

THE SPECIFICS OF ONLINE JOURNALISTIC FORMS:

A COMPARISON OF THE ONLINE AND PRINT EDITIONS OF THE FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG

Abstract: The main difference between online and printed texts lies in the fact that online readers can see only headlines, teasers and photos. On the web, readers often need to decide in less than a second whether to click on the words "read more" or not, so they look for pages that can be easily scanned and skimmed for content. Instead of reading word-for-word, web users pick out single, prominent elements such as headlines or graphics.

Author information:

Viktoriya Ivanova

PhD student

at Konstantin Preslavsky - University of Shumen,

Faculty of Education

✉ v.i.ivanova@shu.bg

🌐 Bulgaria

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In its main features, online journalism is not so different from print journalism. All journalists and editors need to do research and selection of topics on a daily basis. As a journalistic medium, the World Wide Web (WWW) has features which are very similar to those in the print media, such as:

- timeliness;
- reliability;
- thorough research;
- exclusivity;
- investigation;
- proximity and authenticity;
- sustainability and prospecting;
- storytelling and style;
- sincerity, transparency and commitment;
- neutrality and professional distance;
- seriousness and cost-effectiveness [Simons, 2011: 176].

The news journalist's task is to provide current information about events, facts and arguments to his or her audience. He or she collects, checks, processes, analyses and evaluates information and prepares it for the public. In communication science, the news journalist serves as "a gatekeeper", a term introduced by Winfred Schulz to compare the role of a journalist in the news flow to that of a goalkeeper, who controls what goes into the team's goal [Noelle-Neumann; Schulz; Wilke 1990: 233].

Criteria for a good Internet article

Compared to newspapers or magazines, reading on the screen is completely different. Long texts on the screen are not attractive. The Internet is more or less there to provide a brief overview or important information (as soon as possible) about a topic. To answer the question of what an Internet text should look like, the usability gurus Jacob Nielsen and John Morke determine three criteria for a good Internet article, regardless of its genre:

1. Dividing the texts in sections and with headings and interim headings;
2. Using lists, graphics and bold type;

3. Simple and informal spelling: "I don't like reading every word, and with formal writing, you have to read every word, and it slows you down," commented a user [Rolf-Alkan 2009: 35].

All researchers and journalists, however, agree that content is and remains the most important issue, regardless of the type of media (print or the Internet). The reader is interested in facts and information, so according to Nielsen and Morkes, the more links to other sites the website has (the more and more varied information), the higher the credibility of the information provided by that website.

"In ten years, journalism will look completely different from our professional experience," writes Marc Fisher, editor for the Washington Post for more than 20 years. In his opinion, journalism becomes more interactive and leaves more scope for design by users [Weichert 2009: 98]. The problem is that the mass media will no longer exist in the conventional sense. "If there are no more mass media, which ultimately form our common basis for discussion and help us to understand politics and the way of the world, you do not have any informed voters and no functioning democracy" [Weichert 2009: 98].

In the coming years, the hypertext will be increasingly developed in a direction that Jeff Jarvis calls "process journalism": it moderates processes of truth-finding and opinion-building, and then bundles their results. The task of the journalists is to initiate and moderate discussions in the network, to examine facts and to research further material - all this more or less in real time.

At the moment there is a lot of experimentation. There are, for example, non-profit projects to promote quality journalism, such as the ProPublica editorial office (www.prorepublica.net), which attempts to conduct investigative journalism and spread its stories free of charge via the Internet. In addition, there are deliberations in newspaper companies (the Washington Post included), universities or foundations, specifically to ask for funding.

Thanks to the hypertext principle, online journalism transforms formats. In the beginning, the online editions of newspapers and magazines were nothing more than a petition of the paper edition on a technical platform. Over the years, journalists have begun to use the new technological possibilities. Something similar has happened to the theatre, radio and television. At first, the cinema was simply a filmed theatre, the radio was a "newspaper that was read aloud" and the television was "illustrated radio". So, the new media need some time to find their right image and the best ways to inform.

The Internet and the new technological possibilities open up new ways of communication. Over time, the possibilities of the hypertext and non-linear narration are used much more frequently. Thus, a new technological possibility has emerged to combine several elements of the journalistic forms of presentation on the Internet, which was unthinkable until now. These are texts with photos, audios, videos, and animations. All information is provided with a background, with the necessary networking, interaction and feedback. And all information can be constantly updated. Updating a printed newspaper depends on its frequency of publication. For online editions, it is different. The items can be renewed at any time, even several times a day. While journalists are separated from the audience on the radio, television and the press, on the Internet the boundaries between author and recipient are changed. WWW is not only a combination of computer and media, but also a phenomenon of information and culture entertainment worldwide. Today, the Internet is the most important source of information in many areas of life.

Here many examples can be given. "Spiegel-Online" has developed into a stand-alone product in recent years [Mast 2004: 673]. The online edition is not a repetition of the contents of the print version. "The editors do not have to take into consideration the production rhythm of the print editorial team. The changes also affect the forms of journalistic representation. They must adapt to the new reality of technology. Online editions do not only have better information to provide, but also a higher entertainment value, which results from the multimedial abilities of the hypertext (the integration of video, audio and animation). In addition, there are many sites that offer games, prize draws or other types of entertainment.

It is also very interesting to note that journalistic field work has already become multimedial. Journalists must not only be equipped with a pad, a pen and a photo camera, but also have an audio recording device or a video camera. Due to the changes in technology and the specific possibilities of the Internet, the journalistic forms of representation have changed.

Online editions have the best research tools. In particular, the supra regional providers offer various possibilities for database research via the Internet. The detailed databases, archives and important links are compulsory for qualitative online journalism.

According to Millison, online journalism has the following platforms:

- daily printed newspapers with online editions (in the WorldWideWeb or online services);
- printed magazines with online editions (in the WorldWideWeb or online services);
- printed news services with online editions (in the WorldWideWeb or online services);
- pure online editions (in the WorldWideWeb or online services);
- TV / radio stations with online editions (in the WorldWideWeb or online services),
- electronic mail (e-mail);
- CD-ROM with online references [Millison: www].

The Internet has a clear influence on readers and text. The new technological possibilities offer an uncomplicated linking of the text with pictures, sounds, videos and animations. What is complicated to describe can be easily visualized with video or images. This link between the multimedial elements of online journalism builds a new way of perceiving content. The users want an appealing and modern presentation of the news, and many want to participate in this new digital platform through comments or opinions. The WWW offers a new opportunity to present information and that brings a lot of creativity in the writing of journalistic texts. But even on the WWW those texts have to meet certain standards.

A comparison of the online and print editions of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) went online fairly late - on January 8, 2001. Now the page looks quite different.

The layout

The homepage of the FAZ opens with the so-called "Current" section which contains the most important news and topics (www.faz.net). There is an opportunity to view all articles under the rubrics "Politics", "Economy", "Feuilleton", "Sport", "Society", "Finance", "Technik und Motor", "Chance", "Rhine-Main". In the form of a headline and a short summary of the content of the teaser, and sometimes also through pictures, the user can have an overview of the day's events. The page is divided into three columns. The first (right) and second columns provide comments, analyses, and news, and the third presents "Images of the week", stock exchange information, and similar information. The middle, or second, column now contains the latest and important message or messages.

The layout of the homepage makes it easier to find a menu that is immediately under the titles. In addition to the link "Aktuell", there is "Multimedia", where all the advantages of online journalism - video and audio content and pictures - are presented. Next follow the links "Topics", "Blogs", "Archive" and "My FAZ.NET", which open a subsidiary page of FAZ.NET.

The homepage also offers the possibility for special service offers. You can get "top services" listed at the bottom. These include, among others, medical services, financial services, games, iPad applications, FAZ.NET mobile, weather, ticket portal, partner search, cultural calendar. These rubrics are indicated by small icons, which should refer to the content.

A special feature is the possibility of online research on FAZ.NET. The "archive search" is a great advantage of online journalism. Under "Archive" the user is offered the possibility to access old articles for the price of 1 euro. The user can also log on for one month. Full access to the individual articles is only possible for registered users.

The website also offers sections like "Shop", "Mobile" and others. Sometimes, the editorial part and the online shop are just a mouse click away from each other. It is, therefore, only to be welcomed, if Internet communications, as announced by T-Online, are to come up with their own codes, in which they commit themselves to a strong separation between the web and the editorial part"[Wieland 2003: 228].

The "Contact" section is available to the reader for feedback and specific questions. The FAZ.NET website contains several e-mail addresses, which guarantee an answer to the reader's questions. The page is updated every half an hour by uploading new relevant information.

If users want to read the most important news of the day, they start to read FAZ.NET from the title page, like a newspaper. The FAZ.NET homepage offers many special services. This shows the quality of the page. The individual messages are provided with a timestamp and arranged accordingly. This function is especially relevant for those readers who want to be constantly updated. As Gaube said, "We distinguish ourselves through relatively rigid news selection, through strong classification, analysis and commentary. And we believe that we are the medium of publication on the Internet, which mainly lives through our own work. Against this background, we even go so far as to say that we make a significant contribution to the development of the German-language Internet. Because we are not going to stop and register 250 agency notifications, but focus on the essentials (...) ". [Holzinger 2010: 220].

Journalistic texts onFAZ.NET

The online edition contains both articles from the print edition and independent contributions. The print output is the model for the online edition. Users can read news and comments in the "Latest" section. The articles always keep readers informed about the latest events. The most important messages are on the title page and give the user a quick overview of the relevant events of the day. The most important messages are to be seen at a glance. Most news is from the field of domestic and foreign policy. Access to the columns is made possible through the appropriate links - detailed reports, interviews and large-scale reports, which are quite similar in scale to the print output.

The technological possibilities of online journalism give FAZ.NET a great advantage over its printed version. Current events can be published at any time and are not dependent on a production process, as is the case with the daily newspapers. This is perhaps the most important advantage of online journalistic forms.

The Internet thus not only changes the journalistic forms of representation on the WWW, but also affects the daily newspapers. They specialize in detailed research, which also provides the newspaper with a certain educational and entertainment function in addition to its informational features. By contrast, the journalists and editors who work in the news agencies have almost no time for extensive research and independent discussion of the topic. Online journalism can therefore be viewed as a purely informational medium

Most web users want to be quickly and briefly informed of current events and this is especially true for readers of online editions. The shorter articles on the Web offer the perfect opportunity to provide quick and concise information to the readers. At present, the information provided on the FAZ website is still quite long and wordy and there are articles which do not fully meet readers' preference for short text.

Another special feature is the interactive feedback option. In theory, FAZ.NET offers the possibility to contact various addressees with different areas of responsibility under "Contact". In the print edition, only letters can be sent to the editors.

Blogs are another distinctive feature of online journalism. The FAZ website offers its users a blog (www.faz-community.faz.net), which serves as a means of providing and receiving feedback because it is a forum that gives readers the opportunity to express their own opinion about the published content. In this case, the addressee is not the editors, but those recipients who also want to present their opinions. In order to be able to comment on the FAZ.Net blog, the user has to register as a "member". This procedure is similar to the "archive search", but this time it is free.

As regards the differences between the online edition of the FAZ and its print edition, a very clear distinction can be made between the two forms of media coverage. The differences lie mainly in the journalistic representation forms.

Conclusion

Online journalists and editors face a number of challenges. Compared to newspapers or magazines, reading on-screen is a completely different experience. Long texts on the web are not attractive. The Internet is there to provide a brief overview or important information about a topic in a timely manner.

Another important difference is found in the text structure, which is determined by the hypertext. Online journalists must therefore place a strong emphasis on the so-called micro-texts, with which they refer to further content. These include the titling of links, videos and audios, short headings for linked messages, short headlines in the headline format for the announcement of additional text parts (for example, if a report is divided into several parts) or additional reporting.

The Internet opens up new possibilities for online journalism to fulfil its own tasks. These include:

- new ways to produce and distribute medial content;
- new ways of interacting with users;
- new possibilities to increase the quality and attractiveness of media offers;
- new ways to increase the productivity and efficiency of journalistic and editorial work.

As a result, for only a few years online newspapers have become completely different. The FAZ.NET website has developed in to a strong brand.

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