

Print still scores, but newspapers need the money to play game

Writing for The Guardian website, Roy Greenslade says print (still) remains a favourite with readers. He refers to a new study that finds newspapers are read for an average of 40 minutes a day, outstripping by a wide margin the time spent on online reading. If that is the position in the developed world, the amount of time spent on reading a newspaper in a country like India could be far more, which must surely be heartening for newspaper owners and publishers.

Greenslade thinks “print in future will largely serve a niche market (a reality already for magazines)”. An educated, affluent elite will most likely be prepared to pay for the pleasure of getting ink on their hands, he says. What he finds worrying, however, is “whether anyone can find a business model to support independent, trustworthy, quality journalism on a large enough scale to stage a daily national conversation”. A question many of those in the know about the media here have also been asking.

Greenslade finds the growing use of social media to access news “equally problematic”. He refers to his colleague at City, University of London, Neil Thurman, who has just published a study, *Newspaper Consumption in the Mobile Age*, which shows that 89 per cent of newspaper reading is still in newsprint, with just 7 per cent via mobile devices and 4 per cent on PCs. Thurman’s research, Greenslade points out, shows that while newspapers are read for an average of 40 minutes a day, online visitors to the websites and apps of those same newspapers spend an average of just 30 seconds per day.

A fair wind seems to be blowing for newspapers Down Under as well. Fairfax Media, while announcing a half-year profit, plans to keep printing newspapers, says a report on The Guardian website. Fairfax chief executive Greg Hywood says the company will keep printing the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* “for some years yet”. The report mentions the publisher radically restructuring the way the papers are run.

Can Mark Zuckerberg really fix journalism? Well, Emily Bell, director at the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia Journalism School, writing for the *Columbia Journalism Review*, says “what

independent journalism needs more than ever from Silicon Valley is a significant transfer of wealth”. It is not necessarily enough just to re-energise existing institutions (although the involvement of Jeff Bezos and his money at *The Washington Post* has been, from a civic and journalistic point of view, wholly beneficial), she says, adding that Zuckerberg has “a chance to make a generational intervention which will dramatically improve the health of America’s journalism”.

America, in Bell’s view, needs a radical new market intervention similar to that made by the UK Government in 1922 when it issued a Royal Charter and established the BBC. “Remaking independent journalism requires funding that is independent of individuals or corporations, has a long-time horizon built into it, and offers complete independence and as much stability as possible. If, instead of scrapping over news initiatives, the four or five leading technology companies could donate \$1 billion in endowment each for a new type of engine for independent journalism, it would be more significant a contribution than a thousand scattered initiatives put together.”

After 10 months of testing headlines seriously, *The New York Times* has started slicing its audience into finer segments, albeit informally, says Max Willens on the Digiday website. The right headline can drive exponentially higher traffic to a story, which is why publishers big and small are optimising their headlines not just on social media or their owned and operated properties but inside third-party recommendation widgets too, he says. What’s less common, he adds, is optimising by device. While some publishers have toyed with using different headlines inside their mobile apps, fewer are showing headlines to mobile readers that differ from the headlines shown to readers accessing their sites from desktop computers, or from the ones that appear in newsletters, he points out. Most haven’t taken the step because muddling through reader data on that level requires dedicated analytics and support for the work.

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