THE DIGITAL SCHOOL NEWSPAPER PHENOMENA IN ISRAEL IN THE LAST DECADE

CONCEPTUL ZIARULUI ȘCOLAR DIGITAL DIN ISRAEL ÎN ULTIMUL DECENIU

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Summary. *In this article, we will review the intensification phenomenon of the digital school press in Israel in the last decade, while reviewing the infrastructure that led to this phenomenon intensification. The local school press has a rich and long history and it went through many changes until its absolute transition from print to digital. The reasons for this transition are many, starting with the global crisis in the printed press in 2008 which led to the Internet and the online press strengthening, internal organizational challenges in the education system that the school newspaper (SN) faced, such as funding and censorship issues. The purpose of the article is to raise the awareness of the research, the education system and the media supervision in the Ministry of Education, regarding this phenomenon and the return of the SN to its purpose as a democratic educational product that serves the students first and foremost.*

Keywords*: school journalism, print format, digital format, application, Israel, educational system, supervision of media studies, editorial policy.*

Rezumat. *Articolul de mai jos relevă fenomenul de dezvoltare a presei școlare digitale din Israel în ultimul deceniu, fiind prezentată, în mod special, calitatea infrastructurii care a dus la intensificarea acestui fenomen. Presa școlară din Israel are o istorie bogată și lungă și a suportat mai multe schimbări până la trecerea sa de la formatul tipărit la cel digital. Motivele acestei tranziții sunt multe, începând cu criza globală din domeniul presei scrise din 2008 care a dus la consolidarea Internetului și a presei online, precum și provocările organizaționale interne în sistemul educațional cu care s-a confruntat ziarul școlar (ZȘ): insuficiență în procesul de finanțare și problemele de cenzură. Scopul realizării articolului este de a spori gradul de conștientizare a problemei privind existența presei școlare și a supravegherii mass-media școlare din partea Ministerului Educației din Israel cu privire la acest fenomen. Vom concluziona că ZȘ trebuie să revină la scopul său de produs educațional democratic care servește, în primul rând, elevii.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *jurnalism școlar, format print, format digital, aplicație, Israel, sistem de învățământ, supravegherea studiilor media, politică editorială.*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of school journalism In Israel, as in the world, is a fascinating phenomenon that has not received much research or educational attention, especially not

in recent years, despite the many changes it has experienced. In this article, the intensification phenomenon of the digital school press will be reviewed, mainly in the informal framework in the last decade of the 21st century, and especially after the outbreak of the Corona epidemic in 2019 until today, which led to the end of the printed school newspaper. This led to the education system transition from face-to-face learning to digital learning, due to the schools lockdowns [1], [2, p. 2985] and the media supervision new regulations that Instructed to switch to digital learning [3]. Following this, the digital SN, mainly in the informal framework that was not under the regulated media studies, became an institutional product without supervision and pedagogical media training, and its transformation from students SN, to "a newspaper of the institution, not of the students". In order to understand the factors that led to the online SN strengthening in recent years, the factors that led to this will be reviewed through the presentation of the 4-stages historical model of the media development [4, p. 34], [5, p. 707]: Breakthrough Establishment, Defensiveness, and the fourth stage, in which we will describe the adaptation stage of the printed SN to the online SN, and vice-versa, and the online SN intensification in the last decade.

The article covers the history of the school press development in Israel, over more than seven decades, which began even before its establishment, with its transitions between a formal and informal framework, and from a print format to a digital one. The SN, which was intended to be an educational product for the democracy promotion [5, p. 707], [6, p. 10], developed in light of historical events, such as the media global crisis, and the print press crisis of 2008 [Ibid.], which led to the Internet and online press strengthening and the exclusion of the printed press [7, p. 7], [5, p. 707]. This process illustrates the dynamic between new and old means of communication [4, p. 34], [5, p. 707], which was discussed in previous research, but stopped in recent years, despite many findings that indicate its massive contribution to school students [8, p. 258], [9]. Systemic and internal educational institutional factors also led to this development: the education system transition to technology-intensive studies in the 21st century [10, p. 165], a decrease in the number of readers and writers, difficulties in financing the printed SN [9], and a strict editorial policy in the SN production. This school policy expressed the involvement degree of the educational staff and parents [11] and the censorship imposed on the SN contents [12, p. 91], [13, p. 86], a policy which operated according to three different categories: a) Under the responsibility of the educational staff which was the most common category; b) Mutual responsibility of the teaching staff and journalism students and c) Under the responsibility of journalism students [14]. The article focuses on the last decade, and especially on the turning point of the absolute transition from printed to digital school press with the outbreak of the Corona epidemic in 2019-2022 [2 p. 2985], [1]. Although it gave rise to a prolific online school press, which was mostly managed on the school website that served as a "virtual meeting place" for the school population, but also for the development of an alarming phenomenon of an Informal online SN that is managed by the educational staff and is seen as a SN on behalf of the

management and not as a student newspaper, with only a small part of SN's continued to be under the educational supervision as part of media studies. Apart from shedding light on the school press current development in Israel today, this article's purpose is to bring to the awareness of the educational and media research, the education system and the supervision of the media, the need to Immediately change this situation for the school students rights to have their SN as their own product due to educational, ethical, ideological and democratic reasons.

CONTENT

The 4-stages model of school journalism development in Israel – in order to understand what led to the phenomenon strengthening of digital school journalism in Israel today, we will review the infrastructure on which It was based, from its beginning after the state establishment in 1948, and until today, divided into 4 stages of SN development according to the historical model of the mass media development [4, p. 34], [5, p. 707]. After briefly reviewing the first 3 stages, we will extensively review the fourth and final stage of the SN development on the digital platform in the informal setting in the last decade. Our focus will be, mainly, with the outbreak of the Corona epidemic in 2019, the closing of schools [1] and the education system transfer to digital teaching [2, p. 2985] and at the same time, the elimination of the printed SN and the stabilization of the online school press in schools.

The first stage - the breaking through stage of SN into the education system as an educational product between 1948 and 1970, is a direct continuation of SN before the state establishment [9], [13, p. 86], which is characterized as an educational product whose purpose is to promote freedom of expression [Ibid.], [12, p. 91]. The journalistic activity was conducted in the informal framework mainly in middle schools at the end of the school day as an enriching and niche activity, produced in an unprofessional manner, and on a low budget [4, p. 34], [5, p. 707]. The strict editorial policy led to the educational school staff involvement [11] who imposed censorship [12, p. 91], [13, p. 86]. The contents mainly dealt with the love of the homeland, social involvement and mutual responsibility but also with youth contents [Ibid.].

The second stage – the phase of SN establishment in the education system, between 1970-1992, there was a transition from contents with national solidarity characteristics to social ones. During this period, SN begins to gain more recognition as an educational product designed to promote democratic values in the education system [6, p. 10], [5, p. 707]. However, it continued to be an informal niche product [Ibid.], [11], while the educational school staff increased their censorship [12, p. 91], [13, p. 86], and involvement [11]. The production continued to be poor due to funding difficulties [Ibid.], [15] and its circulation and frequency also decreased [6, p. 10], which hurt the students' motivation [11], [13, p. 86]. In these years the research was interested in social value aspects of this press, and mainly in issues of censorship and freedom of expression, yes most school newspapers wore the image of newspapers 'on behalf of the management'

and less ‘of the students’ [12, p. 91], [13, p. 86]. At the beginning of the 90s of the 20th century, with the official integration of communication and journalism studies in high school, the status of SN Improved slightly, alongside the continuation of journalistic activity in middle and elementary schools [16].

In the third stage – the defensive phase between 1993-2008, there were two significant and parallel events in the printed SN development. While the printed SN begins to defend itself against the digital SN, which breaks into the educational arena after the media and print global crisis of 2008 [5 , p. 707], [6, p. 10], at the same time, it begins to oppose him. For the first time, a hybrid educational journalism activity begins, mainly in high school, mostly in print and a minority in digital. Along with the education system preparation for the 21st century, as in the rest of the world, and the transition to technological learning with an emphasis on new media literacy [10, p. 165], the supervision of communication also led a number of changes including new curricula, a set of training courses for teachers and an activity on the new digital platform. During this period, SN’s editorial policy as part of high school communication studies nave changed, and from now on it was managed under the mutual responsibility of the teaching staff and the journalism students. This important step is attributed to the supervision’s guidance, whose goal was to lead a democratic educational journalism with the aim of minimizing the involvement and censorship of the educational staff [16]. The prestige of the SN increased, but along with it, its financing expenses also Increased [5, p. 707], and due to that the Involvement of the management and censorship grew as well [11], [12, p. 91], [13, p. 86], which led to clashes with the students and undermined their motivation [Ibid.]. In these years the research increased, following the strengthening of the Internet and its harmful effects on children and youth [22], [21]. The goal was to reduce these damages and prioritize educational activities such as communication and journalism studies, reading more books and newspapers, which have been proven to have positive cognitive and behavioral effects on school students [9], [8, p. 258]. However, these were only a few studies that have been renewed sporadically those years [5, p. 707], [16], [6, p. 10].

The fourth and last stage, the Adaptation phase, from 2008, which continues today, illustrates the Adaptation of the printed SN to the online SN, but also the end of the first one, with the outbreak of the corona virus, while presenting the circumstances that led to it. This period can be divided into two sub-phases, with the first, from the crisis in media and print from 2008 until the outbreak of the Corona, and the second, with the outbreak of the Corona and the lockdowns imposed on the education system in 2019 until today:

1. **The years between 2008 and 2019 are considered the years of the ‘Golden Age’ of the printed school press,** especially between 2008-2016, when towards the end of this epoch there was a struggle between the printed SN activity and the online SN activity. A struggle that pointed out that media consumption is determined by the type of medium and not necessarily by Its quality- ‘the medium Is the message’ [17]. SN became more professional and high-quality and engaged in valuable content as for political,

cultural and social Issues. Along with this, it continued to experience challenges: the decrease in reading and writing activities, the preference for the internet and social networks over newspapers and books [7, p. 7], [14], [5, p. 707], funding difficulties [Ibid.], and censorship [12, p. 91], [13, p. 86]. On top of that, the supervision and management demonstrably supported the transition to the digital SN. During this period, the media supervision frequently updated the curricula: in 2011 [18], 2016 [15], 2018 [19], and in 2019 [20] with demand to engage into new media literacy. The school administrators also saw the transition to the digital platform as an opportunity to be improved technologically and reduce SN's printing costs [21]. Despite this, until 2016, SN continued to be produced in print in most schools [16]. 2016 to 2019 were the last 3 years in which journalistic activity in schools was hybrid. In the years following the media crisis, educational and media research continued to deal with topical issues, such as the global digitization phenomenon negative effects on the youth [21]. At the same time, SN research has been renewed, out of the fear of its disappearance, while emphasizing its positive effects in cognitive and behavioral aspects, such as improving school achievements, raising social awareness, sharpening the sense of criticism and personal empowerment of the students [8, p. 258], [9], [22]. The research also engaged in informal education as an alternative platform for teaching In schools [10, p. 165], [11], due to the strengthening of digital sphere education and the teaching and learning in the informal framework, a phenomenon that became even stronger during the Corona period [1], [2]

2. Between 2019 – 2024, the digital school press phenomenon intensifies alongside the disappearance of the printed school press. With the outbreak of the Corona epidemic, and in its aftermath, the lockdowns imposed on the education system and the transfer of face-to-face learning to the digital Sphere [2, page 2985], [1], the media supervision have been obliged to rewrite the journalism curriculum [3], and transferred all the printed SN activities to the online Sphere. The post-corona period revealed, for the first time, a surprising situation, according to which the situation between the two branches of media supervision have changed: the number of online school newspapers in high school, in all age groups and sectors, as well as the journalism classes within the technological media supervision, was bigger compared to the number of newspapers and journalism classes under the theoretical communication supervision [16]. This period also led to a new model establishment of SN, which still operates today, in a variety of applications and formats on digital platforms, mostly free [21], but without supervision or regulated training, mainly in elementary and middle schools in the informal framework [16]. With the exception of a few individual school newspapers that operate in democratic schools, in which the editorial policy conducted almost totally by the school students [13, p. 86], the editorial policy in most school newspapers in the informal framework is under the responsibility of the educational staff. The result is a SN with an institutional tone "on behalf of the management", instead as a school SN. The phenomenon is particularly noticeable in elementary SN and in the religious sector – Jewish and Arab, where the low freedom of expression affects the

type of content that appears in the SN and the degree of involvement of the educational staff. This Is how the “school newspaper” became a marketing tool that externalizes the activities of the school and the management, serving its interests, without pedagogical and communicative guidance or supervision, instead of serving the population to which it belongs, the school students.

CONCLUSIONS

The intensification phenomenon of the online SN, parallel to the disappearance of the printed SN in Israel, stems from historical processes of the natural development of media means, at the same time as systemic factors and internal educational institutions, such as funding issues, censorship and technical difficulties. The outbreak of the corona epidemic in 2019, which led to prolonged closures in the education system and the transition from face-to-face to virtual learning, served, among other things, as a catalyst for the disappearance of the printed SN and the strengthening of the digital SN. We should mention also that the corona epidemic and the lockdowns imposed on the schools also led to the weakening of the media supervision and the school management exploitation of the situation to take over the SN, and turning it into a marketing product that promotes the school and its management without any supervision.

The expansion of the digital SN phenomenon in the informal framework compared to the print SN, illustrates the connection between the media platform in which the communication mean is located and its success, as McLuhan’s slogan: The medium is the message. The preference for the online platform, mainly in the informal educational framework, indicates that it is a friendly and attractive Sphere, compared to the print sphere with its complexity, which involve large expenses, and a complex pedagogical and technical production.

The SN research is far from been fruitful today, despite the alarming picture of the situation depicting an unsupervised SN in the informal framework, managed by the school management. Hence, the return of the research to this field, may contribute to change the situation and returning this Important educational product, the SN, to the school students hands.

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