, in his words, “a little empty attic”. Finally, combining different systematic knowledge, he got an all-round knowledge system, which was amazing to most people.

Actually, everyone has the chance to be involved in the same fragment information that successful people are dealing with, but normally they always neglect this because such things are so common and it is dreary to hold the line.

To mosaic one’s knowledge system is similar with integrating one’s knowledge system. However, as the digital publishing age comes, and specialists figure out that a crucial feature in organizing information is to break it into pieces or fragments and then make up them into a whole, therefore it is better to say “mosaic” than “integrate”.

1. Mosaic in Architecture

Mosaic is originally used in architecture (mainly in decoration), which means “a picture or decorative design made by setting small colored pieces, as of stone or tile, into a surface; the process or art of making such pictures or designs”. As a verb, mosaic means “to make by mosaic; to adorn with or as if with mosaic”, such as “mosaic a sidewalk”.^[2]

Fragments of different sizes, colours, shapes and qualities are disorderly and unsystematic at the first glance. Notwithstanding, an experienced craftsman could make unique-looking, beautiful and integrated patterns out of all the pieces. (See Figure 1)

2. Mosaic in Communication

It is enlighten to introduce the concept of mosaic into communication study.

Information of different periods of time, applicability, authenticity, values and from different resources is a collection that will confuse a person. One should mosaic all of

the fragment information and construct his/her own knowledge system.

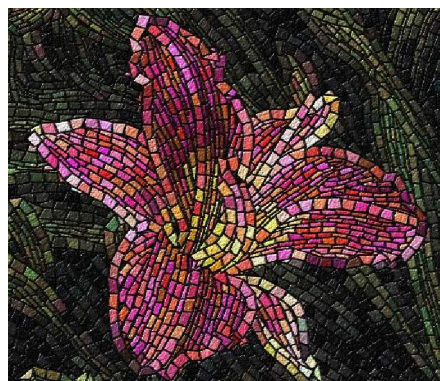


Figure 1: Mosaic Lily (<http://www.firelily.com/nirvana/image/mosaic.lily.jpg>)

Mr. Haozheng ZHOU, a former editor of Yuan-liou Publishing House (Taiwan), is writing a series of articles to discuss the required abilities of an editor in digital publishing age (in his words, the editor’s job should be upgraded to Editor 2.0 since the Web is upgraded to Web 2.0. And now, even Web 3.0 is on the way). Lately (14 May, 2010), his new article mentioned that every editor should master “Jiutong ability”^[3]. Jiutong can be translated into “explore and make acquainted with”, which is abbreviated from a letter wrote by Qian SIMA (author of *Records of the Historian*, one of the greatest Chinese historians) to his friend Shaoqing REN, which reads: With exhaustive exploration and investigation into the mystery between the Universe and humanity, and perspicacious familiarity with the evolution of history, one finally forges one’s own theory (towards history).

In fact, Jiutong is a process of dealing with fragment information, and the purpose is to forge one’s own knowledge system (or philosophy and world view) towards life and the world, and to guide a person in his later life. Thus, as an essential ability of modern editors, Jiutong ability can be explained as the ability to construct one’s own knowledge system by mosaicking the fragment information he/she has involved.

^[2] See *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition (electronic version), (2000), Houghton Mifflin Company. (Updated in 2009).

^[3] See <http://www.epuber.cn/space.php?uid=99&do=blog&id=1669>

3. To Mosaic Fragment Information Is Not New

Perhaps mosaic is infrequent to be mentioned in communication study, but to mosaic fragment information does not only occur in the digital publishing age, it is a common phenomenon through the history.

In the stimulate-reaction experiment made by B. F. Skinner, the mouse learned that food would appear if it pressed a lever. Skinner named the behavior as operational conditioned reflex. We know that a mouse will learn something according to its attempt and experience.

A student may have many teachers. And he/she never remembers all information giving by any teacher. He/she always chooses to remember some information giving by a teacher and some other information giving by another teacher. Or he/she may choose to remember more information giving by Teacher A than Teacher B, according to his/her interests or background, etc.

A dissertation may quote hundreds of published or unpublished research fruits giving by others.

When a strategic decision will be made, governments, armies and companies always collect more than enough information to help with their judgments.

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It is essential for anybody and any organ to mosaic fragment information, despite of time or place.

4. Why Is Mosaic Important?

With the development of the society and science and techniques, information explodes. No one could master all the information in the world, even a small part of his field.

And, information may be weakened and disturbed in communication. Most of all, information will be selected in the process of communication.

However, it is important for men to construct their own knowledge systems to explore the world and to live better lives. Actually men do not need all the information to live and work. So it is important to choose which fragments will be pieced up in one's

knowledge system and how to organize them into a whole.

5. How to Mosaic?

In mosaicking one's fragment information, there are one central task and two basic points.

The central task is to set up a knowledge framework. Just like a craftsman should have a pattern in his mind before he mosaics, a person should know what they want to get in the end and what function or effect his knowledge system will carry out.

One of the two basic points is to look for information that links the new knowledge with your own knowledge framework. For example, a student had been studying psychology for 3 years in a university and was making great efforts to write a graduation paper on certain topic. However, he needed two cases to support his theory. Then when he was reading in the library, he found that in the magazines there were two interrelated reports. He was so happy and quoted them in his paper. This point will deepen your knowledge system.

The other basic point is to look for information that your own knowledge framework lacks. For example, Mike graduated from university 2 years ago and wanted to know some chowmatistic knowledge. He had no tangency with it before but he knew he needed it because he had to prepare for his marriage and house. Then his friend John introduced him a very good financial consultant. With the consultant's help, Mike earned a small amount of money through automatic investment plan (AIP) of mutual fund 6 months later. This point will widen your knowledge system.

As time goes by, a knowledge framework will be filled by all kinds of fragment information if one is sensitive in information collecting. Finally, his/her knowledge framework will become an integrated knowledge system.

6. Individualized Information Demand in the Digital Publishing Age

There is an essential question if we shift to the digital publishing age from printed

publishing age: Is it necessary for paper books exist?

My answer is “No” for the majority of nowadays paper books. In an age which is full of fragment information, the ready-made paper book is full of unwanted things. Yes, they are ready-made so they will decline. What the readers need is the renewable individualized information. And all the information pushed to them should be *their* information.

The future readers want no ready-made books but individualized useful information.

If so, another question will be: how can a person be helped with so many fragments? Good! To solve the problem, one should be competent to mosaic fragment information

into his/her own knowledge system as mentioned above.

7. Conclusion

Mosaic is very important in modern society. As Sherlock Holmes said, “From a drop of water...a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other. So all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it.”

I believe that everyone will be benefited by mosaic. And in the digital publishing age, mosaic can be a vital ability for people.

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Male, 32, Chinese. Postgraduate of Beijing Institute of Graphic Design, studying digital communication. My tutor is Mr. Li ZHANG, Director of Digital Publishing Research Department of China Institute of Publishing Science. I am also the initiator of [Holmes Study Method](#), a guiding theory of a series educational tutorship books.