

Synthetic Information

M. Tilton
Standish Industries, Inc., Lake Mills, WI

Abstract: The increase in information and its handling has led to the use of the term Synthetic Information, which means information which is created for its own sake. In former times, this was called gobbledy-gook, or hogwash, or some other denigrating term, but in the Information Age, all information is valued, whether or not it is important. The use of Synthetic Information in the 1990s will be reviewed and analyzed.

Introduction

All creatures wish to communicate. This is a basic need which is evident from the time a new born baby draws its first breath and opens its lungs to express agony at the cold world into which it has emerged. Animals likewise “speak” to each other in languages which are not understood by human beings. In the case of humans, the need to communicate is so strong that we devise new ways to communicate information which have no relationship to the critical nature of the information.

Information which is fabricated to fill the pages of whatever vehicle used to convey it is called Synthetic Information¹, or SI (no relationship to Standish Industries). SI is fabricated in every walk of life, and threatens to keep all thinking humans from making any real progress towards cosmic understanding.

Experimental and Results

A series of observations and public polls were made in order to gather information on the phenomenon of SI.

One example of media containing SI is the newspaper. From the earliest days of this country’s founding, the newspaper was distributed to inform citizens of events of political and social importance. Without this form of communication, people would go from house to house, spreading information which changed with each telling. The newspaper ensured that the information was accurate and inexpensive to acquire².

Today the newspaper is a volume unto itself. Whole sections describing esoteric topics such as orchid growing or football analysis occupy a majority of the total coverage, whereas sections describing genocide in Bosnia are granted a small paragraph. Huge printing presses spew out page after page of information, which the reading public feels it must have in order to begin or close the day, yet very little of it is

of any significance whatsoever.

The first results are shown in Figure 1, in which it is shown that most people spend more time reading the

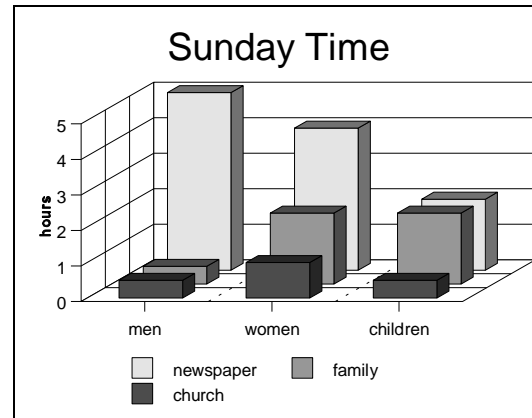


Figure 1

newspaper on Sunday than they do talking to their family or being in church. What is interesting about this study is that the real information which people need to conduct their lives comes from their family (as in what the teenagers are *really* doing). Yet the majority of time is spent on the newspaper.

When polled about what they think the most important thing they could do on Sunday, every group responded that the newspaper is of low priority. The percentage of responses in each category of activity are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Sunday Priorities

	Men	Women	Kids
family	60%	80%	10%
church	2%	5%	2%
paper	10%	5%	0%
other	28% (napping)	10% (cleaning)	89% (napping)

Synthetic Information is not to be confused with entertainment. Activities which people enjoy add value to their lives by the relaxation and stimulation which are gained from doing them. Reading, even watching television, are entertainment activities which are not

necessarily filled with Synthetic Information. Not always, in any case. There are exceptions, such as television “news” magazines, which are generated to keep the people who produce them employed and to provide exposure for the overabundance of news anchors.

Relevance and entertainment are thus two metrics for the evaluation of information to be synthetic. The volume of the information (which can be measured in time, words, pages, or some other unit which provides a common comparison) is the other determinant. From these variables, we have derived the following formula for the determination if information is indeed synthetic:

$$SI = \frac{V}{0.4 * E + 0.6 * R}$$

where V is a unit of volume normalized to a scale of 1 to 10, E is the entertainment value on a scale of 1 to 10, and R is the relevance value on a scale of 1 to 10. SI values greater than 5 are almost assuredly SI, while SI values less than 1 are most assuredly not.

The newspaper was evaluated from the input of men’s responses to the poll. With $V = 9$, $E = 2$, $R = 1$, the SI value is 6.4, meaning that the newspaper has a

high Synthetic Information content.

Conclusions

The preponderance of Synthetic Information in today’s world is a direct result of the increased capability to spread and share information. Not all information has value, and in the study of Synthetic Information, we have derived a simple method of determining whether information has value, or whether it has been created for its own sake. The message to be derived from this is summarized in Figure 2.

Lest the reader think that this paper is Synthetic Information, let him be assured that this is not the case. The techniques used to create it and the fact that it will be used to test the electronic publication for the SID make it of the highest relevance, regardless of the volume of nonsense contained herein.

References

1. M. Tilton, “Information in the 90s”, Nonesuch Digest, Vol. II, No. 3, pp. 123-145, 1993
2. Sothey Say, “Simon’s Presses”, Digest of the South, pp. 45-55, 1975.



Figure 2. It’s a small world, don’t fill it with nonsense