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Local Online Press: A Survey on Users' Expectations and Habits in Kasai-Oriental

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the rise of the online press in Kasai-Oriental, highlighting the challenges faced by this industry within a changing socio-economic context. Whilst the use of digital devices is increasing, limited access to the internet and technology prevents a large proportion of the population from fully benefiting from online media content. Furthermore,

journalists, who often lack training in economics, focus on gathering information without seeking to make their activities profitable. The study highlights the need for a viable business model to ensure the sustainability of the online press, whilst calling for digital education for the population to strengthen their engagement with and access to information.

Keywords: Online press, expectations, habits, users, business model, digital divide.

1. Introduction

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of the countries where the digital industry is booming. With the rise in mobile devices, online content is consumed voraciously and at all times, as users often spend their time following news from one website to another.

The widespread distribution of media content across various digital platforms and the consumption of this content are having a major impact on the journalism profession; with the advent of digital technology, the sector faces the challenges of reporting in real time and the drive to stay in constant communication with consumers.

Multimedia journalism operates with or without a parent media organisation, as it does not require significant financial or material resources to produce media content that can be consumed by the public. Unlike traditional media (print and broadcast media), which require a working environment and equipment for the production of media content, online journalism requires nothing more than a camera and a computer to process events prior to their publication for an unlimited audience.

The emergence of new professions at the intersection of the internet and website development on the one hand, and more or less professionalised internet-based journalism on the other, is contributing to a major reconfiguration of press media, the nature of activities and the organisation of work, as well as audience demographics. (Eric and Sylvain: 2010).

Admittedly, the online press has brought with it several innovations, including, amongst other things, the removal of physical barriers, as its content knows no borders; however, a major question arises regarding the business model required to ensure the long-term viability of this profession in Kasai-Oriental. For Kazadi Raphaël, online journalism unwittingly perpetuates a form of exclusion, as not everyone has easy access to the digital tools required to use it. The internet, which the press currently relies on, excludes a certain category of people. There is a social fragmentation of society caused by the use of New Information and Communication Technologies (Raphaël Kazadi, 2023).

A number of studies have examined the transformations within the press industry. In particular, they have looked at the experimentation with new revenue models and the profitability of online news sites (Inna and Fabrice: 2016). From a socio-economic perspective, a media organisation is viewed first and foremost as an organisation, an industrial player operating within a given environment. This

environment comprises other actors, as well as rules of varying degrees of constraint, procedures and conventions, practices that are more or less standardised, public institutions, policy measures, equipment, infrastructure and technical frameworks, social representations that are more or less explicit, and other macro-analytical factors (Bullish and Schmitt: 2019).

Indeed, in Kasai-Oriental, where the online press has been in existence for less than 10 years – specifically 7 years – we have identified around twenty media outlets; this represents a growth of 3 or 4 online media outlets per year.

Online media outlets are primarily run by journalists who lack economic expertise. For the most part, these journalists focus on gathering news stories to turn into information for the public. By limiting themselves to gathering information, these journalists sometimes forget that they need a solid foundation to reap the long-term benefits of their efforts.

We have observed that the majority of these media outlets are content to publish almost identical or similar content, particularly on political matters, and to a lesser extent, information from the relevant political and administrative authorities. One question in particular comes to mind: is the online press's selection of events for public consumption driven by public expectations or by sponsored articles?

This line of questioning prompted us to investigate among consumers of online media content in order to finally draw a conclusion on the future of the local online press from the perspective of its sustainability and profitability. This emerged from our field survey conducted via the 'mWater' online platform in the Kabeya-Kamuanga territory and in the town of Mbujimayi.

The situation in Kabeya-Kamuanga – specifically in the rural communes of Kena-Kuna, the territory's administrative centre, and those of Lac Munkamba, which borders the province of Kasai-Centrale – is very challenging when it comes to accessing online media content. On the one hand, within the rural commune of Kena-Kuna, there is a problem with access to devices (smartphones and computers) needed to access this content; on the other hand, the rural commune of Lac Munkamba faces a problem with internet access, making it impossible to follow online media content. This leads to the conclusion that this region cannot be a favourable environment for the survival of online media.

As for the town of Mbujimayi, the socio-economic status of the population — who often have access to local online press content — and the quality of that content are the main reasons

cited by internet users to justify their views on the local online press.

2. Theoretical and methodological framework

2.1. Theoretical framework

In information and communication studies, a growing number of different theories are emerging across various fields of study. With regard to our research, we draw upon Elihu Katz's 'uses and gratifications' theory (Gregory: 2013).

The uses and gratifications theory underpinning this study enables us to examine the expectations of individuals and the satisfactions they seek to obtain through their engagement with the media.

The focus is on media usage rather than on the effects of the media, which presupposes an active recipient: the user is responsible for the messages they select and interpret.

A specific segment of the population is concerned with the consumption of online media content published by the local online press.

2.1.1. The functioning and school of usage and gratification

The uses and gratifications school, which developed in the 1960s and 1970s, has its origins in the early publications edited by Lazarsfeld, which focused on audiences' ability to make choices (notably those by Herta Herzog, Patricia Kendall, Katherine Wolf and Marjorie Fiske). Numerous authors, such as Denis McQuail, Jay Blumler, Elihu Katz, Karl Erik Rosengren and Wilbur Schramm, have reversed the conventional perspective on mass communication by setting themselves the aim — to use the established phrase — of studying not what the media do to individuals, but what individuals do with the media (Eric Maigret, 2015).

This research seeks to link expectations, consumption, pleasures and the effects of these pleasures on individuals using quantitative and qualitative indicators, whilst delving deeper into the study of the multiple dimensions of attention, comprehension, acceptance and retention, within a framework that recognises audiences' reflexivity and adaptive choice: the media are not authoritarian deities whose commands must be obeyed, but spaces that are open to audiences (Éric Maigret, op. cit.). 'Research into gratification starts from the notion of selectivity. But the selectivity in question is no longer simply linked to a defensive approach rooted in pre-existing opinions and habits. It is transformed into a forward-looking selectivity that takes account of needs and aspirations. The media thus

appear as public services of which the public makes selective use' (Katz, 1990).

The media are regarded here as a subset, integrated into the greater whole that is society—a subset that can be isolated and whose consequences can be measured. If these consequences correspond to the officially desired outcome for the media in fulfilment of their mission, to that which legitimises their existence, we then speak of manifest, or official, declared functions.

We are more interested in this category of theory because a functionalist approach is open to a number of significant criticisms.

According to this uses and gratifications theory, when attempting to explain a social phenomenon, 'one must distinguish between the efficient cause that produces it and the function it fulfils'.

The uses and gratifications theory seeks to explain why and how the public uses certain media to satisfy certain needs. It differs from other empirical analyses of media reception in that its main question is no longer 'what is the impact of the media on audiences?' but 'how does the public use the media and why?'

Elihu Katz identifies four different uses of the media from which audiences derive gratification:

- Distraction (taking one's mind off things, escapism, entertainment, forgetting personal problems, relaxation, passing the time, sexual arousal)
- Social relationships (socialisation, identification with others, a sense of belonging, topics for conversation and social interaction, a substitute for real-life interaction, assistance in establishing a social identity)
- Personal identity (developing and strengthening one's identity and values, seeking role models or ways of behaving, identifying with an ideal)
- Information (searching for information, seeking advice or opinions, satisfying curiosity, self-education, gaining a sense of security through knowledge)

These uses therefore fulfil individuals' needs. The uses and gratifications theory posits that an individual uses mass communication to connect (and sometimes disconnect) through instrumental, affective or integrative relationships with others (https://fr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/uses_and_gratifications).

The uses and gratifications theory is relevant to the communicational and informational sphere. This theory is rooted in the practice and appropriation of media, viewing the public no longer as amorphous targets, but as active participants endowed with creative capacities.

We also highlight the role of the audience in its use of the mass media.

Functionalism introduces a second distinction: the effects of the media are termed 'positive functions' when they improve the functioning of society, but 'dysfunctions' when they undermine this functioning, when they have 'undesirable' repercussions for individuals, primary groups or society.

Gregory Derville, in his book **The Powers of the Media**, believes that the press fulfils the same cathartic function in modern society as tragedy did in ancient Greece. The press's bridges, albeit temporarily, the gap between an individual's desires and the scope society affords them to satisfy them.

2.2. Research methodology

This section outlines the methodological approach we used to collect, interpret and analyse the data. The methodological approach will focus on observing the effectiveness and influence of this information on the population of the town of Mbujimayi. It therefore involves the 'ethnographic' method.

Social science research follows an approach similar to that of an oil explorer. An oil explorer will not find what they are looking for simply by drilling anywhere. On the contrary, the success of an oil exploration programme depends on the approach taken. The process is comparable in the field of social research. Above all, it is important that the researcher is able to devise and implement a framework for understanding reality – that is to say, in the broadest sense, a working method. This will never take the form of a mere collection of techniques to be applied as they stand, but rather as a comprehensive intellectual approach that needs to be reinvented for each individual project (CAMPENHOUDT, Van Luc and QUIVY, Raymond: 1988).

We have combined the ethnographic method with the 'quantitative' approach. The aim of the latter is to highlight internet users' attitudes towards the consumption of media content from the local online press, in order to reassure us of the survival of the local online press. The quantitative research is exploratory in nature and aims at social understanding.

3. Definition of concepts

3.1. Online press

The online press refers to all news media that publish content on the internet. It encompasses a variety of formats, such as articles, videos, podcasts and blogs, accessible via websites or mobile applications. The online press enables the rapid dissemination of information, greater interactivity and real-time access to news. It may include traditional newspapers that have a digital version as well as exclusively online media (Broussard: 2019).

By definition, it is an enhanced extension of the print version on a digital platform (the Internet). An online newspaper is also known as an electronic newspaper because it utilises computers. The term 'online' simply refers to the fact that it is widely distributed via the Internet. It should be noted that any move to an online format is driven by motivations and objectives that have nothing to do with the personal whims of a manager or a collective whim. Similarly, the various consequences of moving online must, from the outset, be the subject of a serious preliminary analysis.

In the online press, a distinction should be made between the electronic version of the press and the exclusively electronic press. The electronic version of the press is the digitised version of the print edition. It is simply a transfer of the content from the print medium to an electronic medium, a sort of full-text database. Exclusively digital press is designed using computer technology, involving a new form of writing. Online publishing breaks free from print publishing, with its editorial line and specialist journalists, offering articles that are not published in the print version.

In the case of Kasai-Oriental, we have only the exclusively digital version, as we have not seen a migration from print to online media, nor is there a media outlet that publishes both in print and online. Online content in Kasai-Oriental is exclusively available online.

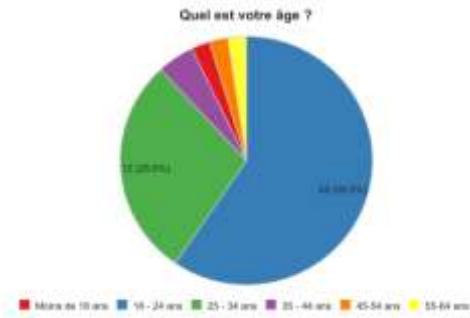
In view of this, the online press offers a number of advantages that are by no means negligible for anyone wishing to embark on this new venture: timeliness, diversification of information, interactivity and multimedia communication. Agnès adds to this list archiving, immediacy, the combination of media (audio, video, text, infographics) and hypertext navigation (AGNES Yves: 2002).

3.2. Business model

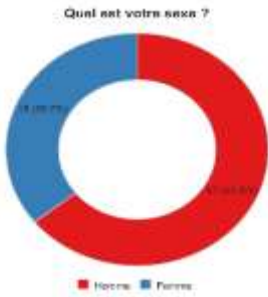
By definition, the business model describes how a company will create value for all its stakeholders and make a profit. A business model comprises several elements: objectives, strategic choices, the range of products or services, and resources (https://www.lecoindesentrepreneurs.fr/modele-economique).

4. Presentation of results and discussion

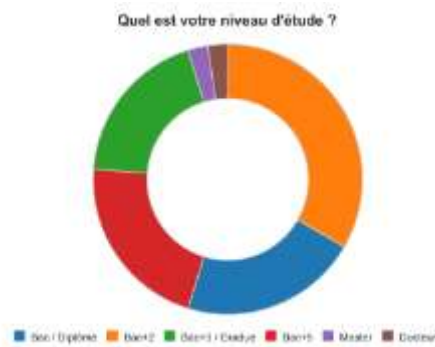
4.1. Presentation of results



The majority of respondents (59.5 per cent) are under 25 years of age, indicating a young audience that is potentially more open to new technologies and content formats.



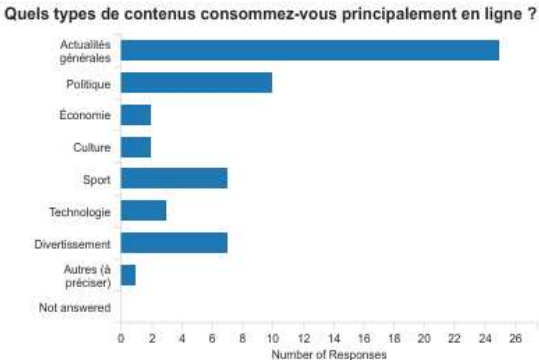
A majority of 64.3 per cent of respondents are men, which could influence the types of content that attract attention.



The distribution is varied, but a significant proportion (21.4 per cent) hold at least a master's degree, suggesting a well-educated audience who may have high expectations regarding content quality.



Nearly half of respondents (47.6 per cent) read local online news every day. This demonstrates a strong interest in online media, but it is crucial to improve ongoing engagement.



General news: This type of content remains the most popular, showing that internet users seek to stay well-informed about current events. This reflects a need for reliable, fact-based information.

Politics: The high demand for political content highlights users' interest in political issues. This may be explained by a desire to engage with public life and understand societal issues.

Economy: The appeal of economic content indicates that users are seeking a better understanding of economic and financial dynamics.

Culture and Sport: Although less popular than the previous categories, these types of content reflect users' diverse interests.

Technology and Entertainment: Their prominence shows that users do not view the internet primarily as a space for entertainment or technology consumption, but rather as a source of information and insight into the world.

Pourquoi ?

J'ai ne pas les moyens

Ma réponse est non, étant donné que je suis encore étudiant et que mes moyens financiers sont limités.

Il n'y a pas assez de sérieux dans ces pages

Parce que les médias en ligne du Kasai-Oriental ne sont pas sérieux et au delà de ça, ils manquent la crédibilité, la rapidité et précision dans la production de leurs contenus.

J'ai pas d'argent pour le moment.

Pas essentiel

The reasons given by some internet users who are not prepared to subscribe to local online news sites.

71.1 per cent are willing to subscribe, but certain obstacles remain, notably financial constraints and a lack of confidence in the quality of local media.

Quel est votre support principal pour lire la presse en ligne locale ?



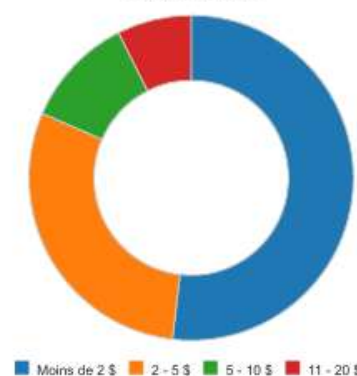
An overwhelming majority (92.1 per cent) use smartphones to access content, highlighting the importance of mobile optimisation for news websites.

Êtes-vous prêt à vous abonner à un ou plusieurs sites de presse en ligne locale ?



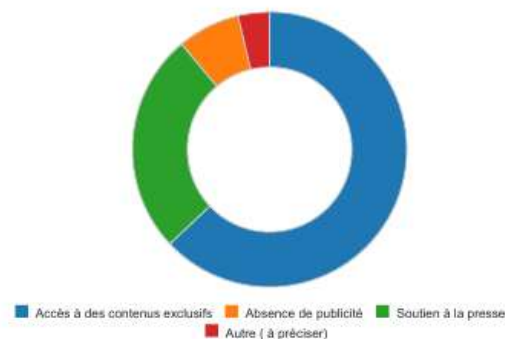
71.1 per cent of respondents are open to the idea of subscribing to local online news sites. This represents an opportunity for publishers to explore subscription models.

Combien pouvez-vous dépenser en moyenne par mois pour ces abonnements ?



The majority of respondents (51.9 per cent) would be willing to pay less than \$2 a month for a subscription.

Quelle est votre principale motivation pour vous abonner à un site de presse en ligne locale ?



Access to exclusive content is the main motivation (63 per cent), whilst supporting the local press comes second (25.9 per cent)

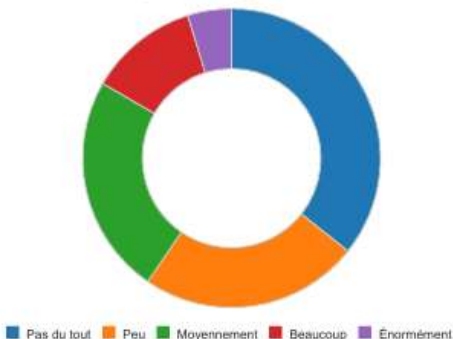
Access to exclusive content (63.0 per cent) is the main motivation, whilst the absence of advertising and support for the press are also attractive factors.

Seriez-vous prêt(e) à payer pour accéder à des contenus de qualité sur un site de presse en ligne locale ?



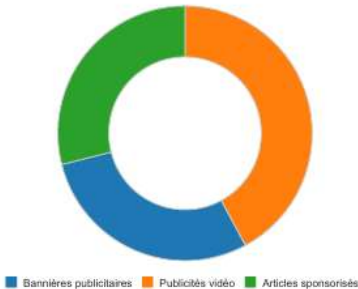
A significant proportion of respondents stated that they were willing to pay for high-quality content in the local online press.

Dans quelle mesure êtes-vous dérangé(e) par la publicité sur les sites de presse en ligne locale ?



The majority of respondents (35.7 per cent) are not at all bothered by adverts, but a significant proportion (23.8 per cent) feel moderately bothered. This indicates that a balanced approach to advertising is essential.

Quelle forme de publicité trouvez-vous la moins intrusive (envahissant) ?



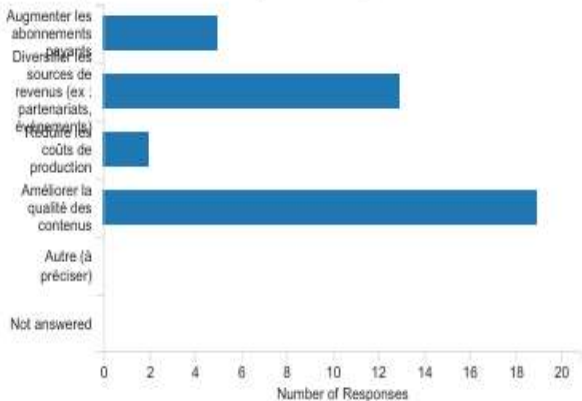
Banner adverts are considered the least intrusive, offering an insight into how adverts can be integrated in a more acceptable way.

Pensez-vous que les modèles de revenus actuels de la presse en ligne locale (publicité, abonnements) sont durables ?



Nearly half of respondents (47.6 per cent) are unsure whether current revenue models are sustainable. This may reflect a lack of confidence or uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of subscriptions and advertising.

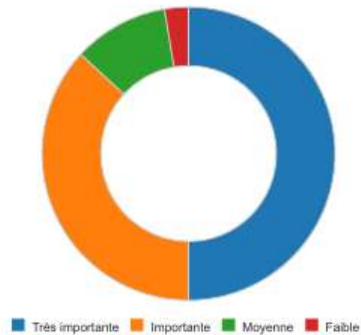
Quels seraient, selon vous, les meilleurs moyens pour assurer la pérennisation de la presse en ligne locale ?



The largest number of responses highlights that respondents consider the quality of content to be a crucial factor for the long-term survival of the online press. This suggests that well-researched and engaging articles can attract and retain readers.

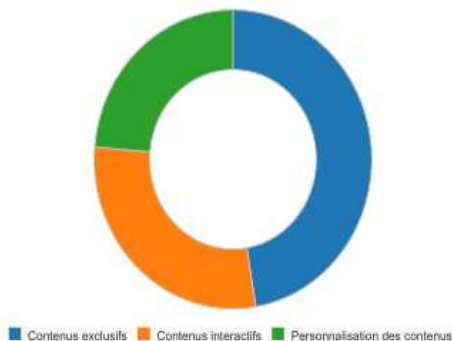
Furthermore, increasing the number of subscriptions is seen as a key way of ensuring the financial viability of the online press.

Quelle importance accordez-vous à la qualité des contenus pour la survie de la presse en ligne locale ?



The vast majority of responses indicate that content quality is perceived as 'very important' or 'important', highlighting a consensus on its crucial role in the long-term viability of the online press.

adopter pour rester compétitive ?



The majority of respondents prioritise exclusive content, indicating that originality and exclusivity are seen as major assets.

4.2. Discussion

At this stage, we must distinguish between news websites and media organisations; generally speaking, those operating online media are run by journalists whose primary mission is to publish news, rather than to run a business.

They lack the necessary skills to make their activities profitable, as they are not experts in entrepreneurship.

The role of journalists has changed so much; in the past, a journalist simply needed a notebook and a pen, but nowadays

they have to be able to do everything – that is, capture images, record sound, film videos and write. This process must be carried out quickly, as news must be published in real time, given that social media poses a constant threat to online media.

Online media must be credible enough to attract a steady stream of internet users.

To build an audience, some believe that media outlets should specialise in specific topics in order to attract a particular community.

Generalist media attracts everyone, but niche media has a strong audience because it attracts people who are interested in the specific content it offers.

How can you monetise your audience?

Establish a system for interacting with your community;

A thematic media outlet must have content that aligns with its vision.

A subscription is a paid commitment from the target audience that creates a relationship between consumers and the media. The more high-quality content a media outlet offers, the more natural the subscription becomes. A subscriber is a genuine customer who must be retained. A subscription fosters a close relationship between the subscriber and the media outlet.

5. Scientific contribution of the work

It is true that Information and Communication Technologies have revolutionised the press by promoting immediacy and rapidity in the transmission of news, by breaking down communication barriers and by enabling everyone to live in a global village. In the province of Kasai-Oriental, the use of digital technology is a serious issue that has been the subject of much debate. Those who own smartphones automatically become citizen journalists. Information is published without regard for ethical standards. As a result, media professionals are no longer the sole arbiters of information.

Furthermore, the online press in Kasai-Oriental faces specific challenges, notably problems with access to the internet and digital devices, highlighting the impact of socio-economic inequalities on news consumption. The majority of the population cannot afford an Android phone to access digital media. Similarly, not all professional journalists have the financial and material resources to set up online media outlets capable of generating revenue. Hence the need to educate the population of Kasai-Oriental, and particularly young people,

about the issues, challenges and opportunities presented by the digital world.

6. Conclusion

Although online media in Kasai-Oriental represents a significant step forward in access to information, it faces structural challenges that jeopardise its long-term viability. The survey conducted reveals that limited access to the internet and digital devices constitutes a major obstacle to the consumption of online media content. Socio-economic inequalities exacerbate this situation, creating a divide between those who can benefit from these new platforms and those who are excluded from them.

Furthermore, the professionalisation of online journalism is still in its infancy, with journalists often ill-equipped to navigate an environment where information must be disseminated quickly and in an engaging manner. This highlights the need for a robust training framework for local journalists so that they can develop skills suited to the demands of the digital age. Such training could not only improve the quality of information but also strengthen public trust in online media.

Finally, to ensure the sustainability of the online press, it is imperative to explore viable business models. This includes setting up subscription schemes, developing high-quality thematic content and engaging with audiences. By cultivating a close relationship with news consumers, online media can not only grow their audience but also lay solid foundations for their future profitability.

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