

# DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN JOURNALISM: ABOUT CREDIBILITY AND INNOVATION

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## Abstract

The field of journalism and information has always been distinguished from other fields by the speed with which any innovative technology that appeared on the market could be quickly implemented in the daily activity of media institutions. Years from now, these technologies could already be considered implemented in other fields, such as educational, medical, arts, etc. We consider ourselves, however, as being pioneers in the process of implementing technologies in the field we represent. This status did not always come with praise of rigor, but often with critical reactions on the need for their implementation. The article below talks precisely about the transformations imposed by information technologies in our field and the digital skills that we must obtain during the years of study in order to practice in media institutions today. It also focuses on the challenges that educational institutions with a journalistic profile face nowadays.

**Keywords:** *digital technologies, technologization of the didactic process, software, native digital media institution, traditional media, global network.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of new technologies within media institutions in the country and abroad has contributed to an even sharper awareness by the specialists in the field about the need to learn the secrets of their use. Thus, in a very short time, to the need for specialists in the field to possess writing and creative thinking skills, the need to possess a very complex set of digital skills was added, just to allow the employees in the newsrooms of media institutions to adapt a journalistic product to all the informational platforms that could host it: text, photo, video, audio and, finally, convergent product. This set of digital skills can be developed, not least, through the possession by specialized higher education institutions of laboratories equipped with state-of-the-art technological equipment,

allowing future specialists to be trained using the same software programs that are also used by the editorial offices of press agencies, native digital institutions or by any other platform for the distribution of qualitative and well-documented information. G. Stepanov, referring to the transformations imposed by information technologies in the activity of all fields, mentions: "As a result of the technologization of the didactic processes, two new teaching-evaluation methodologies were successively affirmed in the higher school: initially - the computer-assisted one, and later - the one entirely based on the new information technologies." (Stepanov, 2021) We recognize that in the context in which such equipment is extremely expensive, not every journalistic faculty today can enjoy such laboratories in which students can obtain the necessary skills to integrate more easily into the field of work, or in recent years, representatives of the labour market have always expressed their bewilderment about the insufficient possession by young specialists of digital skills to quickly integrate into their editorial activities.

## 2. CONTEXT

In recent years, the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences of Moldova State University has made considerable efforts in order to equip the radio and television laboratories with equipment equivalent to that found in the newsrooms of media institutions, and all this through institutional partnerships with representatives of government institutions from abroad, embassies, NGOs that were actively involved in the process, realizing that the fourth

power of a state must also have resources to operate at the necessary speeds, promoting the quality, impartiality and correctness of journalistic products in a world where the fake phenomenon in the world of information acquires an extraordinary scope, and the financiers of these negative and dangerous phenomena for the democracies of the world do not worry about the costs of the equipment for creating, distributing and promoting the phenomena of fake, manipulation and disinformation, or paying for the services of young specialists fresh out of university desks.

Among the main challenges faced by educational institutions with a journalistic profile, however, one could include the following:

- the lack of sufficient specialists to keep up with the development of software programs for the creation of integrated journalistic products and the ability to quickly integrate these programs into the curricula of study programs;
- the insufficient salary level within educational institutions for specialists who possess digital skills and who, moreover, could easily integrate into any newsroom with a net salary higher than that which the educational institutions could offer them;
- the migration of specialists in the field from one workplace to another, resulting from the criterion of remuneration, which is extremely important in the process of choosing a workplace;
- the reduction of the number of students in recent years at the specialized faculties for objective reasons (demographic problems, emigration of the population to the countries of the Western world, the war in the neighbouring country, etc.);
- the increase in recent years of the number of professional tasks for teachers involved in the instructional-didactic process within the faculties, in order to maintain the study programs at all study cycles, their authorization and/or periodic accreditation/re-accreditation, and this fact requires considerable collective efforts to demonstrate the need for program continuity in order to maintain the active field in the national economy.

We also recognize that among the employees of media institutions in the country there are still many specialists who express a certain kind of resistance against the new trends, in their attempt to preserve the old work processes in the newsrooms, believing that the resistance to technologies contributes to greater credibility for the media institution. In the context of the digital evolution of the last period, the field of journalism, indeed, is exposed to some radical metamorphoses. The evolution of the field is at a turning point: keeping traditional methods of information, moving to digital platforms or combining both methods to make information dissemination more efficient. To see the direction journalism is heading, it is necessary to examine the trends of the last few decades. Traditional and digital media currently represent two parallel systems of media activity, which feed each other, but which is also in a certain competition, even if sometimes it is about the same institution. We recognize, however, that keeping both versions of publications for the same edition is a great luxury nowadays, resulting from the fact that often double expenses are needed (staff, space rent, payroll, equipment, etc.). Resulting from the fact that the generations following 1990 are mostly oriented towards the online information process, the digital press is gaining more and more ground in front of the traditional one, thanks to the following aspects:

- easy access of information consumers to the global network and portable devices;
- skills to use new technologies and digital applications;
- distribution of information in real time;
- the existence of many digital media platforms.

According to the data of the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, the number of newspapers published from 2000 until 2020 decreased from 176 to 113, the number of magazines, on the other hand, increased from 99 to 195, with reference to the same period (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, 2021). At the same time, according to the same source, the number of users with mobile internet access increased considerably for the same period. Easy access to the Internet and at a low cost has favoured the development of digital media in favour of the printed one that requires

a longer time to process information, high production costs, accusations of using and exhausting natural resources (paper, etc.). It should be noted that traditional media, such as radio and TV, are also undergoing changes, being forced to adapt to the new conditions: going online, broadcasting breaking news content and/or continuous updates, offering material at low costs. Therefore, the digitalization trend will continue to see an increase in popularity at the expense of traditional media. We understand that 24/7 access to a show, radio or TV broadcast segment placed online favours consumers' preference for TV and radio stations' websites or web pages. We want comfort, easy access, ease of handling technologies that today are at the distance of a pocket. Thus, in the existing conditions, we wonder if the traditional press will coexist with the digital one, or if in the coming years the first type will disappear completely, and the television and radio sets will turn into digital devices with applications similar to a mobile phone, only having other forms and dimensions. We understand that the process has already begun, by transforming these devices and bringing them closer to the forms and content of mobile devices.

In 2013, when Jeff Bezos acquired *The Washington Post* publication, he mentioned that the era of newspapers and materials published on paper has passed and that the era of tablets and phones is coming (Bezos, 2013). Over the past decade, this statement has come true. We find that a strong return of the traditional press is excluded, in the conditions of such impulsive development of the digital press, but publishers who do not want to give up paper publications for the time being must take the following aspects into account:

- the traditional publication can also have a digital version, which could benefit it by placing original and attractive, but incomplete materials that would require the consumer to purchase a printed version, which is what British publications do today, for example *The Times* publication from Great Britain;
- printing the publication in a colour format, A3, which could give it more attractiveness and more manoeuvrability, resulting from the dimensions of the publication;

- the publication alongside the journalistic content of political, economic or social topics and entertainment content could appeal to the younger generation;
- the inclusion of advertising content with bonuses for the consumers of information from written publications (discount vouchers for services and products, samples of cosmetic and perfumery products, etc.);
- media interaction with the community by involving the public in the process of evaluating the quality of the journalistic production through comments, surveys or chats, which can create a close connection between the public and the press;
- transparency and responsibility in the activity of media institutions in order to gain trust among consumers, or once compromised, the media institution will encounter great difficulties in the process of image recovery;
- creating partnerships, free associations, institutional collaborations between media representatives for the exchange of experience.

We cannot doubt the affiliation of media institutions to innovations in the field of information technologies. The media field was one of the first to borrow most of the technological appearances of the last quarter of a century. The Internet appeared - media outlets created electronic versions for the rapid distribution of information. Social media emerged - media outlets created social media pages to reach an even wider audience. Apps on mobile phones appeared - media outlets quickly created digital apps for easy access to web pages. Smart TVs appeared - media institutions asked digital TV operators to create complex databases for recording and storing journalistic products for the convenience of access and viewing at any time of the day or night.

One of the basic characteristics of digital media is the transmission speed of information, which often occurs in real time, but it is known that in these conditions there is always the risk of receiving errors, out of context or even false details and knowingly distributed to a large number of consumers. On the other hand, the traditional press directs its attention to thorough documentation, verification of information from multiple sources, accuracy, knowing the old

adage that what is written with the pen, is not cut with the beard. In the Republic of Moldova, this competition between traditional and digital media is felt, in particular, at the behavioural level of generations. Those over the age of 40 prefer to get information from traditional media and the representatives of the younger generation get information from digital media. This fact accentuates the discrepancies and the difference in visions of reality between the generations.

As for credibility, unfortunately, in recent years, the population's trust in media institutions and in the veracity of the information distributed by them decreased. In recent years, the Public Opinion Barometer (BOP) shows that the citizens of the Republic of Moldova place the greatest trust in the Church and, strange as it may seem, in the public institutions of local authority. Thus, according to the BOP of 2023, our citizen, precisely 5% of the respondents, gives the media a credit of "very much trust," 35.9% - "some trust," 21% do not have much trust, and 33% do not trust the press at all (IPP, 2023). Compared to the year 2022, the national press fell in the trust ranking by 5% (IPP, 2022). An insignificant fall some would say, if we refer to other vital areas that are going wrong in the country. And if we take into account the fact that an independent press is one of the basic indicators of the effective functioning of a state of law, then this fall should alarm us. The same situation is recorded in Romania. Trust in the media in Romania decreased in 2022 by 11% compared to 2020 and, at the same time, the number of those who pay for online news decreased (Dobrea, 2022).

As for EU citizens' trust in the media, the data shows the following: European citizens trust traditional media (radio, television or print media), including their online presence, more than online news platforms and online social communication channels. 49% of respondents expect public radio or television stations to provide them with reliable news, regardless of the chosen format (traditional or online). The next source of news in order of preference is the print media, with 39%. On the other hand, private television and radio stations are considered by 27% of respondents as reliable news sources. Poland is a special case: it is the

only country where the population considers private radio and television stations to be the most trusted source of news. Hungarian respondents show an even more radical distrust of traditional news sources in general. They consider another source of news to be the most trusted one: "the people, groups or friends followed on social media platforms" (European Parliament, 2022).

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### 3. CONCLUSIONS

We find that with the development of technologies, the multiplication of possibilities to access information sources does not necessarily mean the increase of the level of citizens' credibility in information sources. Rather, the variety of information sources that often approach the same topic differently creates confusion, bewilderment, uncertainty and lack of trust in any information source among the general public. Another study conducted this year in the Republic of Moldova shows that citizens do not have absolute confidence in the information sources they use, but rather compare them to identify differences and form their own opinion. One view is that a media source cannot be considered reliable as long as it is subservient to private individuals or the government because they serve certain interests. In order not to be misled, the interviewees consult several sources of information with reference to some news, in order to form their own opinion. At the same time, it is confirmed that some news can be verified, for example, news about compensations or the number of protesters in the square. The participants, in order to check the source of information, apply the time-factor, that is, if the broadcast news proves true after a certain time, then the source is considered to be honest (Magenta Consulting, 2023).

However, due to the global development of mass media in an extremely volatile and uncertain context, resulting from the low potential of the authorities and the public to check the quality and correctness of the information transmitted, it is the responsibility of each information consumer to check for himself permanent source of information and to



self-notify if it finds the use of informational resources for the purpose of manipulation or propaganda. In this sense, the most effective measures that can be taken by each of us could be to ignore the source, to notify the competent bodies regarding the quality of the information transmitted, the public discussions regarding the quality of the information transmitted by that source, or, the possibilities of action would always exist, in the conditions of the presence of citizen activism.

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