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Pauline Amiel

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SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM: A SYMPTOM OF FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES FOR FRENCH LOCAL JOURNALISTS

Pauline Amiel

Since 1995, French local newspapers have been publishing news online. The economic crisis of these media is linked to the rise of the web, according to journalists. *Solutions journalism*, as a professional concept, has been emerging in that context since 2015. Also called *constructivist journalism* or *SoJo* by journalists, it began to appear in the professional vocabulary at the end of the 1990's (Benesh, 1998). For Alexander Curry and Keith Hammonds (2014), "solutions journalism is reporting about responses to entrenched social problems. It examines instances where people, institutions, and communities are working toward solutions. Solutions-based stories focus not just on what may be working, but how and why it appears to be working, or, alternatively, why it may be stumbling". In 2007, the *New York Times* (United States) and *Berlingske Media* (Denmark) newsrooms wanted to promote a journalistic way of working to bring solutions to societal issues. Editors encouraging this method assured that they wanted to get out of agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) so as to increase reporting (Amiel, 2017).

In December 2007, the French newspaper *Libération* was the first to propose an extra journal named *The Liberation of Solutions (Le Libé des solutions)* in collaboration with the organization *Reporters of Hope*. The goal of this newspaper is "to propose information based on the result and the solution, because [they] are convinced that media can be precious instruments of social building" (Busquet, 2008). In 2014, three French local newspapers proposed the page solutions, applying solutions journalism principles on a local level. This page was created in partnership with the organization *Reporters of Hope* as well (Reporters d'Espoirs, 2016).

The following year, in 2015, the phenomenon bloomed. Indeed, local newspapers created tactical cells for strategic monitoring. They called those cells *labs*. These labs gather employees from marketing, newsrooms, sales and infographic services. Their aims are to combat economic struggles and deficits, and to suggest editorial

innovations. At the same time, the local press group *Centre-France*¹ and the local newspaper *Nice-Matin*² have both hired a consultant in media innovations. From these components several projects, including those identified as solutions journalism, have been initiated.

As such, one could say there is a real trend in the French local press for solutions journalism. Indeed, as Patrick Champagne observed in 1984, French journalists are strongly affected by a mimicry effect that encouraged them to copy each other. We suppose that this effect explains in part the enthusiasm for solutions journalism. Furthermore, we can talk about this as a “trend” in the local press because it originated in several newsrooms at the same time with the related and important excitement of journalists regarding it.

The French local press landscape is different from its national counterpart: ten big local press groups share the territory. They hold almost all of the sixty-five daily local newspapers which are in a monopoly position in their area. Next to those big local press groups, a few small actors try to maintain and propose local weekly newspapers or magazines. Despite their monopoly situation, local press groups have lost readers and advertising revenues for more than ten years. In turn, they are trying to balance these losses by diversifying their activities in various sectors like communication, advertising or creating events.

In this context, solutions journalism emerged in several local newsrooms. But behind the phenomenon, it has deeper connotations. Namely, it demonstrates a will to rekindle relationships with readers and communities. This proximity is defined as “the plurality of the ways of defining the close: sometimes, it’s the familiar, the known, the one with whom the relationship already exists thanks to services and mandates already engaged; sometimes, it’s the similar occupying the same position in the social area, in that case the objective proximity doesn’t include the inter-knowledge and social links” (Le Bart & Lefèbvre, 2005).

In this chapter, we propose to study how discourse on solutions journalism is a sign of the will to strengthen proximity in the French local press. For journalists, the idea is to foster positive information, focused on solving issues of the region and proposing answers. What does solutions journalism reveal about the French local press? More widely, we try to understand why solutions journalism could be a symptom of deep changes in the practices and professional identity of French local journalists.

1 Based in Clermont-Ferrand, twenty daily or weekly local newspapers in the center of France. <http://www.lamontagne.fr/pratique/le-groupe.html>

2 Based in Nice. <http://www.nicematin.com/>

The purpose of this chapter is to contrast constitutive concepts of solutions journalism in France with the way local journalism could modify them. By considering differences between local journalists' discourses and practices, we seek to underscore how proximity with the readership could be strengthened. Moreover, the case of solutions journalism permits one to similarly study the influence of marketing and sales services on local journalists as well.

First, we describe the data used for this research and our method of analysis. We then consider the economical context of the implementation of solutions journalism in three newspapers of the corpus. Finally, we illuminate how solutions journalism is perceived as a means to reinforce proximity by the journalists interviewed, allowing for an explication of how this concept accounts for journalistic activities beyond publishing stories. Finally, we examine how solutions journalism allows for the vocabulary of marketing to enter into journalistic discourses more broadly.

Methods

The main data for this chapter comes from qualitative interviews with journalists and editors-in-chief working in three local daily newspapers in France.³ This media constitutes the most read newspaper in France, accounting for 39.1% of the total distribution in 2015. The data from *Alliance Pour Les Chiffres de la Presse et des Médias* (2015) and from the *Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication* (2015) allows us to contextualize our subject in relation to the general economic position of local newspapers in France. This context is relevant to the understanding of journalists' status within their companies. This will be developed in a subsequent part of this chapter (Le Floch, 1997).

Between August 2015 and December 2016, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with journalists and editors-in-chief working in four local daily newspapers and one local digital native. They came from *Nice-Matin*; *La Dépêche du Midi*; *Le Parisien*; *Le Journal du Centre*; and the digital native *Mars Actu*.⁴

While the questions focused on the links with local territories, the readership and other components of professional local journalists' identity, solutions journalism or its paradigms emerged spontaneously in the answers in half of the interviews; a relevant indicator of the journalists' enthusiasm for this concept. They told

3 Those interviews were part of a larger research frame: they are part of the corpus formed for a doctoral dissertation on professional identity and practices of local journalists.

4 *Nice-Matin* (Nice); *La Dépêche du Midi* (Toulouse); *Le Parisien* (Paris); *Centre France*; *Mars Actu*.

us about it as proof of their creativity and of their will to improve their skills. Furthermore, it permitted us to focus on it in our research.

To insure that the data was representative, we chose the interviewees in accordance with their holding the *Identity Card of Professional Journalists Commission* (Observatoire des métiers de la presse, 2016). Ten of the journalists mentioned the phrase “solutions journalism” or incorporated an explanation of at least one of its paradigms; these extracts were used more specifically for this chapter. The journalists evoking solutions journalism or its paradigms work in Nice-Matin, Le Parisien and Le Journal du Centre. Therefore, we have specifically focused on these newspapers for this study.

To that main data set, we also added internal and external documentation⁵ from the newspapers. We analysed those documents according to the qualitative documents analysis which allowed us to understand the fundamental discourses of the press group directions. Moreover, it permits us to follow how the direction discourses enter journalists’ discourses to modify the way journalists perceived proximity.⁶

From the study, several factors emerged allowing for a better understanding of how local journalists want to reinforce proximity thanks to solutions journalism, and how it could provoke important changes in French local journalism practices and professional identity.

French local press situation

The local press is the most widely read press in France with 41.5 million readers every month. In spite of its historic tradition within the nation, local presses constantly lose readers and advertisements – its two main sources of income – since 2008.

The French local press has developed differently from its national counterpart. As researchers Marc Martin (2002) and Michel Mathien (1993) have demonstrated, from its origins, local information has been services oriented. As Franck Bousquet

5 An action plan of the Centre France press group was studied to understand where the idea of solutions journalism comes from and how it had been implemented in the various newsrooms. The Nice-Matin newsletter, created to promote the solutions journalism website, and releases from Le Parisien, regarding the launch of its new website, have been useful in helping to both understand the vocabulary of solutions journalism and the distinctions between the changes, journalists; discourses and marketing purposes.

6 Interviews and documentation were transcribed and analyzed according to the general precept of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). The analysis was iterative. The first elements that appeared in the interviews and in the documentation helped to build and focus questions asked in the subsequent interviews.

(2014) particularly describes, this services-oriented information in local newspapers today is an important part of the reconfiguration of those newspapers.

The French local news media market consists mostly of one local newspaper company's monopoly on its territory (Le Floch, 1997). For several decades, a double strategy frames this economic sector: On one hand, there is a strong logic of ownership concentration which reduces the number of independent local media, and on the other hand, the disappearance of other newspapers has increased their monopolies (Bousquet, 2014). On most territories, there is one monopolistic actor, which is the local daily newspaper. Over the last ten years, more than 25 local press newspapers were bought up, resulting in a dynamic situation whereby bigger and more consolidated groups have expanded across increasingly larger areas. Today, there are a dozen local press groups with different degrees of integration, sharing the French territory and its 66 titles. But the market remains in perpetual evolution (Le Floch, 1997; Le Floch & Sonnac, 2013).

And yet, despite these phenomena of concentration and monopoly of the local press in France, journalists are in a paradoxical and rather schizophrenic situation (Bousquet, 2014): while they are the only players in their regions, they nonetheless face extreme competition online (Damian, Ringoot, Thierry, & Ruellan, 2002, p. 74). Since the inception of the local press online, newsrooms have had to adapt to a new situation which sits diametrically opposed to their habitual practices within a monopoly. Online, numerous actors can invest in local news.

In this context, local journalists experienced a decrease of their readership and reduction of advertising revenue. The borders between journalism and communication tend to be diminishing, as increasingly different pressures from the economic side, as well as internal service pressures related to advertising and marketing to local audiences, push journalists "to cross the line" between serving public and private interests.

In the local press, this tendency is the same if not more important because of the inclination of local press companies to get involved in extra journalistic communication activities. All media groups owning a local daily newspaper have diversified activities in press relations, events or advertising. Bénédicte Toullec (2002, p. 76) reminds us that one must consider "the local newspaper companies not as the heart of local information production, but as a media group, occupying a hegemonic position as mediator in a given area, a position defended by the multiplication of interactions between products". This diversification in media conglomerates (Langonne & Ruellan, 2012) shifts the heart of activities from *journalistic production* to profit-oriented *communication activities*; as Franck Bousquet (2014, p. 62) observed for La Dépêche du Midi: "In 2012, the turnover of La Dépêche du Midi is 110 million euros; that of all other group companies combined reached 90 million".

Colette Brin, Jean Charron and Jean de Bonville first pointed to this concept *communication journalism* and the concept is defined by Erik Neveu:

Communication journalism is emerged during an era of hyperconcurrency between omnipresent medias in everyday life, capable of covering almost all the news live. [...] Communication journalism also refers to the shaping and even the aesthetics of its message as key resources to build loyalty in a competitive context.

(Neveu, 2001, pp. 96–98)

This kind of journalism no longer focused on “hot news” but also on the will to please audiences. For Erik Neveu, three factors explain how these lines are being blurred:

Border dynamics persist, but now threaten to drown the journalist in the great continuum of business communication and information production. The change is due to two dynamics. One comes from the rise of communication of strategic business communication, such as press officers, business press editors and local authorities. The other is the growing weight of amateurs and semi-amateurs whose blogs, sites or wikis offer information and products that have the appearance, and sometimes even the quality of journalism. (...) The image of the profession is blurred, and suffers from ethical slippages. The ways journalists run after their readers may take them far away from them.

(Neveu 2001, p. 20)

Consequently, we situate our work on solutions journalism in the French local press in this research frame, considering how it might be another step in this process. Françoise Laugée (2014) states that solutions journalism or impact journalism “is presented as an alternative to traditional information processing, mostly aimed at problems. As such, it’s a conception of journalistic work which could spark citizen’s involvement”. French local journalists are used to perceiving their readers as proximally close (Bousquet, Marty, & Smyrniaios, 2013). They imagine them living in the same neighbourhoods, enjoying the same activities, etc.

Historically, one of the main characteristics of a local daily newspaper is its relationship with its editorial territory. The local media is part of the building of the territory and its identity. Understood as a place in which meaning is defined by links (Boure & Lefebvre, 2000), it is both constitutive of the media relation with their public and dependent on different editorial constructions. Newspapers, with local

institutions and populations, help to maintain boundaries, and to separate the in and the out of the territory (Paillart, 1993).

The local daily newspaper is also the place where the shared boundaries, symbols, stories, myths and representations are expressed (Faure, 2002). However, online, French local newspapers seem to lose this unique role in defining conceptions of territory. Indeed, they have to share this function with numerous actors, sometimes citizens, on social networks or on blogs, but also with institutional actors or other media. Consequently, French local journalists seek to find editorial proposals to reengage their readers in this proximal relationship.

In short, we assert that solutions journalism is viewed by French local journalists as a solution to the struggle of decreased audiences and increased advertising. Furthermore, they see this concept as a way to enhance the proximity with their audience and their territory. More precisely, in the context of the continual loss of income and extreme competition for local news online, the stature of journalists has been lowered.

Moreover, the decrease in readership forced local press groups to diversify their activities and to diminish the importance of newsrooms. The pressure surrounding selling and marketing services in the group has impacted journalists and has extended the propensity to communication journalism. In this context, local journalists have perceived solutions journalism as a solution to regain their social capital in these companies (Bourdieu, 1980). So, on one hand, they hope to slow audience flight by reinforcing the proximity with their readers. On the other hand, they hope to regain their previous integrity within these companies

Each analysed local medium sits within the aforementioned economic situation. Furthermore, two of them have suffered important redundancy plans: Nice-Matin and Le Journal du Centre. All of them have increasingly lost revenue each year since 2008. For example, Le Parisien observed a decrease in sales of 8% per year over the last 3 years. Before proposing an analysis, it is important to briefly introduce the papers we examined.

Nice-Matin is the main local media company in the French Riviera. It publishes three daily newspapers: *Var-Matin*, *Nice-Matin* and *Monaco-Matin*. It also utilizes a website for each of these. The company, after several sales and a judicial settlement, was bought back by its employees in November 2014. A new investor, the Belgian media group *Néthys*, has invested in the company since 2016. The newspaper and the digital edition were progressively revised in 2015 and 2016 to propose a new offering to readers, namely a paid site, focused on solutions journalism, which was launched in January 2016.

Le Journal du Centre is one of the daily local presses of the *Centre France* group. In 2013, the group fired 230 employees to reduce its losses and to engage in the

digital transformation of its newsrooms. Since 2013, each newspaper in this group has had a digital team composed of two or three web journalists in charge of the website and the social networks. Since December 2014, the group has created a lab, which is an innovation cell designed to propose editorial projects for both the digital and the (print) newspapers. The group's editorial teams, spread over 12 (regional) departments, can also propose new editorial processes online. The outline investigated within this chapter emerged from proposals within this unit. These different aspects related to editorial renewal revolve around a proposal towards creating more proximity.

Le Parisien is the local daily newspaper for Paris. Redesigned by a big French luxury group, LVMH (*Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE*), in 2014, the group *Le Parisien/Aujourd'hui en France* launched a new version of its newspaper and its digital editions in September 2016. The objective of this 10 million-euro plan was to increase the number of subscribers by giving readers information that is closer to them and their daily lives.

Solutions journalism emerges from this challenging economical context. After briefly describing the situation of the French local press the value to proximity and the corpus and method, we then consider how solutions journalism proposals in three analysed French local newspapers seemingly strengthened their proximity within their community.

Reinforce proximity with readership

As we have seen, solutions journalism has been implemented in a difficult economic context for French local journalists. The three newspapers analysed have suffered a takeover and massive redundancy plans. These difficulties are due to the diminished audiences and advertising revenues which forced media groups to diversify. In this background, journalists didn't know their readers as they previously did (Damian et al., 2002, p. 19). As we observed in the newsrooms visited for this research, local journalists did not feel the same proximity with online readers: "Before knowing our readers, we know what they are watching. We know the most consulted articles, the one on which they spend the most time, where they are coming from. We are studying this data" (Le Parisien journalist, 2015). This editor-in-chief summarizes the way local journalists perceive online readers: they know statistics about them but they don't feel close to them.

"Solution journalism is a form of explanatory journalism that can fulfil a watch-dog role, highlighting effective responses to issues, in order to stimulate reforms / changes in areas where people or organizations fail to find answers particularly when better alternatives are available" (Curry & Hammonds, 2014). In its initial definition, this editorial proposal commits journalists to high quality investigative

work. For the journalists interviewed, proposing solutions articles is primarily a change of professional habits. For example, instead of writing an article on a traffic accident in his city, a Nice-Matin journalist proposed an article on “how to reduce the number of accidents by going to see local actors, almost everywhere, on the sea-side roads or whatever. Solutions journalism is going to work more on fact-checking around the problem within the main article. Then, we try to bring a solution to solve a problem” (Nice-Matin journalist, interview, 2015).

In another example, a journalist explained that to propose a solutions-based article, he has to think “upside-down” (Nice-Matin journalist, interview, 2015). Whether it is through inquiry, the desire to get out of agenda-setting or by looking for witnesses different from the traditional actors, this same local journalist stated that he “seeks to renew the way of working. We have to work the other way around. We must put more humanity in our treatment of the news”.

In this discourse, the editorial form is presented by the local journalists as a way of influencing their territory. They want to position themselves differently in the construction and development of the local community. They want to “get out of [their] office” (Journal du Centre journalist, interview, 2016). They believe that traditional public actors no longer have the confidence of the readers. Through the use of solutions journalism, they envisage going beyond the myth of objectivity (Le Bohec, 2000) so as to take an active part in the construction of the territory, proposing concrete solutions. The journalist is no longer an observer but an actor, creator of events, as an integral part of a meeting or debate.

Certain journalists interviewed wanted to get out of the strict framework of the production of articles: “Then we will adapt by being more agentive in our territories, get out of our traditional journalistic habits because we have to get more involved with what is happening around us” (Journal du Centre journalist, interview, 2016). This journalist at the Journal du Centre (interview, 2016), had already set up several projects that directly impact his publishing territory. In a partnership with several economic actors at state agencies, he is set to create a water company, the *SEN* (*Society of Nivernaise water*). He seeks to get involved in his territory and help to offset unemployment by creating an industry. For him, to be a journalist is to propose solutions not only through writing but also by creating opportunities in the field. Being a “militant of the territory” means not only writing about the possible solutions but also acting to prove to the readers the effect of the newspaper on their daily life. This, according to local journalists, is a new way of working and of being “inscribed in reality”. Thus, journalists can be brought to “get out of journalism” as another journalist states (Le Parisien journalist, interview, 2015.). Through this formula, the journalist summarizes the thinking heard in most of the interviews conducted. Local journalists believe that their way of thinking about journalism needs

to be revised to better meet reader's expectations. For a former editor-in-chief in *Le Parisien*: "Today, it's a newsroom, a newspaper. That is not possible anymore. So we have to do events organization, services, a YouTube channel. Journalists have to adapt to within their audiences' evolution" (*Le Parisien* editor in chief, interview, 2015).

To reinforce proximity with readers, in an economically-challenging context, local journalists and editors interviewed seek to propose different kinds of content. Furthermore, they want to get involved in the daily life of the region. They get out of traditional journalistic habits in an effort to try to reengage their audiences.

Embody information

This desire to get involved in readers' daily life through new avenues is a way to strengthen proximity relationships. The direction of the group Centre France sent this new prerogative to their employees: "Let us get closer to our customers, to better impact them, to reach them, and to accompany them in their daily lives".

This closer proximity encourages journalists to create links but also to embody information. The local newspaper must have "a human face" especially "on the networks, where the journalists have to meet their audiences and talk with them". The writing of local newspapers must evolve, according to this trajectory for Centre France:

We introduce proximity into our writing. We do not only write in the third person. When it is justified, we address the reader in the second person (you) and we accept to implicate ourselves in the first person (I or we).

Thus, some journalists interviewed have published articles about how they do their enquiries. They not only proposed articles about news but also incorporated news by publishing stories about themselves. If local journalists have to leave the traditional framework of journalism and depart from a position of objectivity, they subsequently become an incarnation of information. The newspaper must take human form, be personified to simulate a direct relationship with the reader. The reader has to be able to put "a face" and even a "touch" to journalism. Readers should feel more concerned and feel the newspaper is integrated in their daily universe. We then see that local journalists must propose something else, change their practices and get out of their traditional professional identity.

Influence of sales and marketing in discourses

As can be seen in these excerpts from the internal documents of the Centre France group, the marketing and sales' influence as well as the construction of a brand

image, remain prevalent in the proposal to strengthen proximity, especially through solutions journalism. Coming out of the group's management, this communication discourse seems rather well-integrated by the journalists we met. We compared the formulas and proposals resulting from internal documentation gathered with the discourse of the journalists interviewed. Our intention was to understand if the marketing vocabulary used by the general managers in the internal documentation was adopted by journalists.

Many of them organize projects around the axes set out in the internal documents and take up the proposed marketing terms. For example, an editor proposed a weekly column to directly answer readers' questions. She proposed to insert a picture of her at the top of the article, to "embody the column" (Centre France journalist, interview, 2016). In *Le Parisien*, an editor stated that "what is most important, is the brand. The brand *Le Parisien* is synonymous with seriousness and quality" (*Le Parisien* editor, interview, 2015). As we suspected, the marketing terms and logics are adopted by journalists. The intrusion of marketing into the daily life of local press journalists is seen as necessary to combat the paper's economic decline.

As we observed during interviews, the readers are named "the customers". Notions of image and brand appear in the speech of journalists soon after the installation of a lab or after the distribution of internal documentation for the editorial offices. Thus, terminology from the professional worlds of marketing and sales services pop-up in newsrooms. It is important to highlight this phenomenon. In *Nice-Matin*, an editor stated that "we pick solutions journalism because there are studies proving that it can garner more readership. We proposed a pay-per-month website for it" (*Nice-Matin* editor, 2015).

Furthermore, solutions journalism seems to reinvigorate service-based information. For a journalist interviewed, "it's the future. Service-based information is the heart of the local press. It could allow us to promote new content" (*Le Parisien* journalist, 2016). This characteristic gets journalists closer to advertising purposes. For example, "we published a short article on the airplane company Hop! which proposed cheap flight tickets. And the news exploded online. It's that kind of service-based news that readers are looking for" (*Nice-Matin* journalist, interview, 2015).

Indeed, while journalists seemed to resist attempts at the incursion of communication and marketing tropes in their daily work (Damian et al., 2002), solutions journalism could appear as a Trojan horse in editorial offices. This journalistic concept permits marketing logics to enter the newsrooms and to leach into the journalists' vocabulary. Under the guise of reassessment and renewing the proximity relationship with readers, and under the cover of better investigative journalism, solutions journalism seems to be used to impose vernaculars and professional standards on journalists closer to the world of marketing and communication than

to the traditional professional ethical standards of journalism. As we have seen, interviewees talked more about sales and ads than about journalistic practices.

As French researchers (e.g. Le Bohec, 2000) observed, the professional identity of French journalists is based on discourses and myths. The separation between communication, advertisement and journalism stands as one of those fundamental myths. As we can see, solutions journalism permits one to cross this frontier between marketing and journalism. However, this assumption has already been studied while solutions journalism is a newer phenomenon in local newsrooms. The phenomenon and its evolution must be observed over a longer period of time through future analysis.

Conclusions

According to the elements of the corpus, solutions journalism remains frequently presented by local journalists as a means to fight against reader flight. It is also viewed as a new professional model focused on investigation. Before going into detail, it should be remembered that the establishment of solutions journalism is recent and that it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions on a new process in a sector in perpetual movement. Indeed, this first analysis is part of a larger research project in progress. As we have seen, this editorial proposal has been gradually put in place since 2014 and especially since 2016. Thus, if it is too early to draw a definitive conclusion, it seems important to continue to examine the changes at hand – especially since the professional identity and the practices of local journalists could be challenged.

In this chapter, we have tried to understand how solutions journalism is viewed by French local journalists as a solution to the struggle of audience and advertising flight. Also, we observed how journalists interviewed see this concept as a way to enhance the proximity with their audience. Finally, we saw how solutions journalism could change journalists' professional identity by setting up marketing and sales discourses in the newsrooms.

Solutions journalism seems to be a symptom of two movements. On the one hand, in their commentaries, journalists engaged in this new editorial proposal tend to reinforce traditional proximity relations with readers. Indeed, as we have seen, solutions journalism is perceived by journalists as a new way of getting involved which is one of the most important characteristics of the French local press (Bousquet, Marty, & Smyrniaios, 2013). The relations between the local press and its readership are complex and, through this editorial proposal, journalists seek to depart from their role as observers in order to influence publics further and get

more involved. The words “actor” and “militant” of the territory, frequently heard in these commentaries, testify to this. In addition, proximity and readers remain the two principal interests for solutions journalism (Curry & Hammonds, 2014).

On the other hand, on a second front, solutions journalism seems to take local journalists farther from their professional code. Indeed, as we have described, the engagement of local press reporters outside the editorial offices is coupled with an expectation of increased sales and marketing services (Neveu, 2001). In order to reinforce proximity with the reader, journalists are called upon to personify information and to move away from objective reporting even if it means taking the reader to the “information factory’s” backstage (Bousquet, 2014). The local journalist is invited to move beyond their traditional attributes and role in order to win back readership. In that perspective, they are getting closer to a communication journalism evoked by Colette Brin, Jean Charron and Jean de Bonville. By hoping to offer content closer to advertising, journalists agree to carry some of its founding principles into their relationship with their audience. Thus, solutions journalism, first brought to editorial offices through a desire for sales and marketing departments as well as management, can be subsequently traced in journalists’ discourses. This editorial proposal could be perceived as a Trojan horse of communication and marketing praxis in local newsrooms. This double movement of proximity’s reinforcement and of the remoteness of journalism’s professional representations (Le Bohec, 2000) needs to be further investigated. It could involve profound changes in the professional identity and discourses of local press journalists in France.

In conclusion and as we suspected, solutions journalism is perceived by local journalists interviewed as a possibility to strengthen proximity with their readers. For journalists, the idea is to foster positive information, focused on solving the issues of the territory and proposing answers. After years of diminishing audiences and revenues, journalists see in this concept a way of getting closer to their readers. We have also seen how solutions journalism could change local journalists’ professional identity. This concept has been implemented by media management to increase sales. Through solutions journalism, management and marketing logics successfully enter journalistic production.

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