

Chapter 7.11

Online Journalistic Services: Are Digital Newspapers Complementary to Traditional Press?

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ABSTRACT

The new online communication has had a considerable impact on the activities of the newspaper industry. As a result, analysis of the duality of journalism has aroused increasing interest. This chapter analyses the readers' behavior in relation to digital and traditional media. We identify the main reading motivations and the behavior patterns in each medium. Besides, we examine the possible relationship between readers' objectives for reading and the choice of each channel. The results confirm that the electronic and traditional channels are compatible, but suggest that it is necessary to take the process of differentiation in order to enhance this complementarity, meeting readers' needs in different circumstances and combining effects to raise loyalty to a newspaper.

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INTRODUCTION

The constant development of the Internet and the growing spread of its use in the business environment are producing notable changes in the way relationships are established between a company and its sphere of operations. In fact, the impact of the Internet in recent years has been such as to change conventional conceptions of certain activities and businesses. This process of change is particularly notable in the case of services characterized by high levels of intangibility and an increasing presence in the digital media. Indeed, it seems reasonable to think that the characteristics of the digital media could well suppose important advantages for the distribution and sale of services.

Newspaper publishing is one of the activities that has been most affected by the development of the new medium. The appearance of the new digital media has brought far-reaching changes

in this sector (Bush & Gilbert, 2002). These changes will foreseeably increase in the future. Also, Internet technology is rapidly changing the way and the aims with which readers consult newspapers. Definitely, the new medium involves enormous advantages for journalistic services in terms of both supply and demand. Due to these advantages, there is a proliferation of electronic newspapers and these are among the services most avidly sought by Internet users (AIMC; 2006; Media Contacts, 2007; Newspaper Association of America, 2005).

Bearing in mind all the above, there is a clear duality of information distribution channels. In this way, readers have the possibility of using both mediums for reading news. This fact has led some fears at the possibility of cannibalistic effects between digital and traditional medium. In this context, the analysis of readers' behaviour shows a growing relevance for e-journalistic firms. So, the aim of this chapter is to identify and characterize reading behaviour patterns in both channels; as well as to study the key attributes that motivate the use of online vs. printed newspapers.

NEWSPAPER BUSINESS ON THE INTERNET

The majority of print newspapers are developing their digital versions with the use of the online communication and the new medium. These processes involve relevant changes in the press business. We could note a transformation at the organizational level, the creation of a specific language, and a new multimedia environment. Also, the Internet has involved changes in access, production, and circulation of the information. All these imply the arrival of new challenges and opportunities that they will have to face very soon (Dans, 2000; Flavián & Gurrea, 2006). Indeed, editorial offices are working in a different way and with a quicker pace compared to the traditional medium (Greer & Mensing, 2003).

The speed with which news reaches the reader, the low cost of distributing information, the opportunity to establish more direct contact and interact with users, and the possibilities to personalize the journalistic offer are noticeable trends. Besides, the electronic channel allows for updating the news immediately and showing links to other information sources. Moreover, we must note that the Internet combines the three basic advantages of the radio, the press, and the television. In fact, this new medium presents the immediacy of the radio, the wide and deep information offered by the press, and the impact of the images in television. All these aspects allow configuring a complete journalistic offer.

All these advantages have involved a growth in the supply of digital news. There are currently over 4,000 digital newspapers worldwide (Editor & Publisher, 2006; World Newspapers Online, 2007) (see Table 1). All these journalistic firms have contributed to implement definitively the virtual business as a real communication media. The growth of this new distribution channel is spectacular. In fact, the Internet has reached 50 million people during four years (Nielsen/NetRatings, 2007); meanwhile the radio and the television have needed 38 and 13 years, respectively. Also, some studies point out the good situation of the sector and its expectations. More specifically, the World Association of Newspapers (2005) analyzes

Table 1. Digital newspapers around the world (Source: World Newspapers Online (2007))

GEOGRAPHIC AREA	
Canada	394
United States	1226
Latin America	443
Europe	824
Middle East	129
Africa	181
Asia	299
Oceania And Antarctica	87

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