

Media Coverage of the Internet: An Acculturation Strategy for Press of Record?

Chloë Salles

Laboratoire GRESEC (71° section)
Université Grenoble 3 - France

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This paper is part of a wider doctoral study focusing on the acculturation of press of record to the Internet. The article presents evidence persuading us that the on-going crisis that the Press is enduring (and has for a while), though raising constant concern on questions of survival and democratic mechanisms, also sees the formation of small areas in which experiences are run, while symbolically and economically strong companies continue to function normally (i.e. according to historical norms). Here we describe localized areas based on coverage newspapers provide regarding their relation to innovation, perhaps a place to mediate two cultures: 'old,' traditional newspaper culture and the Internet. These suggestions are based on interviews at *Le Monde* with different hierarchy practitioners and the analysis of diverse entities in articles covering innovation, especially those mentioning 'crisis' and 'blogs'.

1 Introduction

This research is part of a wider doctoral study that focuses on the acculturation to the Internet of the French paper of record *Le Monde*. Moreover, we take interest in the way the technical devices are put to profit in that aim.

The discourse on new technologies over the past 20 years is summoned to indicate the changes occurred in how technology has been considered.

How has discourse about the Internet evolved in newspapers over the past 30 years? What used to be the subject of innovation-related enthusiasm only has become over the past decade an effort to try to 'save' journalism and what it constitutes (over the past few years many have spoken of newspapers' 'death'), as well as a major challenge that is visible in the reorganization of newsrooms as well as the redefining of journalism itself.

Thus, we aim here to show and develop the two positions with which the Press seems to be juggling. On one hand, the Internet is presented as one of most important elements to the newspaper, strategically, in striving for survival and reconstruction, in readjusting itself to the present social context (that we consider a constant dispute faced by journalism). On the other hand, though newspapers have strongly invested in the Internet, we aim to show that their strategy is maybe that of observing a conservative position in which the inconsistency of the coverage may be signaling the presence of 'tactical areas.' Discourse instability will be illustrated with coverage of the 'Press crisis' and blogs.

We use a series of interviews at different hierarchical levels done at the French paper *Le Monde*, as well as a corpus of its articles relating to innovation and more particularly to the crisis in journalism, and blogs. We will assay more deeply the challenge for newspapers to communicate on innovation, not only to inform and guide citizens through novelty, but equally, in the case of the Internet, to inform and guide themselves as ‘news practitioners’ through the realms of a medium to which they are not yet acculturated.

Our main focus on Press of record is guided by the idea that those newspapers have more to lose in the on-going changes than smaller Press companies and younger firms, not just economically but also symbolically via the image they project. They are usually considered a reference in their proximity with representations of a ‘mythical’ journalism, revealed through historical stability, usually over a long period of time.

2 Elements of context

2.1 Newspapers & the Internet

Over the past 30 years, the Internet has turned from being an object of interest for technophiles and computer engineers to an everyday tool used in households across the dominant countries of the world¹. Specialized Press was the first to focus on the Internet, in the early 1980s². As soon as computers, followed by the Internet, started entering households, thus allowing private use, generalist newspapers also started to cover the phenomenon.

Columns focused on media had already emerged in French daily newspapers in the 1970s. The left-wing paper *Libération* was the first to include such a column, thus encouraging reflection and discussion on the status of media in highly competitive media and political contexts (political links with the media have always been subject to debate). But the Internet was not automatically covered in the ‘media’ column. It went from a subject of curiosity as a ‘new technology’ to consideration of economic issues (many rapidly growing start-ups taking advantage of the Internet), or as a measured initiator of social changes involving communicating, leisure, etc. Since the mid 1990s, media coverage started to take new interest in the Internet in that investing in on-line formats was becoming a challenge. The Press,

¹ A study published by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) in June 2008 stated that the ten countries with the highest rates of households connected to high-speed Internet are Denmark with 36,7%, the Netherlands 35,5 %, Norway 33,4 %, Switzerland 32,7%, Island 32,3 %, Sweden 32,2 %, South Korea 31,2%, Finland 30,7%, Luxembourg 28,3%, and Canada with 27,9%. France comes in thirteenth position with 26,4 %, and the United States follow after Germany with 25%.

² As we position this research in a French context, we note that many French computing magazines discussing networks, often referred to American findings, evolutions and practices.

apparently stuck in an ongoing crisis since the 1970s³, started investing in the Internet to solve the problems cited for the crisis: drop in readership, lack of trust towards papers, ageing media, new emerging competition...

Thus, the Internet has evolved from being a subject of curiosity in Press coverage, to being a challenge for Press companies that tend to see it as potential savior, though adapting hasn't been as obvious as thought earlier. Different periods of adjustment to the Internet can clearly be defined when analyzing newspapers' venture on the Internet: the 1995 version of *Le Monde* on the Internet has nothing to do with the declension one can read on-line today.

2.2 A paper of record: *Le Monde*

This research considers newspapers of record rather than Press in general, though the Internet has become the major investment for both more traditional and more popular papers. What is now considered 'Press of record' is also called 'quality newspapers,' 'broadsheet papers' or *Presse de référence* (literally 'Press of reference'). Usually renowned internationally, such papers are considered meeting higher standards than that of the rest of the Press.

Though various studies have been undertaken to define the characteristics of such a Press⁴, what constitutes such a status isn't so much of our interest. In fact we believe it to be extremely variable (cultural and political contexts being relevant) despite the traditional representations it tends to reflect. Indeed, throughout the changes of society, newspapers of record tend to keep the same serious tone, expressed by editorial choices illustrated by the subjects that are covered, as well as the style of writing.

Newspapers of record recognize and confirm one another's existence by referring to international fellows. One example is that of French *Le Monde*'s Saturday's edition that includes a four-page excerpt selection of articles from *The New York Times*. In France it is commonly acknowledged that *Le Monde*'s writing is of high quality, making it hard to read in its entirety for the 'average' person. Another criterion reinforcing the idea of tradition is illustrated by the importance of rites and rituals (*Le Monde*'s morning editorial meeting takes place standing solemnly in the director's office) that feeds the internal organization tending to privilege long-term jobs for journalists that may benefit from a high-standard status as well⁵.

³ We say « apparently », because other positions include considering the press has been in an ongoing crisis since the end of the second world war, when having to rebuild itself, and readers' trust, or stating that newspapers are constantly ongoing a crisis (i.e. Denis Ruellan's research, quoted further in this paper).

⁴ MERRIL John C. Les quotidiens de référence dans le monde in *Cahiers du journalisme* (10), 7, 2000 and RIEFFEL Rémy, *L'élite des journalistes*, Presses universitaires de France, 1984, 220 p.

⁵ In the French papers *Le Monde* and *Liberation*, long-term journalists that have experienced various periods in the evolution of the newspaper, or in political contexts are often called "rubricards". It means "columnists", but privileged by high-standard representations, such as very well informed and aware journalists specialised on a topic.

Because of newspapers of record's traditional aspect, we believe that the contrast encountered with the Internet's 'modernity' may help in analyzing their process of adaptation to the Internet. In a wider doctoral study, we aim to include various technical devices allowed by the internet, and "adopted" by the papers, in order to analyze the process.

This article focuses on the French paper *Le Monde*. A few of its characteristics have already been mentioned but a deeper description of the company's internal organization is required. *Le Monde* was created in 1945 in the premises of *Le Temps* newspaper that had been closed for suspicious affairs during WWII. General De Gaulle strongly encouraged the creation of an independent Press organ that was to become *Le Monde*, with to become legendary Hubert Beuve-Méry at the head. He indeed contributed to many rituals that still exist inside the company and stated that his newspaper was to become *un journal de référence*. Though it is commonly acknowledged, vs. an Anglo-Saxon model, that a French journalistic model doesn't separate facts and opinion (likely debatable), *Le Monde* is one of France's most neutral newspapers⁶. Its foundations were that of will for independence and freedom of speech⁷.

Le Monde has experienced various phases during its existence, due to internal and external politics. But it endures, and that is why it is called *de référence*, says the deputy manager.

In 1994, a new period started for the French paper: a new department was created related to telematics and electronic services (T.E.S.). It gave birth to "Luce" in 1995, *Le Monde*'s first online baby, publishing the daily editorials written by Jean-Marie Colombani, then its director. The on-line paper evolved to a daily ".pdf" version produced by the T.E.S. who were also working on creating various CD-ROMS, and programs. The T.E.S. became the *Sequence Multimedia* in 1996, and moved from the printing buildings where it was born to *Le Monde*'s new location (*Rue Claude Bernard*). The 'electronic workers' moved again in 1999, and the department was turned into a subsidiary company called *Le Monde Interactif*.

From then on, responsibilities evolved inside *Le Monde Interactif*, that was growing not only to focus on the on-line newspaper and joint programming, but also to work on the advertising to go with it. By 2004, *Le Monde.fr*, the online version of *Le Monde*, wasn't publishing the print articles only, a new newsroom started producing exclusive papers for the Internet site and technical devices such as forums, chats and blogs were introduced to let registered readers react.

The Internet site's growing popularity became an issue in 2006, as it started to make more money than its parent *Le Monde*. The money was not being equally

⁶ We say "most neutral" acknowledging the fact that neutrality can't really exist in journalism. Although *Le Monde* is considered "most neutral", a study we directed during our masters showed the biased coverage of news regarding the 2004 American presidential election in *Le Monde*. The analysis showed left-wing bias in the specified coverage.

⁷ We do not naively adhere to *Le Monde*'s total neutrality, as we cannot admit to fully objectivity from any existing newspaper.

dispatched and this drew attention to the fact that *Le Monde* and *Le Monde.fr* were both evolving and growing in different newsrooms, with different business cultures.

Newspapers and media in general have covered the Internet throughout its evolution. But is this coverage merely journalism's social role: providing citizens with news? Or could it be helping so-called 'dying' newspapers by leading them into an unknown and rapidly changing context provided by the Internet?

3 Much talk about the Internet

Growing with the paper's on-line investment was the realization that the Internet wouldn't turn out to be just a new medium for existing news, but that the classic newspaper format would need to adapt to the new medium growing to become a major challenge in newspaper 'survival.'

3.1 Mind the Gap Made by Technicism

Though discussion has evolved according to different 'Internet periods'⁸, one characteristic persists: the discourse's "technicist"⁹ dimension. "Technicism" refers to the ideal, widely conveyed in scientific media or public spheres, in which a technology such as the Internet may be central or even the major cause of social change. 'Technicist' discourses illustrate ideal, yet simplified understanding of how a technology and the uses attributed to it surface in society.

As Bernard Miège (1996, 1997, 2007) has often shown¹⁰, the emergence of a technology in society is far more complex than a simple 'give-and-take' model. Media do not emerge naturally. As such, technologies are clearly designed and created according to imagined societal needs and desires. Nevertheless, the use of a technology when introduced is not always what was imagined for it¹¹. This is a first

⁸ Such as "Web 1.0" and "Web 2.0". We therefore argue the idea of such clean cut separable periods in social practices of the Internet can't be as easily made.

⁹ We borrow "technicist" from the French '*technicist*', a contraction of "techno-determinism".

¹⁰ Bernard Miège describes the complex evolution process of communication in society in his works *Les Tic, entre innovation technique et ancrage social*, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2007, 235 p and *La Société conquise par la communication*, Logiques Sociales, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1996, 226 p.

¹¹ An example of difference between the use imagined for a technology, and the use put to practice when commercialised is the phone. Indeed, when it was first integrated in households, people hadn't imagined it to communicate with peers, but rather to listen to plays. Notably, people were showed much suspicion towards the telephone, considering it as a spying instrument. In *L'invention du quotidien*, a French historian and sociologist Michel De Certeau (DE CERTEAU Michel *L'invention du quotidien*, Gallimard, Paris, 1994, 415 pages) celebrates the reappropriation of everyday objects, tools and media, thus contradicting mass media worries strongly developed by the School of Frankfurt.

indicator of the intricacies encountered when ‘launching’ a new technology. A second illustration of the technicism that accompanies the Internet concerns notions such as ‘participation’ and ‘interactivity.’

Since 2002, ‘participation’ has become a key idea in understanding and promoting the Internet. It is often suggested that a mere ‘Internet surfer’ status suffices to initiate ‘participation.’ Participation is encouraged by certain technical communicational devices¹² that allow surfers to ‘publish’ thoughts, reactions and such. It is related to the ideal of participatory democracy, in which everybody would have a say about every-day political, economic, social dimensions of life.

‘Interactivity’ is another popular notion conveyed by the Internet. The Internet and websites are often qualified as ‘interactive.’ The gap with reality may seem that of a detail, yet human presence is required for ‘interactivity’ to be effective.

Once human presence is acknowledged as necessary in giving meaning to the Internet, one can consider the science-fictional aspect of the Internet. The ambient techno-determinism of the Internet, as seen by a majority of people, doesn’t coincide with the ‘Web 2.0’ boom, for which is suggested a breach in the Internet’s evolution and what it may offer rather than changes in society itself (into which the new technology in question is inserting¹³ itself). Back when the Internet, or rather ‘networks’ and ‘telecommunications’, were the preoccupation of computer engineers, students, scholars and technophiles only, a ‘global-village’ ideal was already associated with the new technology

Aspiring to most coherent and neutral results, research in our field¹⁴ encourages a step back from techno-determinism in order to analyze the evolutionary process with minimum bias from ideals that aren’t to be considered as social reality. Yet it would be equally as biased to ignore such discourses, seeing the interest they create in the public sphere via media, political and social debate. Thus, we include these discourses in our research, not necessarily subscribing to their ideas, but questioning their importance and their role in the mutation process undergone by newspapers with the growing popularity of the Internet.

3.2 How the Gap Matters

Therefore, one must be aware of what *is* ‘technicist’ or not. Two primary linked concepts prevail, reflecting on the past emergence of ‘new’ media. Though newspapers may have been considered fabulous tools for democracy by means of

¹² This is the translation of what we refer to in French as *dispositif technique de communication*. This expression stresses the idea that for example a chat room, or a forum, are tools that request human intervention to acquire meaning.

¹³ In his latest published volume, Bernard Miège argues that the use of “anchorage” rather than “emergence” may better correspond to the process of “integration” of a new technology into society: slow and steady.

¹⁴ Communication Studies, called “Sciences de l’Information et de la Communication” in France.

news coverage, they were used for propaganda during the first and second world wars, giving birth to the fear of media manipulation and control.

In the media, and particularly our interest in newspapers, the Internet has been associated to both concepts. As specified above, mainly specialized press discussed networks and telecommunications¹⁵ in the eighties. Though the talk was very technical, mainly aiming to describe various devices, the advertisements, article titles and editorials often helped to build the democratic ideal of the Internet that would connect populations worldwide to allow global freedom of speech.

French mainstream newspapers started to cite the Internet in the early '90s (around 1994), before they started investing in the new technology. Though the articles didn't strongly promote this hope - less technological excitement was coming from them than from first-blush technophiles - they still displayed admiration. Admiration and enthusiasm were both evident in the coverage, but in parallel as newspapers' popularity continued to drop, the Internet's investment potential progressively grew more interesting. Newspapers' various on-line steps illustrate this evolution. *Le Monde*, for example, began with publishing only the daily editorials, and continued with daily uploads of the newspaper's articles in '.pdf' format. Today *Le Monde.fr*'s popularity has grown so much that the next confrontation involves motivating the paper's columnists to engage on the Internet site, thus providing expertise and a step back to a fast working Internet team¹⁶. In spite of such an example in newspapers' evolution on the Internet, it is important to consider that a favorable social context is also necessary for such changes.

The continuing drop in newspaper sales, and the numerous issues raised with the Internet—concerning professional journalistic identity versus 'citizen reporting,' for example—despite the measured success and hope raised for news companies, lead to the impossibility for coverage to deny the worries generated by the 'new media.' Today most news-company managers agree that the Internet is the major challenge to the survival of their business. But the challenge is becoming more obvious and more important daily, raising concerns about adapting a medium long tinged with its own representations that aren't necessarily in accordance with traditional journalism and the identity it built over the years and even centuries.

Thus, we see that coverage of the Internet by newspapers and, in particular, *Le Monde*, is easily variant, switching from raising hope to invoking worries provoked by despair in facing the Internet. As a result, these articles contribute to an ambient blur regarding the Internet's status with respect to newspapers, as well as the concrete reasons for the industry's current crisis. On one hand, this coverage clearly represents an unstable situation the newspaper industry is facing vs. the

¹⁵ We engaged in an overviewing analyze of the way the Internet was mentioned in a selection of five French computing magazines in the early eighties : *Sciences et Vie Micro*, *Soft & Micro*, *L'ordinateur individuel*, *L'information US en direct*, *Informatiques magazines*.

¹⁶ This was observed and confirmed via interviews inside *Le Monde*'s offices in October 2008 as a "Desk Numérique" ("digital desk") had just been opened inside the walls with people originating from *Le Monde Interactif*'s headquarters.

Internet. On the other hand, we question these opinions and their basis regarding the newspaper industry, and its evolution involving the Internet.

4 Crisis and Blogs

We summon two topics of varied status and importance to the newspaper industry, to explain that uneven coverage about the Internet not only represents the milieu's hesitation towards the present situation and the evolution of the Internet, but may also be a way to hang on, and progressively acculturate. First, we question journalism's alleged state of 'crisis.' What kind of crisis is it? What are the causes? Can solutions be found? Second, we consider an ambiguous journalism topic: blogs. A vast majority of online papers give access to blogs nowadays, but are they themselves convinced of their legitimacy?

4.1 Journalism's Crisis

For 30 years journalism has been diagnosed as being in 'crisis.' Political proximity, corruption, an ageing readership, economic concentration, are the various ills attributed to journalism, and are a few of the potential reasons raised for drop in sales, advertising, and popularity. Yet 30 years ago society was different. And it was yet another society during both world wars and during the French Revolution. But all these periods were subject to instability, crises, for journalism and moreover democracy to which it is linked. So crises are recurrent in journalism and the issues raised during various periods could even be measured as constituting what journalism is, or at least considered to be.

What about today's crisis? As previously mentioned, a state of crisis was being raised in France¹⁷ in the mid '70s, and has persisted since. Though concerned managers summoned hope in 1996, as sales rose for the first time in years, 1997 confirmed that the preceding year was anomalous on a seemingly never-ending downward slope.

If we quote critical texts about journalism written in the '70s, accusations mainly tend to proximity and corruption involving politics. The '80s and '90s saw generational ageing, but the turn of the 21st century seems to have added the challenge of Internet 'freedom' to the earlier unresolved issues. As we said before, the Internet is impregnated with techno-deterministic representations, notably that of freedom exercised via participatory on-line practices. Newspapers are no more the main providers in a unique medium, they face strong on-line competition in a capitalistic brew of companies, start-ups and individuals. But our aim isn't either to

¹⁷ We base this on the analysis of articles and publications mentioning the expression *crise du journalisme*. The corpus was framed with help of library catalogues as well as the "Factiva" periodical database.

explain the causes of 'the crisis' in which journalism finds itself. Rather question what the newspapers say about it.

First, it seems natural that newspapers would cover important information of their concern, since their attributed role is meant to be that of democracy. Endangered newspapers then logically signify endangered democracy. This argument is frequently raised either in public debates that are media covered or not, through television, radio, newspapers and/or the Internet, or in articles organized in various columns. Not only do we consider this argument legitimate considering journalism's main societal role, we also believe it to be self-legitimizing, and a reminder of what could be lost: not just money in bankruptcy but, above all, the surveillance of democracy.

Furthermore, we suggest that the numerous causes mentioned by newspapers for the reduced readerships and advertising revenues they have been experiencing create 'noise,' making it difficult for readership to measure the importance of the various causes. Indeed, different articles in one newspaper, and different practitioners in various interviews point out diverse causes and reasons for the crisis, making only one thing certain: a crisis exists¹⁸. The variability reveals journalism's inability to re-structure its unstable situation, confirming the difficulties in solving the problem(s). If we consider the basic definition of the word 'crisis,' it defines a state of instability, creating uncertainty regarding the future¹⁹. Only one element of the definition poses a dilemma: the length of a crisis, typically short and intense is yet considered as been going on for a while.

On the other hand, talking about a crisis doesn't necessarily certify of its intensity nor of its existence. It may also render such fragility trivial. When analyzing a corpus of articles about the Press crisis (*la crise de la Presse*) published in *Le Monde* between 1994 and 2009, many recent articles mention the crisis in the context of a diversity news columns such as the publication of a book, a television series about wine, a photography festival²⁰... Referring to crisis so trivially could confirm the idea that newspapers are in a delicate position, permitting immediate solutions in response to the concern citizens may show. Constant allusion to such fragility may thus contribute to excusing the continuous movement, the fickleness of the milieu, as well as the slip-ups that are disservices to journalism. Thus room is left for experimenting in the margins implied by such a liminal moment as a crisis.

¹⁸ Yet in an interview directed in October 2008, Alain Frachon, editor in chief of *Le Monde*, argued the state of crisis in which newspapers are, and said he would rather call it a time of evolution on an "unsettled ground" ("*une evolution d'un paysage très mouvant*").

¹⁹ "Crisis" comes from the Latin *crisis* and the Greek *krisis* that means "decision". Medicine, Economics, Politics, Social and abstract definitions collide in defining a more or less rapid moment of passage during which the evolution of things is at it's gravest (*Le Grand Robert*, 2005)

²⁰ This does not signify that it appears only as a context in articles as such, as coverage having for main subject the crisis is not rare either.

4.2 The Popularity of Blogs

Additional hypotheses can be developed when discussing blogs. Blogs, earlier called 'Weblogs,' are easily editable Internet pages created on a blog platform, for users with varied competences. They can publish any data they want, vs. conditions imposed when signing up. The posts typically appear in reverse-chronological order, though they may also appear chronologically. If the blog 'owner' provides a certain form of news regularly, the blog may gain visibility independent of newspapers. In the mid-'90s, Matt Drudge revealed the Monica Lewinsky Scandal in his blog called 'The Drudge report,' raising awareness in parallel amongst the media community, on the existence and potentials of such 'Internet diaries.' Blogs existed earlier but were mainly technology focused and thus interested technophiles primarily.

With growing visibility and new possibilities, blogs started sprouting faster than before on the Internet in the mid-'90s and at the turn of the century. Bloggers' identities were therefore diversifying as well. Random citizens, politicians, various experts, and former or still practicing journalists started 'personal' blogs in which they could "publish" nearly whatever they wanted that might otherwise have been difficult or forbidden for practical, material, ethical and other reasons. In 2004 blogging was launched in newspapers. Adding to generalist news in newspapers, blogs were carefully included in the on-line package.

In October 2004, *Le Monde.fr* opened a blog platform for subscribers, as well as their own paper columnists. One of *Le Monde's* political news correspondents based in New York and Washington, Corine Lesnes, was one of the first to blog on *Le Monde.fr*. Though accessible to all Internet surfers on the newspaper's blog platform, editorial decisions were taken to promote blogs furthermore. Much evolution has been seen since, involving the promotion of the blogs on the paper's home page, placed further down the page, before being located further up. First on the right, then towards the center (according to the western reading from top to bottom and left to right). Nonetheless, categorization persists based on whether the blogger is 'invited' to blog (i.e. he need not subscribe to the on-line paper including professional journalists from inside and outside *Le Monde*, as well as experts and writers) or whether the 'blogger' has a subscription. Moreover, subscribers' blogs are classified: twenty to thirty of them are highlighted amongst hundreds when listed near the 'invited blogs' on the blog platform home page.

We want to focus on the evolution of the newspaper's discourse about blogs. A corpus of articles from *Le Monde* between 2004 and today, framed with the key word 'blog,' gave a long list of articles. However, it is interesting to include them all in order to compare the contexts of appearance of such a word. The analysis of such firstly confirms the rise of coverage concerning blogs. The different subjects referred to in the articles are blogging as such, but also participation, politics in various forms, and also ways of life, cuisine. At times it is the sole mention of a protagonist's blog at the end of the article.

The study confirms that coverage citing blogs has evolved in accordance to their popularity, but this doesn't mean that they are causally related. Indeed, as said

previously, the mention of the word blog is sometimes simply the author's blog address or that of the person portrayed in the article. Although this shows how the use of the word blog has acquired a certain banality, and has become a simple contextual detail in some occasions, it nevertheless does not mean that *Le Monde* has fully adopted the online practices it contains relating to blogs. Just as with the word "crisis", *Le Monde's* "speech" concerning blogs is still inconstant, and although its journalists will be accusing blogs of pretentiousness and futility in a auto-legitimizing article concerning their profession one day (*Les blogs, infos ou influence, Le Monde*, 06/03/2009), on the next they just well may be praising such editorial tools for its democratic values in Cairo (*Les rebelles de la toile, Le Monde*, 12 mars 2009). Of course different journalists wrote the articles, possibly expressing their own opinions. Moreover, these variations in coverage signal the editorial inconsistency of a newspaper meant to have only one identity²¹ (Ringoot R., 2004) expressed through editorial choices, and the form these take in the newspaper.

Although the inconsistency of speech regarding blogs may show how the newspaper is yet to be restful concerning its progress on the Internet, it may also be significant of the explicit split in *Le Monde*, between the company that produces the paper, and the one focusing on the Internet. As one's main objective is to grow with the Internet when taking advantage of the possibilities and tools provided by the media, the other still thrives daily in the production of a paper symbolizing a cogwheel position in democracy that was gradually constituted over the years and through the challenges. Such a split is very clearly visible when spending even little time in the newspaper's premises. Many columnists will still hardly acknowledge the existence of the online version, and the fast workers inside the *Desk Numérique* thrive hard to get the wheels between both editions into action.

But the variability of discourse concerning blogs, just as for the crisis can also be considered as trivial in the understanding of the slow yet progressive adaptation of the "old" media to the "new". Although grand strategies are expected from such economically important companies in such phases of very challenging change when much could be to loose, they tend mostly to stay closed, adapting only little by little. Such a conservative position can be justified by many arguments, such as the fear of loss, long-term history, strong symbolism etc. Yet the variations in the coverage of blogs and crises as raised in this article illustrate small locations in which inconstancy can be identified. These areas are not necessarily regarded as central points in the newspaper's endurance, but they may be just that. They seem to define liminal "gaps" that hold the passing time of evolution for the newspaper, and in which experiments can be held. As such, liminal moments are demonstrated by ritual moments of passage in anthropology, such as the rite of passage from

²¹ Roselyne Ringoot's research may be significant for foreign scholars when apprehending French Press, as it specifies the issues and characteristics of such an identity, and may give tools in understanding the French model that isn't necessarily based on the acquaintance of facts and opinions. RINGOOT Roselyne & Robert-Demontrond (coord. by) (2004) *L'analyse de discours*, Apogée, Rennes, 222 p.

childhood to manhood²². We therefore suggest that the discordance seemingly existing between the “old” and the “new” media may create a profitable area allowing at least small benefits of doubt illustrated as tactics in the strongly challenging spot opened by the Internet. Accordingly, newspapers’ stubbornness in conserving practices rather than changing in revolutionary manners (although as a paradox they often speak of an Internet revolution) not only illustrates the economic and symbolic weights in such businesses, but also designates a strategic position in which evolution happens in due time.

5 Conclusion

This paper raises various dualities, inside the newspaper *Le Monde* between its “paper” and “online” offices, in techno-determined discourses whether hope or fear focused, via opinion variability in the newspaper’s coverage of the ongoing journalism “crisis” and in the mention of blogs, through its linking of strategy and tactics.

But the overarching idea of this work, and that of the wider doctoral study, is to consider the space in between such dualities (many more could be cited in consideration of newspapers’ relation to the Internet). Space and time seem practically suspended in such small liminal areas providing a restricted location for something maybe willing to get as close as can be to “freedom” in which more or less decisive experiments and trials can be made. It is the state of “crisis” that allows a “space” for that kind of hesitation inside the mechanisms of such a heavy company that cannot stop and wait for a miracle solution as it would have a serious economic impact, as it would create a breach in the democratic ambitions it pursues. A wider proposition in the doctoral study concerns the potential for acculturation to the Internet that these liminal areas provide. They help soften the contradictions and paradoxes that could logically rise from the encounter of two such instances endowed with such different cultures.

This study’s intention is far from trying to solve any problem or question regarding the future or death of newspapers. In spite of the rapidly changing state in which the field finds itself, better understanding of the process of mutation may allow a deeper apprehension of the different “components” of such a phenomenon, and help in developing questions that cannot solely be limited to the death or survival of such a sector, to which an answer can hardly be given.

²² We borrow the idea of liminality from Victor W. Turner’s *The ritual Process, Structure and anti-structure*, Aldine Transaction, 1969, 213 p. In the same way as he considers the “ritual as a social mechanism for approaching real social problems [he] shows how analysis of the ritual process provides insight into the structure and transformation of groups and societies [...]”.

Chloë Salles is a third year Phd-student at the *Institut de la Communication et des Médias*, Stendhal University, Grenoble (France). She is finishing off her doctoral research regarding the process of acculturation of Press of record to the Internet. She has also been teaching different classes at different levels inside her faculty for the past three years. Her master's work focused on the representations of the American Elections in French Press of Record and the difference of coverage given on the event between *Le Monde* and *Le Monde.fr*. Secondly she is engaged in a scientific popularization project, as well as in the organization of a digital arts festival due for June in Grenoble.