

## Research Paper

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# The big plus

The importance of digital routines and user experience in digital journalistic offers from newspaper publishers

**Abstract:** After the digital turn in media, a central economic imperative for publishing is to build and secure subscription rates. Under the conditions of digitization, publishers are facing new journalistic and marketing challenges with their subscription management, because newspaper subscription figures and sales have been falling for years. The abundance of digital offers is changing the way these media companies understand themselves: Online, they are competing not only with other digital offers from traditional publishing competitors but directly with digital platforms and portals across all media. This development is putting publishers under pressure. Newspaper subscriber management is responding to this by focusing more on customer retention, in addition to attracting new customers, and reducing the churn rate as part of their paid content strategy, especially with their so-called »Plus Offers.« Publishers are developing preventive measures to ward off cancellations to retain their readers in the long term. In this article, observations are made as to which relevance digital routines have in view of this development and which aspects of the user experience are relevant regarding the use of Plus Offers.

The fact that the future of publishing brands no longer lies in print business but in digital business is undisputed in scholarship and practice. The end of the printed newspaper will be predicted and calculated (cf. Meier 2019: n. p.), justified among other things by the high price of paper, the sharp rise in delivery costs, which increase by 30 percent every five years (cf. Sievers et al. 2020: 67ff.), and by the lack of revenue from announcements and advertising: »The publishers indeed have had notable success with digital offers, whether e-paper, articles

behind paywalls, search engines or much more. However, they are still unable to compensate for the decline in sales in the advertising market and, in some cases, the reader market. Here, it has not been possible to stop the downward trend« (Keller/Stavenhagen 2020: 17).

Over the past 30 years, publishing houses have been busy with developing strategies to ensure the continued existence of the traditional print circulation, to find alternative forms of financing, and to develop digital journalistic business models. Despite the steadily increasing paid-content revenue of German trade publishers, which generated almost 900 million Euro through digital sales in 2021 (cf. Pimpl 2022: n. p.), a structural breakthrough, with a few exceptions, has not been documented to this day. On the contrary, readers are not sufficiently willing to pay for digital offers (cf. Sievers et al. 2020: 9; Buschow/Wellbrock 2020a), nor is there a great desire for digital content among the »traditional« readership: according to a study by a German marketing research firm for German newspapers from 2020, three-quarters of users of the subscribed print edition cannot imagine reading their subscribed daily newspaper only as an e-paper (cf. ZMG 2020: 6).

Daily newspapers have recorded a steady decline in circulation since the 1990s. The circulation of daily newspapers, including the Sunday paper, has halved from 30.1 million during the first quarter in 1995 to 14.0 million during the first quarter in 2021 (cf. Röper 2020: 337; ivw 2021: n. p.). E-papers, which are included in these figures, have so far not been able to compensate for the revenue losses of print circulation, as there is a base effect: the annual decline in print circulation is greater than the growth of e-papers (cf. on the base effect in the development of daily newspapers Weigel 2017: n. p.). Given the strong differences in socialization and different usage habits of readers, both online and print publishers do not have much choice but to continue following both avenues: for the foreseeable future, traditional print readers will be serviced, and the digital sector will have to be propelled forward as well.

Nevertheless, the print industry is increasingly moving away from the printed edition and investing in journalistic paid-content products. The fight against declining sales is combined with efforts to address new target groups. The business model of publishing houses is shifting from print to the web in conjunction with a digital business model. Publishers are implementing the entrepreneurial framework conditions of the digital economy into their publishing DNA: »Anyone who wants to survive in the media industry, and in the best-case scenario do so successfully, can no longer avoid the connection between journalism, technology, business, and usage analysis« (Weber 2020: n. p.; cf. on the development of digital editorial strategies: Rinsdorf 2017).

## Plus Offers are the main drivers in digital journalism

A survey conducted by the publishing industry for the Association of German Magazine Publishers (Verband Deutscher Zeitschriftenverleger e. V.) revealed that the strategic priorities in the media companies during this transitional period are characterized by the optimization of processes and workflows as well as the improvement of innovative capabilities (cf. KPMG 2020: 6). These priorities certainly also include painful cuts such as job reductions and the thinning out of local newsrooms (cf. Grimberg 2022: n. p.).<sup>1)</sup> The crucial aspect for growth in the meantime, however, is the development, or rather expansion, of paid content. With the drastic decline in traditional print subscription figures and the increasing spread of digital devices, the topic of paid content and paywalls have gradually been starting to take hold in Germany. The development started with the introduction of an e-paper by the local newspaper *Rhein-Zeitung* in 2001. Twelve years later, the national tabloid paper *Bild-Zeitung* set up a paywall for selected articles, and in 2018 the national news magazine *Der Spiegel* launched its digital pay service *Spiegel Plus*. There are now a considerable number of paywall models and numerous paywall innovations (cf. Schöberl 2019: 23f.; Simon/Graves 2019).

In the case of digital subscriptions, the development of fee-based Plus Offers, whose content is placed behind a paywall, is the big topic of the future and the impetus for innovation in the publishing industry. In the meantime, they have become of great importance to publishers in terms of both, journalism and economics, and »are currently the fastest-growing product category« (Schöberl 2021: 21). An example of this development can be seen in the case of the national newspaper *Die Welt* published by the Springer Publishing Company, where the number of hard print copies was 40,000 in the third quarter of 2021, and »180,621 people were persuaded to use the paid offer online in December [2021]. Within a year, the number increased by over 42,000 or more than 30 percent« (DWDL 2022: n. d.).

It is noteworthy in this context that Plus Offers and the classic daily newspaper edition are completely different products.<sup>2)</sup> Printed daily newspapers, and in the paid-content sector e-papers, are finite periodically published media products, i. e., »expenditure products that appear at fixed dates in an expectable volume« (Schöberl 2021: 21). In contrast, the digital journalistic bonus content, or

1 High-quality local journalism and democratic structures are closely intertwined. For example, Daniel Kübler and Christopher Goodman concluded in a study that there is a connection between the crisis in local journalism and the decline in voter turnout, see Kübler/Goodman 2019

2 Weekly newspapers are a special feature of digital subscriptions. In the case of *Spiegel Plus* and *Zeit Plus*, Plus subscriptions include both the e-paper and the daily articles behind the paywall. The success of the Plus Offers at the weeklies leads to circulation growth against the industry trend, since they »are also included in the supposed »print« circulation due to a similar price level compared to the print-only subscription« (DWDL 2022: n. p.).

plus offers, are of a different nature: They are produced and received in continuous operation and »are located on a website behind a paywall or are played on a ›news app« (Schöberl 2021: 21). The product logic of the Plus Offer from the daily press differs from that of printed daily newspapers and the e-paper. The lack of periodicity is an important attribute of extra offers online. They bid farewell to the daily issue and are, according to Markus Schöberl, »streaming like online content« (Schöberl 2022: 22).

Added features are mainly comprised of selected online articles from the current print edition of the newspaper in question, as well as online-only content that cannot be read in the print edition (cf. von Garmissen 2020: 21). It is not made clear to the user which articles are from the print version and which articles are online-only. The publishers' extra features are oriented toward successful subscription-based portals. Digital forms of distribution are copied here, which »differ strongly from traditional business models and distribution channels in journalism and are already established in adjacent media markets« (Buschow/Wellbrock 2020b: 127). For many publishers added features at a fixed monthly price are now part of the paid content portfolio (e. g., the added features of the newspapers *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (F+), the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ Plus), the *Rheinische Post* (RP+), and the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, (StZ Plus)) and are forcing the process of selling content digitally. Added features are not offshoots of daily newspapers but are developing into independent media products with specific characteristics in terms of marketing, pricing, and sales. It should be noted that publishers have to deal with different readers in their print and online media. *SZ Plus*, the added features of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, serves as an example: »basic *SZ Plus* subscribers tend to be younger and more urban, having a high affinity to ›SZ,‹ especially to sz.de, and read [us] to a very large extent on their smartphones« (Kornfeld 2020a: 33).

The change in usage habits of readers must therefore also be considered by the publishing houses when designing their digital offers. Simply transferring the print product to digital media will not do justice to digital readers.

## Adapting the business model to the needs of readers

The developments in digital journalism and the growing importance of added features have been impacting the usage habits of the readership and editorial work. The print media product, which has been optimized over decades and adapted to the usage behavior of readers, seems to have been exhausted – the use of added features requires the development of new routines. The classic newspaper is not used spontaneously within the framework of a subscription but through knowledge of its actual appearance (cf. basic considerations in the

decision to subscribe to a newspaper: Rinsdorf 2003: 5ff.). In this way, utilization can be planned and can be integrated into or become a habitual part of everyday life, which has a positive effect on the propensity to subscribe (Rinsdorf 2003: 54). In the case of content that is continuously produced and received, such as added features, it is reasonable to assume that this very routine no longer applies. For digital publishing products, the motto was *Online First* for many years, which seems outdated as a motto. Meanwhile, the Web is less about transforming the same content from the newspaper medium into an online medium than about establishing new media structures: from a finite to a fluid medium. Above all, however, potentials beyond the print medium must be leveraged; it is a matter of a change of perspective: the digital products of publishers on the Web are e-commerce. This, in turn, has consequences for these publishing products, because on the Web, consistent orientation to the user's perspective and the user experience is crucial for success. At the forefront of product development is: »What do digital journalistic offers look like so that users are willing to pay for, that retain them in the long term, and that meet their needs?« (Schöberl 2022: 22). Do the publishers succeed in building a relationship with the users via the product? Do the digital publishing products meet the needs of readers? What emotional incentives are given to readers? And, what experience-centered applications do the digital publishers' offers have? Today, the publishing industry is at the stage that Veit Dengler formulated in 2015 at the beginning of this development: »The focus for the business model must therefore move away from the product – whether newspaper or website – to a focus on the paying customer and their *needs*. The journalistic product of the future remains to be created; however, it will increasingly resemble service offers, namely classification, and analysis« (Emphasis by EB/KS, Dengler 2015; cf. also Royal 2015: n. d.).

In order to position themselves in the highly competitive market and be successful in the long term, publishers are increasingly focusing on responding to the needs of their readers, understanding them, and designing their offers accordingly. Publishers combine publishing digital business with e-commerce business. And a central feature of e-commerce is user-first thinking, combined with the permanent evaluation and optimization of digital applications. E-commerce offers grow and are successful if optimizations are carried out regularly. According to a survey by the German Newspaper Publishers and Digitalpublishers Association (Bundesverband Digitalpublisher und Zeitungsverleger) (BDZV), experts from the industry also confirm this trend: 95 percent state that *the factor of understanding user habits and interests* will make a major contribution to the success of a digital payment model in the future (see BDZV/Schickler 2021). The News Product Alliance, founded in 2020, has taken up this aspect with its claim *The future of news is product*: »Today's most successful newsrooms have adopted product strategy into their culture. As traditional news revenue models have

broken down, they've embraced product practices from digital industries and found ways to connect their content and business strategy in order to develop dedicated audiences and new revenue streams» (news product alliance 2022: n. d.).

In this context, it must be pointed out that it cannot be a matter of replacing journalistic work with non-journalistic products, rather journalism and product are more closely intertwined in the digital realm than is the case in the analog world. In a study, Silke Fürst investigated the consequences of the growing importance of web analytics tools, respectively, *audience metrics* for journalistic quality, and came to a sobering conclusion:

»This article [...] has found that audience metrics have a mainly negative impact on news quality [...], particularly in profit-driven newsrooms and in connection with growing economic pressures. With respect to the *allocation of resources and recognition*, it has become clear that audience metrics further exacerbate an already precarious situation. Despite significant staff cuts, new jobs are created that focus on how to increase audience traffic. Moreover, most journalists are expected to monitor and optimize audience metrics and are valued for ›doing well‹ in this matter« (Fürst 2020: 276).

Nevertheless, dashboards, key figures, and the evaluation of online usage data have long since found their way into editorial offices (cf. Kornfeld 2020b). Konrad Weber emphasizes the advantages of the tools:

»A medium cannot do without relevant and well-researched stories. And yes, the best stories always reach an audience. But by no means are all published stories worthy of a Pulitzer Prize. Even more important is a functioning interplay between content, design, and technology – coupled with data and marketing know-how – so that the stories are actually discovered and used« (Weber 2020: n. p.).

The terms *usability* and *user experience* are important for the implementation of this interaction. While the term usability refers to the effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction of the actual use of an interactive system, user experience focuses on the subjective perceptions and reactions of the user, both before, during, and after use (cf. Geis/Tesch 2019: 19). User experience brings the emotional experience of use to the foreground (cf. Burmester 2013: 141). It is known from UX research that emotions, or »Be-Goals,« play a major role: »A positive user experience requires the fulfillment of needs. A product that can convey a feeling of, for example, ›being stimulated,‹ ›being competent,‹ or ›being admired,‹ because of the interaction is decisive for the quality of the user experience.« (Schlierkamp/Burmester 2010: 13). Consequently, user experience needs to be understood because of the fulfillment of psychological needs (cf. Burmester et al. 2014: 7). Hassenzahl et al. (2010) show that in particular the fulfillment of human needs for autonomy, competence, connectedness, popularity, stimulation, and security are crucial for the evaluation of experiences in a technological context.

UX is a conglomerate of many different factors which, depending on the product, are decisive for a positive user experience in different compositions (cf. Winter et al. 2015: 33). A study by Winter et al. (2017) investigated how users rate the importance of 16 UX factors compiled from the literature for different product categories. For the category of *news portals* studied, the following factors proved to be particularly relevant: Content Quality, Clarity, Intuitive Use, Transparency, Efficiency, Beauty, and Value (see Winter 2017: 196). For publishers and the implementation of UX in their paid content offers, this would be the place to start. A good user experience can help to set oneself apart from competitors. Only the fulfillment of expectations entices users to repeatedly purchase or use a certain product so that the user experience can have a direct impact on the economic success of a company.

## Importance of retention marketing and the subscription model for added features

The importance of the UX is reflected in the management of customer loyalty. With the introduction of added feature portals as a low-cost web subscription, customer loyalty management (cf. Lingenfelder/Fisbeck-Groh 2003: 179) has gained momentum and importance for the publishing houses. Customer retention is understood to mean all measures with which previous and future behavioral intentions of users of the added features portals can be shaped positively to stabilize and expand the relationship with customers. In order to retain subscribers to added offers on the web, the industry faces the challenge that journalistic offers should not only be convincing in terms of quality but that publishers must also respond to new usage habits and needs. However, the needs of users on the web are fundamentally different from those of print media, and this is where loyalty marketing comes into play as part of customer retention management. A key area of application for retention marketing is the achievement of digital subscriptions. Whereas in the past publishers could assume that the signing of a print subscription represented the *endpoint* of sales activity, the conclusion of a Plus subscription represents the beginning of a product story. High cancellation rates and customer churn during the free trial period or within the first 100 days pose a major challenge for publishers, and the shelf life of Plus subscribers is significantly worse than for traditional edition products such as print subscriptions or e-papers (see Schöberl 2021: 21). According to Johannes Hauner (from the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung Digital* or SZ), only a good 50 percent of new subscribers remain loyal to the SZ's digital offer after the four-week free trial phase and become paying customers (cf. Kornfeld 2020a: 34). Monthly cancellation options are also the rule with Plus Offers, and these cancellation periods are

significantly shorter than with traditional print subscriptions. Thus, retention marketing is now challenged accordingly. For their digital subscriptions, publishers need to design conceptual foundations for subscription management: What do customers want, what is their willingness to pay, and how do they decide? For a successful marketing to hold customers, the digital world reveals a need to support users in the development of routines around the product or subscription. The digital product, as distinct from the print newspaper or e-paper, needs a fixed place in the everyday life of the user community. Otherwise, it will be forgotten too quickly. While the reception of the printed daily newspaper is generally governed by morning time reading at the breakfast table, the digital product is used much more frequently »in between« and throughout the day (cf. Score Media Group 2018: n. d.). Digital readers must therefore be carefully introduced to the product and motivated to use it regularly through customizable functions. Publishers must ensure that they establish routines for their readers and ensure engagement. The great advantage of online media in this context is that publishers can develop a user-first strategy on the web in a user-centric way. It is now possible to tailor the media product to the user and their needs and to offer what Dengler calls a »customer-centric news production« (Dengler 2015: n. p.). For users who must make a new monthly decision to retain a digital subscription (by not canceling it), the individual decision architecture is decisive. The characteristics of this decision architecture are, on the one hand, the journalistic quality of the media content, and on the other hand, the web-specific features that bind users to new offers, such as smart onboarding processes, interaction options, daily newsletters, regular website updates, feedback channels, and multimedia added value.

The subscription remains the central instrument for sales. In the online sector, it is now becoming increasingly clear that publishers are not relying on individual sales of articles on the web, but that subscriptions are and will remain the key success factor in sales. The subscription model promises higher margins and a good opportunity to analyze customer data (see Verband Deutscher Zeitungsverleger 2021: n. d.). Hauner calls the *SZ-Plus* subscription »the most important pillar of our digital business« (Kornfeld 2020a: 34). According to a BDZV survey (cf. BDZV 2019) of Plus portals from 2019, the digital subscription is the most frequently used billing model in the online sector, used by around 90 percent in the online sector. The majority of users are offered a free service at the beginning of the subscription, which costs no more than 10 Euro after the test phase at two-thirds of the added features portals (cf. on the willingness to pay for digital journalistic services Wellbrock/Buschow 2020 and on the question of which usage motives have an influence on the willingness to pay for digital journalistic content Riemann et al. 2020). Day passes (primarily for regional daily newspapers) also play a role for the Plus Portals surveyed (42 percent use this as a billing



model); logging at 9 percent, the individual sale of articles is hardly used or offered as a billing model (cf. BDZV 2019: 14ff.; Kornfeld 2020a: 34). The importance of subscriptions and an associated pricing policy is increasing because revenues from advertising and classifieds are declining dramatically and, in some cases, permanently (cf. Keller/Stavenhagen 2020: 7).

## On the importance of digital routines and UX

Before we go into the importance of digital routines and an appropriate UX for Plus Offers, our considerations are preceded by the central characteristics of this media offer:

1. Added feature portals are subscription offers with a weak contractual obligation (usually giving the option to cancel on a month-by-month basis) and compared to the classic print subscription, a significantly lower-priced product.
2. Added feature subscriptions can be defined as a hybrid medium. As online offers, they provide extensive multimedia content, forms of social interaction (e. g., in the comments section in discussion with other users), and para-social contacts with media figures.<sup>3</sup>
3. The content of added features is characterized by permanence compared to traditional media offers from the areas of radio, television, or print newspapers (incl. e-papers). They lack a schedule, are not periodic, and are characterized by the absence of issues. Exceptions in the case of weekly newspapers, which include the newspaper *Zeit Plus* and the news magazine *Spiegel Plus*, for example, were referred to above.

In light of these findings, questions arise for the print industry about the further development of added offers as part of its digital transformation process. Month-by-month cancellation options are putting publishers and editorial teams under pressure to keep their readership permanently loyal. The focus here is on churn management, i. e., the question of how to retain the subscriber base and how to reduce the enormous cancellation rates of digital subscriptions (cf. Tongbhoyai 2020: n.d.). *Churn* is a neologism, made up of the words *change* and *turn* (cf. Neu/Günter 2015: 91). The object of churn management is to identify customers at risk of churn and to prevent churn among profitable customers, with the overriding goal being to minimize and prevent customer churn by implementing suitable measures (see Tecklenburg 2008: 25). The aim is to identify customers at risk of churn before they distance themselves completely from the

3 Paid content offers also show how para-social interaction can turn into a genuine social interaction when users communicate with journalists directly or via the detour of social media (cf. on para-social interaction in the media sector Schweiger 2007: 121ff and in digital journalism Riemann et al. 2020: 116).

company and, for example, give notice of termination. Weber uses the example of the *New York Times* to describe its strategic approach:

»Inspired by the strategies of Netflix, Spotify, and HBO, a radical focus on the core business of journalism took place. At the same time, new online services and functions were continuously added, from personalized fitness advice and interactive news-bots to virtual reality films, with the aim of making a subscription indispensable for existing users and more attractive for future subscribers« (Weber 2022: n. p.).

Christian Zaschke points to the success of the *New York Times*, which makes profits from its online offers beyond news: »More than two million people paid for other content. This includes not only the puzzle pages, which include the famous crossword puzzle but also the sections with recipes and tests of household appliances« (Zaschke 2022: n. d.). For the special constellation of added offers, it is important that the subscriptions become a central part of the everyday media routines of their users. The creation of routines can succeed if the online offers force rational selection decisions in media use, both in terms of content and with the help of web media forms. The thematic-content routines, e. g., high-quality news journalism or entertainment offers, serve to satisfy the needs of the two known cognitive motive groups: *gratifications* and *instrumental utility* (cf. in detail Schweiger 2007: 94ff.).

The creation of routines through the interaction of content and form is a fundamental characteristic of media companies that produce and distribute media offers. In a traditional medium such as television, these routines are established by a program: »The cyclical recurrence of certain program forms, certain broadcasts, but also certain broadcast elements at certain times enables ritual formation within the framework of television reception.« (Bleicher 1998: 68).

These ritualized media use processes embedded in a program (cf. on media rituals Fahlenbrach et al. 2008) are no longer present in this form in the streaming-like added offers. New mediation elements in the form of digital everyday routines are used here, which represents a revolution in recent newspaper history. If it is no longer the reception of the daily newspaper edition that determines the use, but the permanent updating of content in the online offer, then users must acquire new routines with the help of new forms. These web-media forms are, for example, breaking news with push function to smartphone or wearables, daily newsletters, thematic summaries by mail, and weekly podcasts. They all continuously promote newsworthy, entertaining, and self-referential events. In the online sphere, the levels of media or news use, social interaction with other users, and para-social interaction with media figures are now combined.

It should be emphasized in this context that these digital transformation processes, with their focus on Plus Offer subscriptions, are entirely compatible with high-quality journalism. The managing director of the *New York Times*, Meredith Kopit Levien, was extremely successful in transforming the online offers of the

*New York Times* from advertising-financed to subscription-based business models in 2020. »Meredith [Kopit] Levien sees the key to this success in two places: First, in the quality, scope, and depth of journalism, and second, by thinking in terms of digital products« (Weber 2022: n. d.). Riemann et al. (2020) confirm this development in their empirical study. In a study, the authors surveyed which motives cause the intention to pay in online journalism, and one of their main findings is that it would be purposeful for media houses to offer »exclusive and detailed content that supports opinion formation and also promotes exchange in social situations« (Riemann et al. 2021: 117).

Successful web offers are characterized by permanent optimization, especially with the help of appropriate UX measures. This also applies to paid content offers. An appropriate UX is indispensable for continuously drawing users' attention to the journalistic online product and supporting regular use. Technical errors and hurdles must be reduced in the context of Plus Offers, because they prevent a pleasant usability experience in the sense of a positive UX. This leads to a lack of motivation to engage further with the product and thus stands in the way of building a routine and ultimately a habit. Simple and intuitive usability is a decisive factor for a positive UX here. The quality of an interactive product is therefore not to be evaluated with the help of a single product property, but on the basis of the interaction between users and the product. Relevant to the publishers' approach is the assumption, derived from usability and UX research, that the user-friendly design and usability of interactive systems depend on the quality of the interaction design. It should be noted that »users [...] perceive the relationship to the product on the one hand on the pragmatic level via functionality, on the other hand on a level beyond functionality via hedonistic quality. While the pragmatic level is addressed by traditional usability features, UX features address hedonistic quality« (Gotthartsleitner 2009: 199). This is particularly important following the start of a subscription to ensure long-term customer loyalty. If the digital subscription is not used sufficiently within the first three months of signing up, customers quickly feel that the price-usage ratio is unbalanced and a threat to cancel the subscription arises, as Patric Tonghboyai reports in the *New York Times*: »A team of ten specialists focuses on convincing subscribers of the company's services in their first 90 days« (Tonghboyai 2020: n. d.).

A lack of routine leads customers to feel that they are only using a small part of the service so that the price is not worth it. Steffen Klusmann, editor-in-chief of the German news magazine *Spiegel*, provides an example: »New subscribers generally no longer want a self-contained magazine that appears once a week, but rather a fast-paced news platform that is enriched with strong analyses, classifications, reconstructions, and investigative stories – whether these are from the current issue or the one before or were only researched for the website doesn't matter to readers. As long as the pieces offer added value. And because modern

journalism is no longer just about text, we're expanding our range of podcasts and audio-recorded articles. For nine months, we have had the daily podcast *Spiegel Daily* in our program« (Ringle 2021: n. p.). Thus, successful onboarding and a positive product experience are essential, especially in the initial period, to convince (new) customers of the offer, establish a digital routine, and thus retain them. Newspapers have found a form of offer in the paid content area with Plus Offers that allow them to look optimistically to the future. In order to be able to retain subscriptions on the web in the long term, two factors come into focus for the communication of high-quality journalism: the anchoring of everyday digital routines and the implementation of an appropriate UX. Should the move away from issue-based publishing to a permanence of streaming become established in the long run, we will be dealing not only with the media shift from print to the web but above all with the establishment of a new media ritual in the newspaper landscape.

What is critical about this development is the exploitation connection between this new media ritual and the business model. Helmut Schanze foresaw this problematic development as early as 2008:

»The New Media, which propagate user responsibility and elevate every television viewer to the position of the program director, however, not only allow, it seems, hybridizations, news without news value, and self-celebration, but they encourage them. The tried-and-true control mechanisms assigned to the mass media are failing in a globalized world of new media. Programs can no longer be predicted; the readability and rationality of programs disappear in the multitude of ›programs,‹ i. e., the content of the networks, which appear to be ›user-driven« (Schanze 2008: 68).

The fact that thematic-content discourse oriented to a streaming logic might have an interest in a permanent state of crisis and a state of excitement, may well become a delicate matter. If streaming the catastrophe were to become the »normality« of the media ritual« (Hickethier 2008: 50), this would in turn have an impact on journalistic quality criteria, agenda-setting, and ultimately on the self-image of publishers.

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