

Newspapers in Crisis



Conference Proceedings:
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
March 27, 2010
Haworth College of Business
Center for Sustainable Business Practices

**Can an Educated Society be Sustained
Solely by Digitalization?**

**Edited by Prof. Dr. Andrew Targowski
and Dr. Thomas Rienzo**



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WMU-Haworth College of Business, Center for Sustainable Business Practices

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Preface

I invite you to read the Proceedings of the 1st Conference of the WMU, Haworth College of Business' Center for Sustainable Business Practices on:

“Can an Educated Society be Sustained Solely by Digitalization?”

This conference took place at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA on March 27, 2010 at the Fetzer Center. This conference was organized because the aggressive proliferation of digital media in the 21st century is threatening the well-being of paper-based newspapers. Furthermore, it takes place during the world-wide economic crisis in 2008-2010, which pushes the newspapers' publishers to cut the cost and publish news electronically. Paper-based newspapers are losing business advertisements and cannot subsidize the production of news.

Some enthusiasts of e-media (among them some communication faculty at WMU) argue that it is “done deal.” People read more electronically, while this author thinks that “we scan more and read less.” Therefore the issue “how to write for those who do not read” arises nowadays, particularly being important for those who teach and learn.

This conference's purpose was to debate professionally and academically a new emerging situation caused by the crisis of news and journalism in general. We the organizers were neither for paper based news nor for e-news. Therefore we invited news professionals and information-oriented faculty, and students also to present their viewpoints. The reader can find-out what is right and what is wrong by reading these specialists' knowledge and wisdom based contributions.

In general, the Conference did find the following conclusions:

1. The Information Revolution cannot be stopped and the 2008-2010 Financial Crisis will not disappear soon, since it is the political-economic system's paradigmatic crisis. Therefore, the trend of electronizing news will take place whether the wise readers like it or not.
2. The Information Revolution under the form of the globally accessible Internet is positive for disseminating democratic ideas among captivated countries. On the other hand the Internet is the decisive factor in exporting jobs from the Western Civilization which is steadily declining. The self-imposed censorship (supported by the retail/manufacturing lobby with an annual budget of \$500 million¹) on the trend of exporting jobs undercuts the feedback which makes our democratic system misinformed and misguided and leading to unsustainable society and its “colonization” by the narrow interest.
3. While the digital media have given the readers access to endless data from spread-out sources, many of readers tend to focus on narrow topics and familiar points of view.

We rather become datamaniacs who discover less new ideas and opinions. We have more data but worse reasoning. Again the information feedback of our democratic system is rather weaker than stronger.

4. Advanced information consumers are losing the search for serendipity² which is the accidental discovery of unexpected relevance, which readers did not imagine they were interested in reading. It is similar to shopping on impulse, which is very common human habit. As a result readers become narrow minded instead of broad minded. Again the information feedback of our democratic system becomes rather narrower than broader.
5. Paper-based newspapers are not only 2D page-oriented information devices but societal glue which monitors development and activities of communities in a narrow sense and societal/national entities in a broad sense. This “glue” cannot be replaced successfully by digitalization.
6. Instead of emphasizing the divergence of media, we as a society and particularly as the faculty should promote the convergence of media, which means the sustainability of the wise equilibrium between different technologies of informing.
7. This conference touched some key issues of current news crisis and perhaps only the long future will tell whether e-news will impact the society as impressively as the discovery of printed books and news did 556 years ago. Only the time will tell the true story. Now we are just at the beginning of the info-communication technology-driven tsunami.

I encourage you to read these Proceedings with diverse points of views (full of good knowledge and wisdom) which should help in understanding and making wise decisions with respect to business, editorial, and sustainability models of news at the dawn of the 21st century.

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