

THE (RE)DESIGN OF TITLES IN ROMANIAN WRITTEN MEDIA

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Abstract: *The success of a media product greatly depends on the ability of the press manager to identify the key elements of the market. The title is part of this context because it has a great impact in selling the newspaper or the magazine. This article aims to analyze how the printing design is reflected in national (central), regional and local media. Design is not simply cosmetics or a temporary patch and it does not only regard style, but it is an essential issue of design and creation, even when it comes to journalism. This is the essence of our article.*

Key words: *design, communication, visual, media, title*

1. INTRODUCTION

Why design? Because nowadays' modern newspapers and magazines are intelligently built mixtures of information and design. (Keeble, 2009) The answer to this question also takes into consideration two other important areas: 1. A publication, either a newspaper or a magazine, needs to attract the reader's attention on one hand and on the other hand, it needs to motivate the consumers to buy the printed product. This is why, in the commercial process, the journalistic design represents a vital work tool. 2. Our industrial product has a certain visual aspect but not by chance; the design supports and guides the reader in browsing through and then reading the newspaper or the magazine, implicitly helping him/her to save time and effort.

Media design is neither a trifle nor a luxury. It is a necessity in a tremendously competitive market. A newspaper from ten years ago shows its age, the illnesses of the elderly, no matter what "cosmetics" were applied in its youth, while a publication dating twenty years ago is unacceptable to today's readers. Practice has proved more than once that a skilled and opportune visualization does not sell a newspaper indefinitely, it only saves some appearances, just as a specifically presented newspaper, but outstandingly written, can only be seen at the newsagent's, the reader refusing it from the very beginning. In short, the importance of this activity is given by the fact that in the journalistic field, the designer represents the first and the most active contact surface with the public. There is something else we need to add: today, the design of a publication has a shorter "bisection" time, from five to ten years tops. (Arghir et.al., 2007)

Why specifically the title? The greatest support for this answer comes from Umberto Eco, who considers the title "a cultural item in a universe of a well determined discourse". (Roșca&Surugiu, 2007) So, the title could be a sure key towards deciphering the content. Also, we need to look at an older study, which shows that the order and intensity of visualizing the element of a newspaper starts with the illustration (80-75% intensity), continues with the main titles (56%), advertisement (52%), short news (31%) and finally, regular text, read with only 25% attention rate. Other research of this kind shows that the "objective" importance of a news item is secondary is more definitive in its "personal" relevance or its "force" and that the good titles have a dominant role. (Arghir et.al., 2007) Within the journalistic field, no matter what the publication is, the title always represents the first level of reading for someone. In other words, image attracts, but

what really sells a newspaper is the title.

Obviously, these two elements – design and title – represent a journalistic monolith, being the main motivation for this research which generally focuses on the Romanian written media after the Revolution.

2. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In approaching this subject, we analyzed the way printing design is reflected in national (central), regional and local media. We covered two directions in our research elements:

1. The titles' layout on a page
2. The essential criteria for titles' configuration:
 - a) Number of rows;
 - b) Title structure;
 - c) Graphic unity;
 - d) Positioning from the text;
 - e) Title positioning within different journalistic products;
 - f) Technical execution.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

The analysis looked at the following publications: Adevărul, România liberă, Evenimentul zilei, Jurnalul național (from the national media) and Renașterea bănățeană, Timișoara și Agenda (from the local media). The results can be summed up in the following ideas and solutions: 1. Regarding page positioning, we saw that most titles are placed above the text, „hat” style, creating a tiring monotony for the page; they are sometimes linear and create obvious confusion. The “buried” title could be a beneficial solution. (Fig. 1).

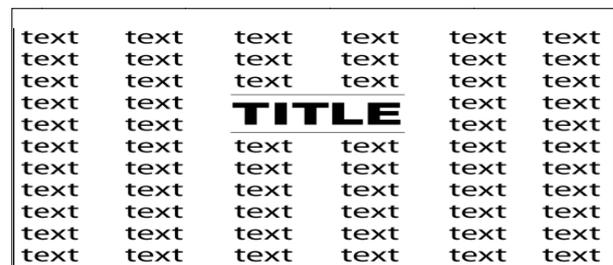


Fig. 1. The title which is buried in the text is welcome in the body of the lengthier articles, because it “airs” the text

2. Often titles are too long and so text/title proportion is neglected. Research done so far proved that an appropriate title shouldn't be longer than six words, respectively 45 printed characters.

3. Regarding title structure, we noticed a gross confusion both in media theory and practice, when the chapeau, the lead and the photo capture (the cliché text) are considered printing elements. We believe this is an incorrect approach. The chapeau is a short text that comes right after the title, either chosen for the same reason (row length) as the title or on one column, being the introduction to the article, but in bold or different characters and highlighted from the text. (Gaillard, 2000). The lead, of about a paragraph is the most

important part of the article. (Randall, 2007) The structure of this journalistic element is defined by the title, overhead, subhead and the in-between title.

4. We also observed a monotony regarding the graphic unity of titles, usually presented as monolithic blocks. Dislocated and semi-buried titles could be an alternative. (Fig. 2, 3 and 4)

5. Another beneficial solution for article layout for first level reading could be a title positioned on the left or at least vertically buried. (Fig. 5 and 6)

6. We can scarcely see clichéd titles on photographs both in national or local media; this would be a visible cheer-up of the pages and of course of the newspaper.

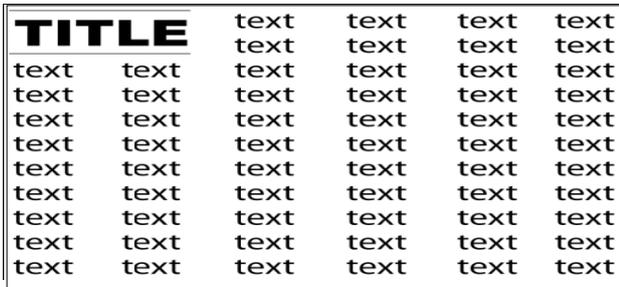


Fig. 2 The semi-buried title in the text, at the beginning of the article

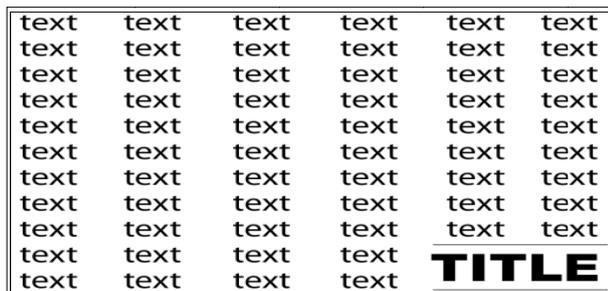


Fig. 3 The semi-buried title in the text, at the end of the article

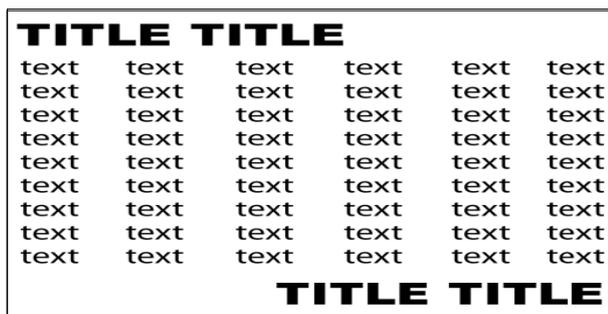


Fig. 4 The dislocated title, an appropriate solution for short articles, especially beneficial for articles with miscellaneous content

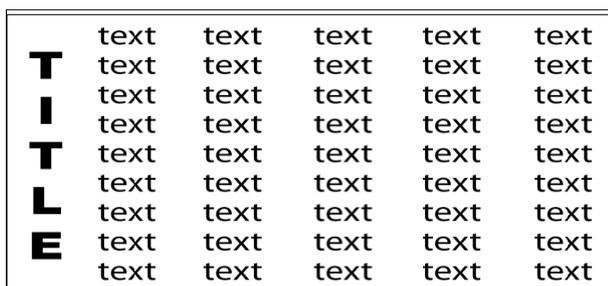


Fig. 5 Vertically detached title, which should not be longer than two words, and the text should be within the height limit of the

article

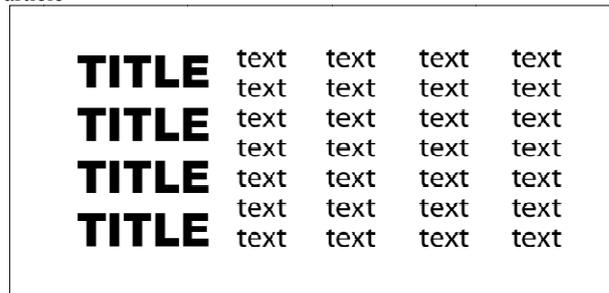


Fig. 6 The detached title through burying it in the left position could be a challenge for cultural articles, but not only

4. CONCLUSION

There are efforts made regarding graphic unity of the newspaper as a global sign within the Romanian media, but when it comes to title evaluation, appreciation is less positive. For a good visualization, it is beneficial to avoid the following errors regarding the typical design of a title:

1. Titles with the same length and in the same direction to be read subsequently
2. Colored titles
3. Titles with different dimensions in columns with short news
4. Titles that „cover” a photo they are not related to
5. More „explosive” titles on one page
6. The same type of letter on the whole page is damaging for the importance of the articles. The texts on the top of the page are the most important, so they need a bigger title, using the same printing space and being considered “on duty”.
7. The titles, overheads and subheads support the visual identity of the newspaper. This is why, choosing the character type for the title letter is very important. The basic principle must be the harmonic contrast (a possible combination could be a grotesque letter for the title and antique letter for the regular text).

Obviously, the subject issue has not been exhausted and there could be permanent research conducted, considering the importance of the title in the economy of a page. In journalistic practice, redesigning titles is not something that could be resolved overnight; it is a process of at least two to three months and maybe even over a year when a refreshing of the whole printing process is required.

Whatever solution is adopted, it is very important to take into consideration three essential elements: 1. Style unity, defined as a personality trademark of the publication; 2. Consistency, visualization solutions must be applied consistently; 3. Economy, any visual means must be used moderately, otherwise there will be a damaging chaos in the page for the disadvantage of the message and of course, for the reader.

In our future research we intend to analyze the redesigning of the media title online.

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