

RESTRUCTURING NEWS MEDIA IN THE INFORMATION AGE

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Abstract: Recent research in the field indicates that news media industry has been facing major changes related to production, distribution and consumption, within the last decade mostly due to the digital era. Digital technology and social media are creating a real twist within media industry at large. Audiences, that once had access to different information only by consuming media, nowadays are in the position to have open access to free information on websites, online platforms, blogs, social media, email, newsletters and others. New ways of media production and new strategies for engaging audiences are necessary.

Almost 50% of Facebook users, aged between 19 and 29, in the US are getting news on their pages in spite of their clear intention, and they are also consuming online video news, according to studies. Advertising must as well reinvent itself in order to reach more and more consumers – "native advertising" that top media like The New York Times, The Washington Post or The Wall Street Journal is one relevant example.

For the beginning, the paper presents the general theoretical aspects related to media – an evolution of functions, specific formats, audiences and consumptions etc. Further, the article focuses on the most recent research on media – such as "The State of the News Media 2014" that is an annual report by the Pew Research Center's Journalism Project examining the landscape of American journalism. Also, the most relevant principles of journalism are mentioned as explained in the book titled "The Elements of Journalism", that is a relevant work on the practice and principles of journalism.

Keywords: news media, media industry, professional media practices, media consumption, Romanian media.

An Overview of Media Industry

Media industry at large is reinventing in order to respond to the challenges of the digital era. In 2011, the entire media industry watched Rupert Murdoch's Newscorporation historical media bet: *a gamble, a mix of high-contemporary technology and the best of traditional journalism, a \$30 million investment targeting sophisticated media audience, a news carousel focusing on multimedia interactivity (the iPad tablet): The Daily*. The innovative media project defined how digital technologies have influenced the media industry and the consumers' behavior over time (Nistor, 2011, p. 91). One and a half year later, The Daily was closed, due to the reduced number of subscribers that was not providing the financial sustainability of the project.

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The Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2013 – Tracking the Future of News* analyzes the growing number of ways of consuming news and of locations where consumers have access to news, alongside with the revolution caused by the mobile devices. When asked about the sources for accessing news, respondents indicated traditional news brands, but also referred to aggregators and social media and blogs in significant percentages (Nistor, 2013).

When describing professional media industry, the keyword is *convergence*, whereby the media are integrating, not only within the media and journalists' workplaces but also throughout the whole media ownership system with its vertical and horizontal structures (Terzis, 2009, p. 514).

Ignacio Ramonet in his volume “L’Explosion du journalism”, while questioning the survival of print media, says that “planes do not replace boats” adding that indeed print media may be seen as dinosaurs, but they have been wandering on the planet for millions of years (Ramonet, 2011, p. 127). The author considers that the Internet will not replace print media, just like television did not replace radio, or just like cinema did not replace theater or opera, admitting that print media indeed is searching for ways to restructure itself in a communication era when access to information is wider than in any other time in the history. These changes are considered a true revolution by Ramonet who believes that journalists must learn to edit and produce their stories in new formats so that they can be distributed through social networks, blogs etc. So, the author concludes, media audiences will search for and consume double-quality information – both in terms of content and format, based on useful and credible information (Ramonet, 2011, p. 130).

Regarding the news media management in the digital age, there is the major strategic challenge both to identify and then build a digital business model and strategy which sustains itself (Graham; Greenhill, 2014). The two authors also consider that the newspapers' previous dominance was in terms of geography and of demography, while now they must focus on diversifying the value streams of their content.

Over the last few decades, these key areas of human existence have converged in and through our concurrent and continuous exposure to, use of and immersion in media, information and communication technologies, explains Mark Deuze in his article titled “Media Life” (Deuze, 2011). The author is citing the concept of *mediapolis* – a comprehensively mediated public space where media underpin and overarch the experiences and expressions of everyday life. Going further, Mark Deuze considers that this perspective on live lived *in*, rather than *with*, media could be the ontological benchmark for the 21st century media studies. “We are living a media life, and multi-tasking our media has become a regular feature of everyday life”, according to Deuze. Information is reaching us in various ways – social accounts, search engines and others. The graphic below, indicated within a research of the Reuters Institute, identifies the main ways that media consumers are coming across news stories.

Most important gateways to news

	UK	Germany	Spain	Italy	France	Denmark	US	Urban Brazil	Japan
Brands	34%	32%	38%	35%	16%	55%	20%	47%	28%
Search	24%	40%	40%	49%	45%	30%	33%	44%	39%
Social	17%	50%	45%	38%	14%	22%	30%	60%	12%
Aggregators	17%	16%	17%	16%	12%	7%	26%	37%	43%

Q10: Thinking about how you FIND news online, which are the main ways that you come across news stories? Chose up to five.

Base: All markets UK (n=2078) US (n=2028) Spain (n=979) Japan (n=978) Italy (n=965) Germany (n=1062) France (n=973) Denmark (n=1007) Urban Brazil (n=985)

(Figure source: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk> accessed in 2014)

The State of the News Media 2014 is the eleventh edition of an annual report by the Pew Research Center's Journalism Project examining the landscape of American journalism (<http://www.journalism.org/packages/state-of-the-news-media-2014/>, accessed in 2014). After reading the report, the main conclusion would be that news media are more than ever before linked to the social media and to the mobile devices (tablets, smartphones etc). According to the cited research, half of Facebook users get news even though they did not go there looking for it. (the majority being aged between 18-to-29-year-old), and the percentage is similar for the area of online video.

The Nine Essential Principles of Journalism

In the summer edition of 2001 from the Nieman Reports from The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University – “Essays about the Elements of Journalism”, the nine essential principles of journalism established by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel are presented and commented. We will briefly mention the nine elements:

1. *“Journalism’s first obligation is to the truth* – rather adding context and interpretation, press needs to concentrate on synthesis and verification;
2. *Journalism’ first loyalty is to citizens* – a commitment to citizens is more than professional egoism; the allegiance to citizens is the meaning of the journalistic independence;
3. *The essence of journalism is a discipline of verification* – the discipline of verification is what separates journalism from entertainment, propaganda, art, fiction;
4. *Journalists must maintain an independence from those they cover*;
5. *Journalists must serve as an independent monitor of power* – in the next century, the press must watchdog not only government, but an expanding nonprofit world, a corporate world, and the expanding public debate that new technology is creating;
6. *Journalism must provide a forum for public criticism and comment*;
7. *Journalists must make the significant interesting and relevant* – storytelling and information are not contradictory;
8. *Journalists should keep the news in proportion and make it comprehensive* – journalism is our modern cartography; it creates a map for citizens to navigate society;
9. *Journalists have an obligation to personal conscience*” (Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel in “The Elements of Journalism”).

No matter what the technology, journalism will involve monitoring those in power; researching a topic; gathering information and identifying to consumers where it came from; examining critical documents and verifying what sources reveal Bob Giles considers in an article titled “Creating a Road Map for Journalism’s Mission” (<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu> accessed 2014).

Michael Getler in his article “The News Has Become the News” published in the Nieman Reports, 2001 (<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu> accessed 2014), explains that editorial standards are under pressure – they are challenged by the increased tabloid-style, by the growing usage of previously unaccepted language on television and in print.

Roles and Dimensions of the “Next Journalism”

Over the time, scholarly literature has classified the functions and roles of media in many ways, but the main functions are considered to be the ones briefly described in the following lines.

1. Exercising its *function of information*, information is being distributed by media organizations to large numbers of citizens. The intensity of the media coverage usually determines the level of concern and reaction among targeted audiences. This explains the low impact that poorly publicized services or events have. The attention paid by the media can influence decisively the evolution of a subject. Coverage of any kind (negative or positive) is an essential condition that an event or a public person must meet to count in the public competition. In the long term, as demonstrated, ignorance is more disastrous than negative publicity. One natural consequence of this situation is that public actors are permanently trying to create interesting events so that they get intense media coverage.
2. The *function to entertain* – the most frequent reasons for consuming media content are *information and entertainment* - media participate in reducing daily stress by offering a show built with characters that are not necessarily part of the sphere of entertainment, but in all areas (political, sporting or other).
3. The media *function of compensation* – media eliminates frustrations, as it happens in of soap operas, where consumers transfer in virtual reality provided by a continuing TV program, thus compensating their own failure from the real life.
4. Other media functions refer to *education, social integration, culture, explanation, integration etc.*

How are the new news media responding to all these functions that media organizations have? Authors Levi Obijiofor and Folker Hanusch refer to the seven dimensions along which journalism cultures could be distinguished globally that had previously been identified by Hanitzsch. Further, we briefly list them (Obijiofor; Hanusch, 2011, p. 49):

1. *Interventionism* – which is the extent to which journalists believe they should intervene in the news process; there are both interventionist journalists that get involved in the news coverage, and detached journalists who act objectively;
2. *Power distance* – this refers to the position that one journalist has in regard to the power;
3. *Market orientation* – this refers to the main goal of producing the news (is it to serve the public interest or only to reach a large audience?);
4. *Objectivism* – this dimension refers to the degree to which journalists believe that an objective truth really exists;
5. *Empiricism* – it refers to aspects of how truth claims can be justified;
6. *Relativism* – it discusses the way individuals base their personal moral philosophies on universal ethical rules;
7. *Idealism* – this refers to the consequences of the responses to ethical dilemmas;

In a hypermedia environment characterized by a continuous overload of information, the role of media and the needs of consumers are changing accordingly.

In their book titled “*Blur: How to Know What’s True in the Age of Information Overload*” authors Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel established eight functions that the news consumers expect from “the next journalism” as the two authors are naming it; further we briefly refer to the these functions using the adapted version presented by The Nieman Reports (<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102533/Creating-a-Navigational-Guide-to-New-Media.aspx>, accessed 2014).

1. *The authenticator role* – even if journalists are no longer seen as the only information provider, the press must help the media consumers to authenticate what facts are true and reliable. This process demands however a higher level of expertise from newsrooms. This authenticator role is a key element in the digital era when news organizations have no longer monopoly over information.
2. *Sense Maker* – journalists should put information into a larger context and link events, declarations, facts, so that media consumers can understand the meaning of the news.
3. *Investigator* – it is emphasized that journalists still need to function as public investigators;
4. *Witness Bearer* – that refers to the monitoring function of journalism
5. *Empowerer* – it refers to the mutual empowerment – journalists and citizens (sharing experience and knowledge).
6. *Smart Aggregator* – that should save people time and steer them to trusted sources.
7. *Forum Organizer* – media organizations may function as public squares where citizens can monitor different voices.
8. *Role Model* - The new press will inevitably serve as a role model for those news consumers that want to operate as citizen journalists.

Conclusions

News media industry has been seriously challenged by the dynamic changes imposed by the evolution of technology. Media managers and journalists are trying to identify solutions for being interesting enough for the more and more demanding consumers. In a hypermedia environment characterized by a continuous overload of information, the role of media and the needs of consumers are changing accordingly.

Citizen journalism is another important challenge, since there are numerous quick, comfortable and free ways to access information and share it with millions around the globe.

Therefore, media newsrooms must identify not only the proper content, but also the proper format, and distribution channel so that they can still reach the target audiences that are permanently exposed to information. In this turmoil, news industry must understand that the key element is to respect the fundamental principles of journalism (mentioned within this article) – this could be the ultimate rescue boat for the press in the complicated new age of communication.

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