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Digital press- a replica of the paper edition or an independent communication platform?

Abstract:

The articles attempts to describe the role of digital press in the shaping of information circulation. It invites a discussion on the subject of re-defining the mission and goals of journalists, the areas of expansion for new technologies and their capabilities on the press market. Moreover, it provides information on the development of new media and the science of social communication. The analysis shows how the new technologies have created alternative, fast and effective ways for users to obtain information and are a revolutionary phenomenon on the press market. It describes the role and mission of digital media on this competitive market. Perhaps it will be useful in developing the, so far non-existing, definitions and model solutions for journalist and recipient cooperation in digital form. It might allow for the description of possible perspectives for growth and an analysis of the necessity for investment in new technologies and the popularisation of e-paper, which have great prospects.

The onset of the Internet, a quick and effective alternative in delivering information to readers, was a turning point on the press market. It revolutionized the so far existent theory of media's importance and functioning. The development of new technologies has created a feeling of anxiety in the publishers and led them to find solutions to react to changes. Technological progress, as the next step in perfecting ways of information transmission, has led to a migration of traditional media consumers to on-line usage. The precursors on the Polish market were dailies and magazines with owners who were quick to react to the changes taking place. They were the first to create on-line versions of their publications.

Although paper press is still predicted to have many years of existence and traditional media will not become obsolete, year after year more and more people will turn to on-line press being faster and having more comprehensive coverage of news¹. It will also be a cheaper option considering there are no printing and distribution costs (on an international scale) and a more profitable one in view of the quick development of the advertising market on-line. The conclusion is that traditional press is losing its readers and will continue to do in the future while on-line press will be gaining support.

Traditional press from the newsstand or on-line?

The most developed and wealthiest countries in the world are in the lead as far as Internet usage. These are countries in which dominant are middle classes to which delivery of a newspaper to their front door or the office is an element of their culture. Regardless its informative value, the daily press is a symbol of status, it identifies the reader socially and politically. Factors such as changes on the media market² and generation switch among media

¹ See Project for Excellence in Journalism "The State Of The News Media 2006" – reports on journalist trends in America.[Online:] <http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org>

² Just like the trade revolution of the XVI century depended on capital, just like the industrial revolution of XVIII and XIX centuries resulted in a crisis of production and distribution means, which lead to a telecommunications revolution and later the information age. (Beniger 1986). The readers are constantly subjected to technological modifications. "Technology is the cause of great progress in communication" – see McLuhan M., (2004) "Zrozumieć media" WNT. Internet is a medium which brings together different mass media, as a result of the synthesis created are new, profiled configurations. The result is that traditional audiences are broken up into various segments, based on their interests. They then need to be defined according to such. Can such changes lead to the disappearance of traditional mass media.?

consumers³ bring changes to old habits. The number of people reading on-line press differs significantly from country to country (see Chart 1). It should be mentioned that prices of subscriptions, with some exceptions, are rather low in comparison to people's incomes. Therefore, costs of access to digital media can be comparable to traditional press. The reader can either pay for one copy of a paper daily or for access to a particular article or issue or have access to a website for a specified period of time.

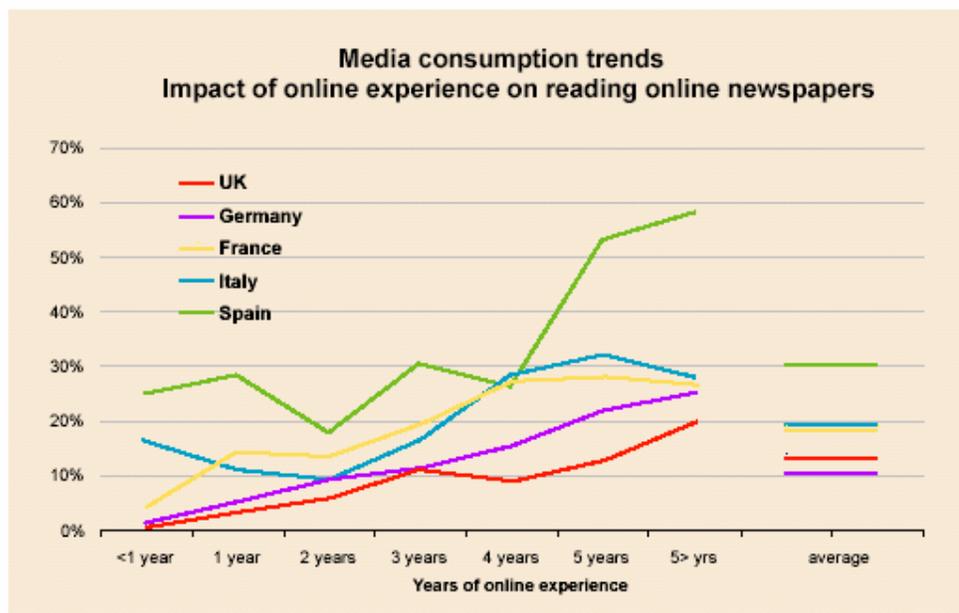


Chart 2

Source: Forrester

Chart 1.

World Association of Newspapers, report "Media Consumption" 2004
 [Online:] <http://www.wan-press.org/>

The similarities and differences in the way traditional and digital press fulfil people's needs are worth taking a closer look at. Proponents of traditional press claim that reading paper copies is relaxing and entertaining. They are turned off by Internet advertising such as pop-ups and banners. For them it is unnatural to flip pages in the PDF format, move around using mouse or simply be stuck to the computer screen. Traditionalists or people who do not enjoy access to the Internet claim that publishers should rather pay more attention to improving the quality of the paper issue than import their papers on-line⁴.

On the other hand, Internet enthusiasts say that on-line information is more topical. By the time dailies reach the newsstand they are often outdated. Condensed versions of articles on-line are enough information for busy readers. The readers can find out what is going on in the world without going out of the house, they can solely focus on what is of interest to them and skip what is not. Quick sorting of the text, with supporting image or sound coverage⁵ are

³ Internet as the basic source of information, dominant role of the press in the information sector, great amounts of information flow - see Goban-Klas T., (2004) "Media i komunikowanie masowe" Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN. Interactive relations, global tendencies, post-modernistic culture – see McQuail D., (1994) "Mass Communication Theory" SAGE Publications.

⁴ See Postman N., (2004) "Technopol. Triumf techniki nad kulturą" MUZA

⁵ In the US, among the 100 most popular Internet websites, equivalent to traditional press, there are 31 which have established on their websites news information podcasts, ie. "The New York Times". This means that

additional benefits. Moreover, the articles of interest can be recorded by the reader on his hard disk creating a type of personal archive which sounds much better than keeping old and dusty copies of traditional papers. It is also possible to send copies of articles to others and to subscribe without postage costs. Additionally, the overall costs of production and distribution are much lower. These are some but not all benefits of turning to on-line press. The current trend is that more readers choose the Internet and they use it more and more often. Results of surveys done by Jupiter Research show that young readers prefer electronic versions of papers and they are not emotionally attached to traditional press. The level of readership on-line is increasing among those who are more familiar with Internet media. For new users attractive could be the fact there is free on-line press.

Digital press in Poland

Polish dailies and magazines are attempting to adapt to the changing trends and create on-line versions of their publications. At the same time they are concerned about losing their position on the market and profits. However, there so far have been only a few publishers who have taken this step. Mostly, Polish publishers are not taking advantage of their own WWW sites. The successful ones are few:

- Based on the number of users and visitors *Gazeta.pl* (3 232 thousand users, 281.6 mln visitors – according to *Megapanel PBI/Gemius* research by *Polskie Badania Internetu Sp. z o.o.* and *Gemius SA*, for December 2005),
- Based on the sales of on-line issue *GazetaPrawna.pl* (3 888 thousand subscriptions between I-VI 2005).

English press appears to be the most advanced as far as taking advantage of the Internet and the Web to increase sales of their paper issues as well as appealing to old customers on-line and reaching new readers. Far behind them is French press which is mostly limited to selling paper copies through the Internet as well as selling on-line versions of the paper issues. The Polish market is still seeking to identify itself on the Web. Polish publishers do not fully take advantage of the opportunities they have. Interesting information on electronic press readership was provided by the International Herald Tribune⁶. The daily stated that internet users from Eastern Europe, especially the Ukraine, Hungary, Poland and Latvia, are more keen on reading on-line press than their peers in Western Europe. Paradoxically, the reason for this is that in that part of the world there has been less technological progress. Western Europeans were able to use the Internet earlier on their PCs and the process of assimilation was more gradual. While in Eastern Europe progress came later and there was no time for gradual assimilation with new technologies instantly becoming popular.

From the economic point of view, Internet versions of the press need to make available to their users access to the most current issue, to archives and to general economic and sport news. The main source of income for most versions on-line is the content they sell. Apart from information and entertainment there are also new services such as thematical reports, communicators, etc. Another opportunity when investing in new information platforms is the earlier mentioned Internet advertising. The larger the number of visitors and users, the greater the interest of advertisers. This market is growing quickly and is becoming more popular than traditional advertising such as billboards. The users are becoming used to paying for

publishers are eager to use new technologies – “The Use of the Internet by America’s Newspapers”, The Bivings Group, published 01.04.2006.

⁶ Shannon V., “The End User: East Europe leaps ahead”, International Herald Tribune, 11.01.2006

information from the Internet including a selection of just the content they are interested in. They are more likely to pay for information if it is of the utmost topicality, substantially meaningful, easily accessible (economy, law) and narrowly filtered. There is more profit to be gained if the information is personalized or targeted at a specific group of recipients rather than very general. Time for information gathering becomes shorter and users are able to spend more of their time on entertainment. All this leads us to some reflection – the information provided will be based on knowledge the user needs rather than general information from a given field. For on-line press (not in leading positions) it is a chance to gain new, wider audiences.

Most Popular Categories

Nr.	Name	Real users	Visitors/entrances	Avg. nr of entr./user	Time (hrs)	Avg. time/user	Range
1	Culture, Entertainment	1211812	3020554981	249.26	53731963.42	04:26:02	96,24%
2	Information, news, media	10030062	687402594	68.53	11557093.24	01:09:08	79,66%
3	New technology	9626386	461666673	47.96	7193637.23	00:44:50	76,45%
4	Lifestyles	7957326	4561677850	57.33	5519427.46	00:41:37	63,20%
5	Communities	7425923	1635873947	220.29%	27554868.65	03:42:38	58,97%
6	Education	7124798	300181516	42.13	5271269.29	00:44:23	56,58%
7	Business, finances, law	7001619	214723938	30.67	4765150.25	00:40:50	55,61%
8	Motorization	5710138	420249433	73.60	4186207.52	00:43:59	45,35%
9	Sport	5632591	368783602	65.47	8184442.12	01:27:10	44,73%
10	Tourism	5070704	32116884	16.19	994931.32	00:11:45	40,27%
11	Employment	3384290	126495433	37.38	1266927.44	00:22:27	26,88%
12	Construction, Real Estate	2826931	105722343	37.40	116558928	00:24:44	22,45%

Chart 2

Megapanel PBI/Gemius, September 2006, by Internet Standard

The chart shows the most popular categories and the number of users thematically ordered according to popularity⁷.

The publishers need to accept the current trends and adapt to them. Now there is more demand for thematical information rather than general news. In the future on-line versions of newspapers should rather play a supplementary role to their paper versions and not be their copies. They should offer information in the areas which are not available traditionally due to space limitations or other complex details. They should provide topical information from various fields such as law, economy, technology, finance or archives. Today, digital versions of weeklies such as “Polityka” or “Newsweek” promote their printed versions while on the web page we can find only fragments of articles. New technologies enable the construction and management of narrowed down content geared at a specific target group⁸.

Most publishers, acting according to a verified method, attempt to build a base of users on-line by offering them services free of charge. The first step is to start with newsletters. Their fears and reservations about going on-line are argued⁹: by the possibility of losing

⁷See Zalewski P., “Serwisy tematyczne we wrześniu” Internet Standard 28.11.2006 [Online:]

<http://www.internetstandard.pl/news/103100.html>

⁸ Cf. Gogołek W., (2005) “Technologie informacyjne mediów” Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA, Polowczyk-Kuik Ż., (2001) “Media polskie w Internecie” Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. A. Mickiewicza in Poznan.

⁹ Cf. Gorceżyński M., “Cyfrowy Gutenberg”, Brief, Nr 77, February, 2006

traditional readers and thus market share, or not being able to keep up with advancing technology. Younger generations, having different reading habits, will switch over to the Internet and if they do not enter the Web they will be considered too traditional, obsolete and not at all in tune with modern trends. Also they may be regarded as inconvenient to use, might enter the market too late or may be put off by costs of going on-line, hiring IT staff and the general risk of taking on new endeavours – losing profit, not knowing what to offer for free and what to charge for (in this case there are many options to choose). Or should they perhaps just sell on-line the paper versions?

Should digital press be a replica of paper press?

A categorical statement that Internet press should not be a replica of the paper version would be subject to acute criticism, especially during the annual Digital Press Global Forum. This issue is continuously being debated among the publishers. Also whether and to what extent should on-line content be similar to that of the traditional. The Internet version, if it is the same as the traditional, will not attract readers or advertisers (Chart 2)¹⁰. In this case the best regulator becomes the press market. Popular newspapers, in order to attract or keep readers establish chat rooms, journalist and readers’ blogs, discussion forums, video (archives, e-mail contacts, etc.). Journalist blogs enable close contacts with readers as they systematically report on events taking place ‘from the inside’ and are written in a subjective way. This way the on-line version limits the press’s role but it does not eliminate it.

Profits from Advertising

Year	All media	Printed Press	New Media
1995	\$162 bln	\$14 bln	\$0.4 bln
2005	\$194 bln	\$19 bln	\$11.5 bln
2015	\$243 bln	\$22 bln	\$35 bln

Distribution

Year	Avg. nr of press titles/household	Internet users in US in mln
1990	3.67	-
1995	3.48	16 mln
2000	3.37	95 mln
2005	3.11	190 mln

Chart 3.

Based on a chart from “Digital Magazine News“ (Jan/Feb 2006)

[Online:] <http://www.digitalmagazineneeds.com>

Marshall McLuhan stated that any type of mass media can be a powerful tool in eliminating other types of media. Will on-line press replace the traditional? Over 30 years ago, when the Internet was just being established, people thought it was rather improbable that its impact would be so revolutionary worldwide. It is worth pondering whether a synergy of the paper and the on-line issue is the future of this type of press. In the author’s opinion, these two will

¹⁰ “Digital Magazine News” (January/February 2006) [Online:] <http://www.digitalmagazineneeds.com>

continue to be rather independent but also supplementary to each other products. Internet strategy should be implemented and continually developed, taking advantage of the Internet's popularity and the strength of the press. With the fast growing number of on-line users, the publishers need to have their own user friendly websites. About 79% of internet users do not read but scan the texts. This is because the processing of information from the monitor screen is 25% slower in comparison to the paper version. This information, taken from Nielsen¹¹, should be a hint in how on-line text should be constructed and formatted to be friendly to the eye for scanning. The format, according to classic journalist rules with small modifications, should be followed not just by on-line press but also by other Internet portals. Short sentences, short and separated paragraphs and clear and outstanding headlines and leads are desirable. But, once again, we are faced with the dilemma of on-line version of the press being just Internet copies of the traditional. As mentioned above, the future of e-press should be supplementary to the paper issue. Cooperation between the two could take place in the field of content arrangement, personalisation of information and creating an on-line community, etc.

E-publication standards

The issue of common e-press standards is becoming topical among publishers. Their lack as well as that of legal regulations in Poland regarding digital press has made publishers be reluctant to invest in this field. The Press Distribution Control Association (ZKDP) was pressed to register new regulation in this area. According to ZKDP's new definition¹² an e-issue is at least one mutation of a press title distributed electronically. It includes the same material in terms of form, content and advertising as the printed version. It is allowed to have expanded versions of articles and advertising taking advantage of electronic capabilities. E-issues are available at the same time as the printed ones. ZKDP allows digital press data to be added to the general regarding distribution figures after meeting certain criteria. The e-issue needs to include the same journalist material and the same advertising as the paper one. It also needs to be the same in form. If it does, its sales numbers can be added to general circulation figures. (From ZKDP's regulation – "circulation is the set number of copies of a particular newspaper title with the same date and number. It is calculated by adding the number of paper copies to the sold digital copies"). The digital press figures can be included in the overall number if the e-papers are sold individually or distributed through newsstands at a price no lower than 30% of the paper copy price. The circulation and distribution figures are presented together, the e-paper circulation next to regular paper sales. Subscriptions include:

- e-paper sales ordered individually for the period of one publishing cycle,
- at the specified price, no lower than 30% of the printed issue and constant during the paid subscription, to the final subscriber, without the right to re-sale. These solutions are profitable to the publishers who sell regular and digital versions of the paper copies since they can include circulation figures for both versions in their final scores, which is advantageous regarding advertising contracts. Not all publishers meet these criteria but most do or attempt to do so. Additionally, it would also be a good idea to include in these figures the number of website visitors /entrances (ie. www.wyborcza.pl, www.rzeczpospolita.pl, etc) as that would more precisely indicate the true amount of interest and readership of a given newspaper.

World wide the situation with digital press regulation is rather different. According to information from International Federation of Audit Bureaux of Circulations¹³, distribution

¹¹ Nielsen J., (1999) "Designing Web Usability" New Riders

¹² Press Distribution Control Association (ZKDP) regulation (effective since the XV ZKDP congress, December 9, 2004) [Online:] http://www.zkdp.pl/reg_kontroli.htm

¹³ International Federation of Audit Bureaux of Circulations, [Online:] <http://www.ifabc.org>

figures of e-paper issues are either published together or separately from traditional paper circulation. There are two models, the British and the French. In Great Britain the data is published together but it is not summed up but printed side by side. In France, digital press figures are calculated and published separately. The difficulty is regarding titles distributed free of charge. In this case it would be sensible to calculate circulation the same way as the free press, however, this issue, because it is so new, does not have finalized regulation. In the US , when someone subscribes both the paper and the digital version of a title, BPA Worldwide¹⁴ counts it as one subscription.

According to C.G. Jung, when a Roman was surrounded by slaves, he became enslaved himself. Therefore, the ability to possess all types of mass media within one medium can lead to us becoming enslaved by it. Will traditional media disappear in the future? Rupert Murdoch's theory that, "by 2040 traditional press will no longer exist" seems to be quite exaggerated. Let's remember that the onset of radio, cinema and television did not lead to the disappearance of paper press. It did, however, have to evolve. The same is true presently. Digital press may complement traditional without being a threat to it. Internet kiosks will just supplement the traditional and distribute e-paper versions of newspapers¹⁵. The Internet should not be treated as competition but as a modern supplement to the classic mass media – the press (supplemented by the Internet as an alternative choice - Gurevitch, Katz and Haas 1973).

¹⁴ BPA Worldwide [Online:] <http://www.bpaww.com>

¹⁵ Starewicz-Jaworska A., "Gazeta Prawna na całym świecie", *Gazeta Prawna* Nr 208 (1064) 24-26.10.2003.