

Print Journalism in the Era of Electronic Media

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Abstract

Using the Internet and other new information and communication technologies has become an inherent part of human life since a lot of our work and private activities take place in online environment – thanks to various communication tools such as smartphones, tablets, etc. These technologies have become also important ways and means used to acquire and disseminate information. The impact of technological progress on journalism and its products cannot be understated. The ongoing trends lead us to the conclusion that newspapers are currently looking for new ways of distribution and new forms of existence, especially in electronic environment, in order to attract the readers – users of new media and various technologies related to them. The basic assumption of the article is that their success fully depends on effective using of these technologies by people with physical disabilities or other disadvantages. Since these media also carry information contents, the form of the presentation of information always corresponds with the overall character of given medium. Mainly for this reason, the number of new applications for smartphones, tablets or smart televisions is increasing in these days. These applications react to the demands of effectiveness, intelligibility and interactivity of the offered services while the key factor that determines the selection of information is the reader, user of such devices. The aim of the article is to discuss the relationship between new communication technologies and journalism, focusing on new ways and forms of distribution of newspapers or – more specifically – selected news to the readers.

Keywords: *print media, Internet, new media, communication, journalism.*

1. Introduction

The processes of spreading, acquiring and storing information have been parts of social and cultural reality of everyday life practically during the whole history of humankind. Therefore, the need to acquire information and reflect the current affairs is a timeless cultural phenomenon and also one of the most essential aspects of human communication in all its forms. According to current findings of historiography, the origins of journalism as a specific form of social communication are related to the formation of modern states and emergence of capitalistic relationships. However, the basic precondition leading to the mass production of print materials and significant changes in the development processes of European society was Johann Gutenberg's invention of mechanical movable type printing, approximately in 1455. Using the movable type led to fast dissemination of identical copies. S. Gálik states that any text was originally a manuscript, a work connected directly to its author. The era of mass media broke the direct connection between authors and their texts and led to the formation of new collective mentality and new idea of acquiring knowledge based on subject / object duality: "Print media are produced and distributed without being fully dependent on their authors, so knowledge that claim to be objective also have to be independent from their subjects" (S. Gálik, 2012, p. 41).

Periodical acquiring of information became much more important at the end of the 15th century when emerging middle class started to replace declining feudalism in the Western Europe. This new social class needed information about domestic and foreign affairs from existential matters. More importantly, people were willing to pay for the basic products of journalism – news. News became commodities, functioning not only as information, but also as goods and sources of profit. The economical dimension of journalism has stayed an important part of making news ever since. Many scholars often see the structure of forms and contents of contemporary journalism as results of intensifying commodification of information. Taking into account this point of view, we understand these tendencies as a natural development of kinds and transformations of human communication and cultural situation in the late modern society and fully developed capitalism that is typical for contemporary Western societies.

As well as other segments of the media industry, traditional print journalism fights for the interest and attention of the readers within the environment of globalized media communication. According to normative media theories, journalism is supposed to offer objective news and pluralistic opinions related to current social events. On the other hand,

the economic imperatives of media industry and efforts to attract and maintain the attention of the readers are the main determinants of contemporary nature of journalism and its products (J. Radošinská & J. Višňovský, 2013).

News and opinions published in newspapers are defined mostly by their importance for the readers and less and less by the attributes of news values such as significance, actuality or impact on the whole society. Other important factors that influence the current trends in making print news include concentration and commercialization of print newspapers and omitting the information function of news in favour of profit. In other words, contemporary print journalism has become a specific kind of entertainment that is able to distract, stimulate, shock, and surprise the reader through attractive expressions and suggestive images. This trend is not evident only in the mass press that naturally works with such principles, but also in the segment of elite newspapers where tabloidization and infotainment are considered as deficiencies. Therefore, journalism theorists frequently point out that the traditional boundaries between 'serious' and 'entertaining' or 'elite' and 'popular' have become vague and uncertain. As Pravdová (2011) observes, the world of imagination, dramatic stories and emotions is relevant particularly in the context of making news and publishing opinions. Infotainment simplifies the discussed issues and situations, transforms their essence and meaning through dramatization or utter change of authentic events and statements.

Needless to say, the effort to predict the further development of print journalism depends on taking into account a wide spectrum of processes, phenomena and aspects that are connected to journalism and therefore influence its specific segments, as well as its outputs – news, stories and articles. Although these products of journalism are still based on printed words, they now exist in both print and online versions.

The situation print journalism finds itself in is a result of several factors and circumstances. The recipients are able to access increasing amounts of information offerings. The Internet, television and radio spread news much faster than press journalism. Using new information technologies such as smartphones, tablets or 'intelligent' TVs has become a part of common, everyday reality, especially for young and middle-aged people and there are also alternative ways of disseminating information, e.g. online social networks. Decreasing circulation of the press media proves that, generally speaking, people read the newspapers less than in the past. However, they spend more time working and playing with the computers. Another fact worth mentioning is that needs for information related to reading newspapers have changed significantly. Few recipients pay attention to political or economic life in society; the readers are interested in tabloid journalism instead, preferring entertainment over information values. Roubal discusses the "society of experience" and states that "a world of unlimited opportunities is a world that also provides unlimited resources in terms of experiences and entertainment" (O. Roubal, 2014, p 88).

The producers of print journalism are well aware of this tendency. Newspapers – more precisely their editors and owners – understand that in order to stay 'on the market', they have to take countermeasures to eliminate the negative perspectives on the newspaper industry and keep their stable base of readers and advertising incomes. These activities include economic dimension of publishing newspapers in terms of doing business (transformation of traditional business models, concentration of ownership, and rationalization of editorial practises, etc.), newspaper contents (tabloidization of topics in daily news, prevalence of 'information services'), as well as constantly changing preferences of the readers that more frequently look for 'easy topics'. M. Solik (2009) observes that hypermedia and the images of the world, people and their behaviour significantly influence our perception of the surrounding environment and "subject" as such.

This is exactly the chance for print media; chance to use the weaknesses of their competitors to their own benefit. J. Višňovský (2014) states that the press traditionally puts an emphasis on information function of newspapers, i.e. on selecting information in order to offer the readers transparent contents which are easy to understand. The newspapers change along with transformations of the whole media landscape, aiming to provide their readers with information that are both attractive and useful. During the last decade editorial teams of many newspapers, magazines and journals approved essential changes in form and content of their products – redesigned the titles to face the increasing competition and financial limitations related to advertising revenue decline.

The electronic media, radio, television and the Internet have overtaken the print media thanks to the speed at which they are able to bring information and news to their recipients. However, especially as the contents of online newspapers often offer reports about less significant or even insignificant events, it can be argued that they lack deeper reflection on major events and important society-wide actions. In addition, the print media should make use of the shortcomings of their traditional competitors – radio and television, e.g. the selective attention paid to audio-visual media contents or the ephemeral nature of radio broadcasting. The main advantages typical for newspapers include easily comprehensible content editing, effective visualisation and the fact that the readers tend to think about newspapers as the most trustworthy and reliable information sources.

Last but not least, editors and journalists take into account the advances in information and communication technologies to accommodate to the readers and their needs and expectations. Globalization processes are both

intensive and extensive, affecting practically every aspect of social, cultural and economic life of the media recipients. It is reasonable to presume that their need for certain types of information and expectations related to their processing are changing together with the era they live in.

2. New Media as a Virtual Platform of Journalism

Formal media typology defines the Internet as one of the so called 'new media', as a multi-media channel that allows millions of its users to communicate in real time. However, the term 'new media' is related also to Web sites, Internet applications and many technologies available via online environment as well as via other types of information and communication technologies, e.g. mobile phones, mp3 players. Using modern information and communication technologies seems to be one of the determining aspects of the new media – the new media available 'online' use the Internet as a platform.

Generally speaking, traditional print journalism and online journalism have co-existed for more than fifteen years. Technological advancements of Web 2.0 have created an effective environment to adapt journalism – previously limited to traditional types of media such as the press, photography, film, radio and television – to the specific conditions of the Internet. Even though the Internet has outperformed these traditional media in terms of technological progress, the products of online journalism are partly results of their influence. The benefits of online communication related to its speed, availability and interactivity cannot be doubted.

According to M. McLuhan (2000), the influence of electronic media, including the Internet, is much significant, mostly because of their ability to change the psychosocial conditions of life and human behaviour. The author considers the new media to be "extensions of human senses". Extension of senses through media shapes our central neural system and transforms all aspects of our social and psychological existence, including the sphere of relationships. However, we have to point out that theoretical concepts and opinions on communication processes, social relationships, cultural environments and human values influenced by dominant electronic communication via the Internet are very diverse.

Virtual electronic environment, shaped mostly by the new media, is not only an obvious proof of technological development of human civilization and a part of the culture defining the differences between human being and nature, but also the space where most of our activities, public or private, take place. Electronic media have changed the quality of human life significantly, mostly in positive ways. However, E. Višňovský points out: "The world of our electronic media is not 'against the nature' in the sense of not being accessible to creation, maintenance and spreading its existence to accomplish some or many of our goals. ... Electronic world seems to be very interesting, but our culture is, in many ways, very fragile and delicate; it is 'software' in contrast with the nature as 'hardware'" (E. Višňovský, 2003, p. 69)

French sociologist J. Lohisse (2003) pessimistically observes that technical and technological aspects of communication project themselves into our social relationships – human relations become "cellular". We are not able to predict what kinds of changes will electronic media bring and how will they influence our society, social relations, our thoughts and doings: "An individual, alone with a monitor, engages in a dialogue with the world only through commands typed on a keyboard" (J. Lohisse, 2003, p. 180).

However, new information and communication technologies have brought also new ways of spreading information. The 'boom' of smartphones and tablets has resulted in specific formal modifications of online newspapers, taking into account mostly the sizes of displays and functions offered by these mobile devices. Equally important fact is that the number of the newest communication tools is increasing constantly. Naturally, the situation in which journalism has been since the end of the 20th century must be understood not only in economic terms, but also from the viewpoint of social and cultural aspects of human life reflected into the structure of desired information, influencing also the interest of the readers in print newspapers and the nature of functions these recipients expect from them.

3. Design of the New Media and Design of Journalistic Information

Newspaper industry and editors of print media need to react to the emergence of new information and communication technologies adequately and flexibly. The amount of attention they pay to adapt to new (digital) forms of journalism is in direct relationship with rapid spreading of these technologies throughout the society. Using iPads, iPhones and other mobile devices has influenced significantly all processes of journalism. Publishing houses, trying to communicate with the readers and offer them a certain level of comfort during reading, have created special versions of newspapers meant to be read via various types of mobile devices. These electronic products of journalism function as special applications based on the Internet platform and they allow their users to organize and also publish journalistic contents and related

texts or reactions. 'Intelligent' televisions are able to connect to the Internet and use many of these special applications, changing not only our traditional understanding of television technology, but also the journalism itself. This kind of television differs from its predecessors significantly. The recipients may passively watch TV, but also use many interactive functions available via the Internet. These interactive functions are usually situated in the 'application centre' that, after activation, looks almost like a monitor, since the user is able to browse the contents by 'clicking' on certain icons and shortcuts. Interactive interfaces have been parts of software accessories of televisions and Blu-ray players with Internet connection since 2010.

New ways of publishing on the Internet and existence of applications designed to browse and read online newspapers aimed at the users of smartphones, tablets and similar devices are linked to two basic issues that must be addressed by the providers of the contents (media producers):

1. The first issue is related to the selection of textual and audio-visual information meant to be published online and their effective organization in communication space, in other words, their appropriate positioning on the display used by the reader (e.g. computer monitor, display of smartphone or tablet). This 'information design' is basically a set of functional editing of information used to create compact journalistic products.
2. The second issue is to create special kinds of applications that will correspond with the technical features and limitations of communication devices used to mediate the journalistic contents, particularly focusing on interactivity and comfort of the readers (users). In this case, we take into account mainly technological design of communication devices to make sure they are available to wide spectrum of users, even to the users with various kinds of physiological disabilities and limitations.

In accordance with the issues stated above, we define the 'information design' as a general approach to arranging the content and presentation of information in order to communicate particular ideas and information clearly and effectively. Originally developed to improve the usefulness of printed books and manuals, it is now just as likely to be found in the processes of production of online news published on Web sites (S. Jones, 2003). The main goal of the information design – effective communication – is therefore achieved through an absolute focus on the user of the information. Given arguments suggest that information design is related mostly to the content of communication that can be thought of by questions 'who' 'what' and 'how'. 'Designing of information' is a process of effective presentation of visual, auditive or audio-visual components in a compact, integrated way. This process minds the clear differences between using graphic elements to arrange the texts and choosing appropriate visual components (e.g. photographs) that complete the textual information.

Minding the dynamic development of communication technologies, it is necessary to realize that various types of media communicate information in many different ways. Mobile phones are equipped with SIM cards; galleries and museums use so called 'electronic guides'. The key requirements always include easy orientation of the users and eligible arrangement of texts, images and videos – this necessity applies also to the contents of electronic newspapers.

The available options are determined – as in the case of print newspapers – by quality and range of available space. Even while discussing the issues of online newspapers, we are able to observe that serious events related to the whole society are situated in the most visible places, functioning as an electronic version of front page. Theory of journalism pays special attention to analysing the electronic contents from various points of view. It is reasonable to assume that Web sites, their features, design components and the ways that are used to organize the contents reflect the cultural particularities of countries of their origin and, even more importantly, cultural situation of the countries their readers live in.

Dutch cultural anthropologist G. Hofstede offers a certain methodological outline aimed at addressing the issue of studying both print and online journalism from the viewpoint of cultural differences between particular countries. The author defines cultures and organizational structures of different societies as "Software of the Mind" (G. Hofstede, 1980). Particular values that represent cultural differences between countries are segmented into specific categories called "cultural dimensions" by using quantitative (statistic) methods. The data were acquired as results of long-term research aimed at employees of trans-national concerns in more than 50 countries across the world, including Slovakia. The research published in 1980 defines four different cultural dimensions – power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. G. Hofstede and M. H. Bond (1988) extended these four dimensions by adding the fifth value – pragmatism. More recently, G. Hofstede, G. J. Hofstede and M. Minkov (2010) work also with sixth dimension called indulgence.

New media and modern communication devices connected to the Internet are, without a doubt, among the key factors that transform the traditional model of journalism related to print media or alternatively to radio and television. Media 'evolution' and improvement of electronic communication technologies lead to the development of new forms of editing, organizing and presenting journalistic contents and information. These new journalistic practises are

characterized by a high degree of standardization that makes them user-friendly and thus widely available and suitable for the mass audiences.

'Universal design' refers to the design of products and environments that are made to be easily usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for physical adaptation or developing a specialized design. The main objective of universal design is to simplify life for everyone through the creation of products, communication contents and user interfaces that are suitable for as many people as possible. In relation to the new media, universal design refers to the design of communication devices and services, including Web sites, telephones, TVs and computers that are adjusted also to people with diverse physiological disabilities (S. Jones, 2003).

The Centre for Universal Design at North Carolina State University (1997) works with seven basic principles of universal design:

1. Equitable use. The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
2. Flexibility in use. The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
3. Simple and intuitive. Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
4. Perceptible information. The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the users' sensory abilities.
5. Tolerance for error. The design minimizes hazards and the adverse, consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
6. Low physical effort. The design can be used efficiently and comfortably, and with a minimum of fatigue.
7. Size and space for approach and use. The design provides appropriate size and space for approach, reach, manipulation, and use, regardless of the user's body, posture, or mobility.

The requirements related to creation of Web sites that respect the principles of universal design have been accepted by (among others) the governments of United States of America, Great Britain, Canada, France and Australia, mainly in the case of Web sites that consist of information relevant to all levels of public administration. Universal design of these communication spaces makes them effectively accessible even for people with visual or hearing impairment as well as for people who suffer from neurological diseases.

Assistive technologies facilitate access to the information for people with diverse disabilities. In the case of computers and the Internet, assistive technologies include: alternative keyboards, alternative mouse systems, braille embossers, speech synthesizers, haptic devices, optical character recognition devices, screen magnifiers and readers, voice output communication devices, and voice recognition systems. For example, smartphone Samsung Galaxy S4 is able to track the movements of our eyes in order to automatically roll the pages up or down, depending on which way our eyes move.

These facts refer to one of the key trends in development of modern communication devices – the highest possible efficiency of the ways we disseminate information mostly appeals to so called 'mediocre recipient' (in terms of sociological mediocrity). T. Zasepa, P. Olekšák and I. Gazda (2009) critically observe that media tend to focus on effective transfer of information and the content itself becomes somehow less important. Both dissemination of information and regulation of social communication are influenced by many kinds of manipulation.

Media 'evolution' takes a major part in development and progress of the newspaper industry all over the world. The indicators that evaluate the current situation on the newspaper market in a global perspective, most importantly the circulation of newspapers and profits from advertising, suggest that the catastrophic scenarios predicting 'the end of print media' will not happen since the print newspapers seem to be able to find their way to improve this unflattering situation, even though it is necessary to admit that their four-hundred-year-long dominance in the sphere of media production is definitely over.

Although the situation in European countries and in the USA is getting worse, Asian countries are indicating (so far only small) increase of press circulation. Also, the number of people who read online newspapers in their different forms and variations is increasing constantly, as well as availability and use of Internet connection and new communication technologies on a global scale. However, we have to take into account also the readers of the final products of journalism. Traditional newspapers are more popular among older and middle-aged people while younger readers tend to read news on social networks or displays of their tablets and smartphones. Social and cultural factors, rituals and customs of the readers are very significant parts of the processes of production and perception of media contents. Media – if they want to 'survive' and be successful – will have to adapt to these dynamic communication trends.

Focusing on journalism and its place in the globalized societies of the 21st century, B. McNair notes that the dominant model of journalism of the 20th century represented by professional journalists and objective and reliable journalistic information is currently fragmented; mainly due to the influence of new media and technologies. Despite many

pessimistic visions, McNair does not worry about the future of journalism itself: "Journalism will not die out in this environment, because it is still needed on so many social, political and cultural levels. Journalism has a future. It will evolve, as it has evolved already, from the antique styles of the early newspapers to the gloss and sheen of the modern prime time news bulletin... But how will it change and will the change be for the better, or for the worse?" (B. McNair, 2009, p. 21).

Taking into account these uncertainties, we also have to mention a significant shift in the sector of so called "citizen journalism" (also known as 'public journalism', or 'participatory journalism'). Basically all people who are able to connect to the Internet are also able to freely publish and spread their opinions, offering a certain critical alternative of not being dependent on dominant media. However, this form of participation has been discussed with regards to the quality of journalistic contributions written and published by unprofessional journalists.

4. Conclusion

To answer the questions related to the future of the print media and traditional forms of journalism, we have to consider a lot of different factors and contexts. It is hard to tell whether the newspapers will be published on paper or only electronically, but the need for creating and editing the information contents will persist definitely. The influence of information technologies on the journalistic work cannot be doubted. Besides being skilled writers, the journalists also have to know how to use computers and specialized editing software that play an important role in the production processes of journalistic texts. Online newspapers are associated with extended demands related to all editorial positions in publishing, since the traditional news are combined with audio-visual materials to fit into online environment. Most of newspapers employ editorial staff members who are in charge of placing the journalistic information online. The specifics of editing the electronic issues of newspapers require a radical transformation of traditional models of editorial work.

Newspapers fight for their readers with both content and design. There is a continuous decline in readers' interest in hard news as they increasingly prefer soft news. Consequently, changes adopted by broadsheet newspapers to compete with tabloids are quite evident – adjusting their format to resemble the formal aspects of tabloids, but also producing more simple content accompanied by engaging visual graphics. The arrangement of texts within online issues is different from the print version, as online newspapers have a different structure designed for mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets, enabling quick and easy manipulation of the online content. It is very important to analyse and reflect these trends – as Pravdová and Radošinská (2013) state, media texts, whether print or electronic, communicate sets of meanings through their internal and external characteristics. Among the most significant ones are the sorts of narratives chosen, anticipated preferences of the media audiences and ways of constructing and sharing the content.

Taking into account the economic reality, the press has been affected mainly by the impact of the global economic crisis. Such unfavourable economic situation has led advertisers to limit their spending or move their marketing activities online, causing significant circulation and advertising revenue decline related to the press. In relation to presentation of the newspaper content, it can be concluded that there is a substantial shift in the emphasis from texts to pictures. Visualisation of information, previously associated mostly with television, is now prioritised in the daily press as well. Unquestionably, eye-catching visuals have a lot of advantages, especially in terms of their ability to represent reality; on the other hand, they are traditionally associated with the phenomenon of tabloid media. Finally, in recent years we have been witnessing a kind of 'battle' between traditional newspapers and online newspapers published on the Internet. As publishers and editors have understood the various advantages of online newspapers (e.g. economic factors, simple distribution), these online issues of the newspapers have become, in many cases, 'siblings' of the traditional press. However, there are still many examples that define the online newspapers as a standalone competitor to the press. The future of this 'rivalry' is uncertain and almost impossible to predict.

However, even if the future trends in development of both print and online newspapers are unclear, we are able to make a few conclusions. In the first place, due to the increasing importance of online journalism and digital media, the journalists and editors will have to be multi-skilled, able to cope with the dynamic transformations of journalism practices, since the publishing processes will be very similar for both traditional and online news. Secondly, it is possible to say that all media will be increasingly rich in colour, visual attractiveness and quality, whether print newspapers or online news. Thirdly, the economic imperatives of media industry (advertising, gaining profits) will determine how and to what extent the readers will be able to access information. Finally, the social gossip, print news related to celebrities and sports (as well as to their online and mobile equivalents) will increasingly depend on the interests of advertisers. On the other hand, premium (paid) news aimed at well-educated, elite audiences will have to pay more and more attention to extensive commentaries and analyses of the most significant business, economic and political issues in order to attract their readers and meet their expectations.

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