

The Decline of Newspapers: the case of the Greek press

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ABSTRACT *This study provides an account of the recent decline of the Greek press—one of the most seriously hit media industries in Europe. It argues that the crisis of the Greek press is the result of a combination of factors and not simply the consequence of the deregulation of the broadcasting system.*

KEY WORDS: *Greek Press, Declining Sales, Media Deregulation, Press Partisanship, Readership, Advertising, Coupons*

Press decline in terms of sales, readership and advertising revenue is a worldwide phenomenon. In Europe, the deregulation of broadcasting systems and the emergence of a plethora of private television channels has created many problems for the print media. By and large, the newspaper industry is an industry in transition. According to Dunnet, “virtually every aspect of the [press] industry has recently undergone or is currently undergoing change. These changes have affected newspaper industry demand and supply, structure, conduct and performance” (1988, p. 1).

Within the European Union, Germany, France and Britain remain the strongest markets for newspapers. Between them they supply 60 per cent of Western Europe’s daily newspaper sales, 71 per cent of its paid-for weekly papers and 78 per cent of its free newspapers. But all the signs of market saturation and long-term decline are evident. Another symptom of press problems is the gradually declining share of total media advertising rev-

enues it attracts as media such as television and local free newspapers increase in importance. Despite this trend, the press’s share of advertising income remains significant though changing rapidly in an increasingly competitive environment. On the eve of the digital era, moreover, renewed growth in television channels and radio stations, and increasing use of the internet for personalised information are anticipated.

In effect, as Schoenbach et al. point out, “Newspapers are an endangered species. Since the beginning of the 1970s their average daily access to population and their circulation have declined virtually everywhere—except in some Third World or ‘threshold’ countries” (1999, p. 225). As Table 1 shows, daily newspapers in the European Union during the period 1990–97 have suffered a sustained decline in terms of sales, titles and readers. This decline might be explained by what De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989) have described as the “normal diffusion process of mass media”,

meaning that all media peak as new media emerge and replicate some of their functions (see also Host, 1999). Explaining the decline of the press in the USA and Germany, Schoenbach et al. (1999, p. 226), note the following. Firstly, competition for traditional newspaper audiences has increased, leading to more attractive content for everyone on television, on radio, in magazines and other print media and—in the future—on the internet. Secondly, the newspaper as such—its content, its appearance and the way it presents itself—may no longer appeal to large sections of the society. Thirdly, structural changes (such as an ageing society, education, stagnating incomes, more single households, etc.) in society might contribute to changes in newspaper readership.

These factors seem to have implications for the Greek newspaper industry as well. This article provides an account of the decline of the press in Greece. It will also argue that the crisis of the Greek press is not merely the result of a combination of these factors, but also reflects newspapers' failure to address the issue of how to attract younger readers.

Greek Media in the European Context

The newspaper sector in Western Europe is diverse in many aspects of its basic structure and circumstances. Broadly speaking, newspapers remain a national medium mainly because of the language they use and the issues they report. There are, moreover, substantial variations in *per capita* newspaper consumption, especially between northern and southern Europe. There is not a common newspaper industry model in Europe, even in terms of how Europeans prefer to consume a newspaper. In general terms, the develop-

ment of the media in any country reflects the political, social and economic conditions as well as population and cultural traits, which in turn give the media their particular characteristics (Merrill and Lowenstein, 1990, pp. 50–53; Hiebert et al., 1982, pp. 40–43). For European newspapers, there are a number of other relevant differences that are worth identifying (see Table 1). These include:

- Differences in the consumption of newspapers, especially between northern and southern Europe. As Table 1 shows, the consumption of newspapers in southern Europe (Greece, Spain, and Italy) is much lower than in northern Europe (Norway, Finland, and Sweden).
- Differences between countries with a strong national press (Britain) and those with a stronger regional and local press (Germany, France). In France, for example, the Parisian newspapers are the most well known, but it is a regional newspaper that sells more copies than any other French daily. In Germany, the biggest newspapers are regional newspapers based in Frankfurt, Munich and Hamburg (Sidel and McMane, 1995). However, it seems, as Gustafsson and Weibull note, that “the countries with a high newspaper penetration all have the same kind of newspaper structure, with a strong local press, besides a fairly strong national press” (cited in Host, 1999).
- Differences in preferences for morning dailies (Britain) or evening dailies (Greece). Greece seems to be an exception because of its newspaper readers' preferences which make its evening dailies the country's leading newspapers (see Table 2).
- In some countries, the Sunday press is very popular (Britain, Sweden, Greece) with many titles and colour supplements, while in others Sunday

Table 1. Trends in European, American and Japanese newspapers, 1990-97

Country	Number of daily titles in 1990	Number of daily titles in 1993	Number of daily titles in 1997	Circulation of dailies in 1990 (in 000)	Circulation of dailies in 1993 (in 000)	Circulation of dailies in 1997 (in 000)	Consumption of dailies in 1990 per 1000 inhabitants	Consumption of dailies in 1993 per 1000 inhabitants	Consumption of dailies in 1997 per 1000 inhabitants
Austria	17	17	17	2775	2529	2082	356	328	296
Belgium	35	32	30	1779	1716	1621	175	173	158
Denmark	45	43	38	1823	1671	1617	355	325	306
Finland	66	56	56	2744	2750	2323	562	512	453
France	103 ¹	85	84	8896	8743 ²	8820 ³	127 ¹	154 ²	153
Germany	356	414	402	20,598	25,902	25,038	341	324	305
Greece	20	21	23	1278	839	715	118	83	69
Ireland	8	8	6	677	606	552	189	175	152
Italy	82	83	77	6764	6550	5920	118	113	103
The Netherlands	47	44	38	4624	4728	4753	313	311	296
Norway	86	84	83	2583	2623	2603	615	608	598
Spain	110	126	128	3000	3950	4265	77	100	107
Sweden	109	103	101	4537	4232	3871	529	490	438
Britain	105	98	99	22,712	19,578	18,447	393	351	307
European Union ⁴	1212	1153	1132	85,310	84,189	80,763	288	273	251
USA	1626	1556	1509	62,502	59,812	56,728	253	233	209
Japan	125	109	108	68,653	72,043	72,699	559	576	453

¹Data of 1988; ²Data of 1992; ³Data of 1996; ⁴European Union of the 15 member states.

Source: Based on data from annual reports of the International Federation of Newspapers Publishers (1991, 1994).

Table 2. Ten leading daily newspapers in Greece, 1998

Title	Ownership	National average daily circulation in 1998 (in 000) ¹	Advertising revenue in 1998 (in million drachmas)	Format	Political stance	Edition	Membership of a chain	Internet edition
TA NEA	Lambrakis Group	96	7715	Tabloid	Liberal	Evening	TV: Mega Channel; press: Lambrakis Group (papers, magazines); travel culture	Yes
Eleftherotypia	C.K. Tegopoulos	75	5212	Tabloid	Liberal	Evening	TV: Mega Channel; press: magazines; telecommunication services	Yes
Ethnos	Bobolas	54	3455	Tabloid	Liberal	Evening	TV: Mega Channel; press: magazines; construction	Yes
Eleftheros Typos	Press Foundation	53	3142	Tabloid	Conservative	Evening	Some shares in Star Channel	Yes
Kathimerini	Alafouzos	44	613	Broadsheet	Independent	Morning	Radio: two stations; press: magazines; TV: used to own SKAI TV and one of the founders of Mega Channel (now holds only 1% of the shares); shipping	Yes
Apogeymatini	Karagiannis	38	1531	Tabloid	Conservative	Evening	No	Yes
Adesmeutos Typos	Adesmeutos Typos	25	605	Tabloid	Conservative	Evening	No	Yes
Exousia	Androulidakis	16	1049	Tabloid	Liberal	Evening	Press: <i>Financial Weekly</i> , <i>Daily Sports</i> ; radio: Planet	Yes
Vradyni	Tragas	12	1452	Tabloid	Conservative	Evening	Magazine	Yes
Rizospastis	Communist Party	114	71	Tabloid	Communist/left	Morning	No	Yes

¹The circulation of these ten leading dailies represents 77 per cent of the average sales of the daily press (morning and evening). In terms of advertising they represent 70 per cent of the advertising revenue of the daily press.

Sources: Based on data from the Athens Association of Newspaper Publishers (for circulations) and Media Services SA (on advertising).

papers are virtually non-existent (Germany, France).

- In some countries the tabloid sensationalist press is very popular (Britain, Germany, Norway); in others it is much less so (France, Greece). The British *Sun* and the German *Bild Zeitung*, for example, enjoy the highest circulations in the UK and Germany, respectively.
- In some countries the tabloid press is the “yellow” or “sensational” press, whereas the broadsheet press is seen as the “respectable” press. Yet in others the tabloid press is associated with the physical size of a newspaper rather than the content, and some of these newspapers offer readers very serious journalism (Spain, Italy, and Greece). Few would identify *TA NEA* (Greece), *El Pais* (Spain) and *La Repubblica* (Italy) as sensational newspapers because of their tabloid format.
- Differences in advertising. As Humphreys notes (1996, p. 36), a related factor for the comparative strength of the northern European press industries and the weakness of the southern European press has been the share of advertising expenditure received by the press. As Table 3 indicates, the lion’s share of media advertising in the northern European countries has tended to be reserved for newspapers.

Tables 1 and 3 provide a picture of the Western, mainly European Union, press industry in the 1990s as well as an assessment of the Greek press compared with other European countries.

Greek mass media have been characteristically more driven by supply than consumer demand since the foundation of the modern Greek state. In effect, it appears to be a kind of tradition in Greece, since there are more newspapers, more television channels,

more magazines and more radio stations than such a small market can support. By the mid 1990s there were about 160 local, regional and national daily newspapers in Greece as well as 600 popular and special interest magazine titles, 150 national and local television channels and 1200 radio stations—for a market of 11 million inhabitants.

Another feature of the Greek mass communications sector is that the media have been influenced by the country’s troubled political history and political instability. Greek newspapers, for example, have a long history of divisions along party lines, which has literally split the country during its modern political history. From its inception, the Greek press coincided with the struggle for independence from the Turks in 1821, and its development has paralleled the growth of political life in the nascent Greek state. The establishment of political parties in the late nineteenth century paralleled the start and the growth of the modern Greek press.

Table 3. Newspaper shares (per cent) of media advertising expenditure in Western Europe, 1990–97¹

Country	1990	1993	1997
Austria	47.4	44.2	45.6
Belgium	25.7	27.4	26.4
Denmark	64.7	63.3	61.9
Finland	68.7	62.7	58.6
France	28.6	25.0	24.4
Germany	51.9	51.7	48.1
Greece	22.9	14.2	18.6
Ireland	61.4	59.8	58.4
Italy	23.8	20.9	21.0
The Netherlands	61.0	51.2	49.8
Norway	77.2	66.1	60.1
Portugal	22.5	19.0	14.0
Spain	36.3	30.8	31.5
Sweden	78.1	67.4	61.7
Britain	43.7	43.3	40.9

¹The percentages are based on advertising expenditures that include cinema, posters, etc. Source: Young and Rubicam, (1998).

A third and relevant characteristic is that the state has played a decisive role in the media sector. This is readily evidenced in the various press laws. First, the state enforces these press laws and, second, the provision of sizeable financial aid to the press means individual media enterprises become dependent because they cannot cover their production costs. Law 2328 (1995), for example, does not allow publishers to own more than two daily political newspapers—one a morning and one an evening daily, published in Athens, Piraeus, or Thessaloniki and distributed by the Press Distribution Agency. Additionally, Law 1892 (1990) states that daily newspaper publishers making investments larger than US\$370,000 qualify for state financial aid. The investor must put up at least 35 per cent in cash, and may borrow up to 40 per cent. The state pays up to 25 per cent and may subsidise loan interest by the same percentage. The subsidised portion may not be amortised against profits. Third, the decisive role of the state in media affairs is reflected in the fact, as we shall see later, that the broadcast media were initially under the total control of the state.

The closed relationship between the state and the media has largely arisen from the political tensions (including civil war) in Greek society since the end of the Second World War. These tensions, combined with the absence of a strong civil society, have made the state an autonomous and dominant factor in Greek society. Mouzelis points out that this situation is associated with an atrophied civil society in which the state has to take on additional politico-ideological functions (1980, pp. 261–64). This makes the system less self-regulatory than in cases of developed capitalism such as Britain or the US. The lack of self-regulation is also noticeable at the level of the politico-

ideological superstructure because in a weak civil society even the economically dominant classes do not manage to form well-organised and cohesive pressure groups. Mouzelis notes that because of the persistence of patronage politics even bourgeois parties and interest groups are articulated within the state machinery in a clientist/personalistic manner (1980, p. 263). This has led the state to promote the interests of particular types of capital rather than the interests of capital as a whole. Therefore, the lack of self-regulation makes the state intervene not only in the politico-ideological sphere but also in the economy. The fact that the state plays a decisive role in the formation of the Greek economy and polity illustrates the state's relative autonomy from society (Mouzelis, 1985; Tsoukalas, 1981). Consequently, it is not by chance that there used to be such strict control over the broadcasting media in Greece (Papathanassopoulos, 1990, pp. 338–39). This situation has changed with the deregulation and commercialisation of the media sector, but some "inheritance effects" still influence Greek media culture.

Finally, Greek media have experienced a process of modernisation during the last 25 years, since the fall of the dictatorship: a new era has begun for the press. First, advertising has begun to play a decisive role in press revenues. Seventy per cent of the leading newspapers' revenues, for example, now derive from advertising. The purely partisan press has slowly declined as more market-oriented newspapers have come to dominate the sector. Second, since the mid 1980s entrepreneurs and ship owners have gradually become the new owners of the Greek press. In effect, they are the owners of the major media (print and broadcast) in Greece. Mega Channel, the major Greek private television channel, for example, is owned by the

most influential Athenian publishers, who also have interests in construction, shipping, oil business, travel, telecommunication services, etc. As in other countries, newspapers still articulate political preferences and allegiances but now the papers appear to function more as enterprises rather than party outlets.

In addition, Greek television has, since the early 1990s, undergone complete commercialisation, adapting to a market-oriented environment with more channels, more advertising, more programme imports (mainly from the US), more sensationalism and more domestic productions, which are mostly imitations of US programmes adapted to Greek sensibilities. And, as in other countries, the publishers and other business-oriented interests have impressively entered the broadcasting landscape. Although some government control over the state broadcasting channels is still evident, there is no overt control of the plethora of private television channels, which have lately dominated the broadcasting scene in terms of viewers' ratings and advertising revenue.

The Crisis in the Greek Press

As noted above, the growth of the modern Greek press coincided with the establishment of political parties in the latter part of the 19th century. At that time each party had its own newspaper. Despite the gradual separation of the parties and papers, an identity of interests was maintained (McDonald, 1983, p. 24). The press used to survey developments in political life and play an important role in the political scene. This turned it into a player with some power, stronger, in some cases, than in other countries. Since the fall of the dictatorship (1974), the press has been under going a process of modernis-

ation. The development of advertising as one of its main sources of revenue in the 1960s worked as a catalyst concerning the newspapers' political choices, and tended to neutralise the partisan divisions of "black" and "white" (or "us" and "them").

The tradition of the small-circulation partisan publication has gradually given way to a larger commercial newspaper with an emphasis on economic and political issues. Moreover, the entry of new printing technologies in the 1980s (Leandros, 1992) and the entry of entrepreneurs and business people in the media sector as well as severe competition from television have changed the field since the 1980s (Psychogios, 1992, pp. 11–35; Zaousis and Stratos, 1992, pp. 171–87; Paraschos, 1995). As a result, the content of the press has become more objective and the traditionally close association with particular parties or individuals has been superseded by a tendency to identify more with a political camp—right, left or centre. Partly this has arisen out of the need to attract a broader spectrum of readers to increase circulation in a time of economic difficulties; partly it has reflected a drift within the political community itself towards larger block parties. However, the political stance of the newspapers is always present, especially in periods characterised by a politically intense climate and of course during elections (Kominou, 1990, 1996).

In a highly centralised country, it is not surprising that the Athenian press dominates the market: over half of all dailies are sold in Athens and the Athenian press has become national, although some regions still prefer their local newspapers, mainly as a supplement to the Athenian ones. There is a strong Sunday press, again mainly originating from Athens. However, there is limited reader demand (69 out of 1000 bought a daily paper in 1997)

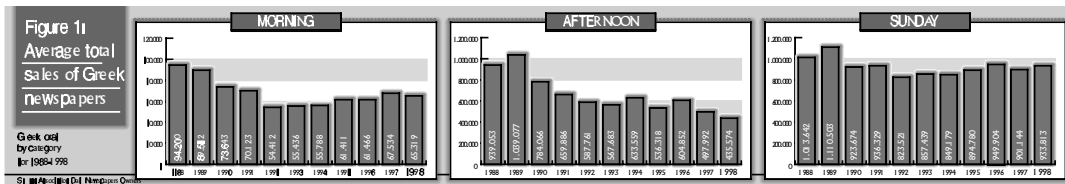


Figure 1. Average total sales of Greek newspapers

and with the entry of a plethora of private channels and radio stations, reader demand diminishes year by year. Thus, since the early 1990s the Greek press has entered a state of permanent crisis.

The circulation figures provided by the Association of Athens Daily Newspaper Owners for Greek newspapers present a depressing picture when sales for 1998 are compared with 1997. While Sunday newspapers increased their circulation by 4 per cent, afternoon papers fell by 13 per cent (21 per cent compared with 1996) and morning papers by 3 per cent. Between 1993 and 1997, however, total sales of Athenian newspapers rose by 2 million copies (a 7 per cent increase) although this increase was chiefly due to growth in sports papers (17,000,000 copies), Sunday papers and weeklies (by 10,500,000). By contrast, afternoon newspaper sales dropped significantly, by 26,500,000 copies, while morning newspaper sales increased by 950,000 copies. Within this period, a number of new titles were launched, but in most cases failed to make an impact: further evidence that under present conditions the Greek market is too small to maintain not only new daily publications but also old ones (Figure 1). In effect, the average circulation figure for the 17 afternoon dailies was 435,574 copies in 1998 and for the seven morning dailies 65,319 copies (Papathanassopoulos, 1999). The fact that the morning press appears to be more durable is largely explained by the increase in sales of

the daily morning quality newspaper *Kathimerini*, the only morning daily able to compete in offers and coupons with its evening rivals. On the other hand, the Sunday press was always durable in the Greek market, but if one compares its circulation with figures for the 1980s, it has lost about 30 per cent of its sales.

As for media-placed advertising expenditures in the same period, two basic factors emerge. The first is an almost steady increase in advertising from year to year of 35 per cent. The second is the increase in the share of advertising that goes to television and the corresponding decrease in the share that goes to the press. The annual reports of the advertising monitoring agency Media Services SA (1998–90) reveal that the total advertising expenditure in 1988 was 40 billion drachmas, while in 1995 it exceeded 408 billion, i.e. a tenfold increase. In the same period, television increased its share from 43 per cent to 70 per cent (its revenue increased from 18 billion to 285 billion drachmas). Newspapers and magazines more than doubled their nominal revenue, but their share shrank significantly (from 18 per cent to 10.3 per cent and from 25 per cent to 14 per cent, respectively). In 1996, for the first time in eight years, this situation was reversed. Total expenditure fell (30 per cent). Television's share decreased from 70 per cent to 54 per cent, while newspapers increased theirs from 10.3 per cent to 15.2 per cent.

Table 4. Importance of media for information on current affairs issues

	Total	Men	Women	Age range				
				15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55 +
Radio	1.65	1.78	1.53	1.44	1.72	1.72	1.92	1.61
Television	5.75	5.33	6.14	5.70	5.49	5.46	5.64	6.22
Newspapers	1.52	1.88	1.20	1.18	1.73	1.78	1.63	1.45
Magazines	0.25	0.22	0.28	0.41	0.27	0.32	0.16	0.10
Books	0.07	0.08	0.06	0.12	0.06	0.10	0.04	0.04
Social circle	0.57	0.56	0.57	0.77	0.60	0.45	0.55	0.46

N = 5403 individuals: 2534 men and 2869 women.

Source: AGB Hellas, establishment survey 1998, Athens, Thessaloniki and urban areas.

In 1997, according to the Media Services data (1998–90), advertising expenditure was 329 billion drachmas (a 16.6 per cent increase over 1996) and the newspapers' share increased from 15.2 per cent to 16.5 per cent. It is obvious from a report published by the Association of Athens Daily Newspaper Owners (1998) that print media have significantly improved their share of advertising in the past two years. But it is still too early, the report concludes, to make confident predictions about developments over the next few years. The report also notes that the causes of this change seem to be based more on corrective moves in the advertising market, which, similar to or following television trends, is looking for a more stable balance. The change may also be partly due to an important market approach by the press. In fact, this change is the result of the pressures imposed by publishers on the advertisers and advertising agencies in 1995. It is not a coincidence that a new media law, Law 2328, exists to regulate transparency in media advertising expenditure (article 12). This law also asks state companies to direct 40 per cent of their advertising budget to newspapers.

In terms of readership, fewer and fewer Greeks read a newspaper on a daily basis. In a study conducted by the research agency MRB Hellas (1992), it

was found that 69 per cent of the sample got their daily political information from television, 11 per cent from radio and 17 per cent from the press (evening and morning). Another recent study conducted by AGB Hellas (1998), the television ratings company, asked respondents to estimate the contribution of each medium to their information. Each respondent distributed ten points to the media for each topic in which they were interested. The position of television as a source of information emerged as dominant on all topics (current issues/news, social/political/economic issues, culture/show business, medical/health, sports, human relations, and professional/scientific issues). Regarding current affairs/news, newspapers were ranked in third position (Table 4).

Explanations of the Crisis

The Loss of Comparative Advantage

Why with the inauguration and expansion of private sector broadcasting have the sales of newspapers declined so readily and rapidly? Up to the 1990s, the state channels used to be regarded as "arms of the state", in effect the mouthpiece of the government of the

day (Papathanassopoulos, 1997a). This tight governmental control on both radio and television curtailed the credibility of the electronic media, and the attention given by the Greek public to state news broadcasts was limited. This gave newspapers a comparative advantage. It would not be an exaggeration to argue that the Athens daily press back in the 1970s and in the 1980s was regarded as the key mass medium in the dissemination of political information of Panhellenic interest. As researchers have noted, the overwhelming majority of Greeks kept informed about events of national significance by reading the Athens dailies rather than by using any other mass medium or interpersonal channel (Carmocolias, 1981).

With the entry of the private broadcasting sector, this comparative advantage was lost. Television news began to offer greater coverage of domestic issues. In sharp contrast to the state monopoly, reporting of foreign news has decreased by about 25 per cent in news programmes on the private channels (Papathanassopoulos, 1997b). In fact, domestic news dominates the news output of the private channels (75 per cent of their total news programmes output). Moreover, contemporary television news is faster and judged less boring and the new newscasters are at least that (ie news casters) rather than merely readers of the government's announcements as in the past.

The expansion of private radio and television has exacerbated the crisis in the press, drastically changing the ways in which the public acquires information. On the other hand, newspapers have not been able to defend their comparative advantage in providing comment and in-depth analysis of developments. As the editor-in-chief of *Eleftherotypia* newspaper, Serafim Fyntanidis, said at a seminar organised

at the University of Athens in 1997, "With the Gulf War we realised that television had already shown, what we were thinking to write the next day." Indeed, in most cases, the newspapers have mimicked the model of television journalism with which they cannot compete. Moreover, if television has snatched the element of directness in the dissemination of information from the dailies, both radio and television have literally pillaged them with their daily and often comprehensive press review programmes from early morning until afternoon (Papathanassopoulos, 1999). Ignoring the complaints of newspapers' editors, the major television channels and radio stations continue to review the front pages of the newspapers, while one channel (Kanali 5) broadcasts an hourly television programme each day which provides an extensive press review.

The Declining Interest in Politics

Greek newspapers used to be characterised by a blend of politics, culture and general news presentation. A newspaper's political party association used to provide a fairly accurate predictor of each daily's attitude towards political issues. But, since the mid 1980s, accusations concerning scandals and corruption have become a frequent issue on the public agenda and newspapers have played a part in this. Parties and politicians, on the one hand, have generally condemned clientelism and the corruption of the institutions, and, on the other, have avoided taking action, obviously due to the apparent political cost. In a very short period of time—as indicated by the polls, as well as a growing abstention from elections and void votes—political parties in Greece have lost touch with the voters (Papathanassopoulos, in press; Demertzis and Kafetzis, 1996).

This indifference to or abstention from politics, seems, however, to have an effect on newspapers sales, since in Greece the press is still regarded as highly political (Komninou, 1996) (see Table 2). It is no coincidence that the public has started to regard both institutions as dysfunctional (politics and media). In a recent survey, the majority replied that they do not trust either politicians or journalists (PRC, 1995). In other words, the lack of credibility in public and political life has resulted in public disillusion and a relative indifference towards politics, both reflected negatively in the circulation of dailies. This is admitted publicly by most Greek newspaper editors. In effect, what the public perceives as political incompetence has naturally had a negative effect on the circulation figures of dailies that continue to focus on politics. While political newspapers are declining, sporting and financial papers are booming whether because of the achievements of certain athletes or teams or because of the meteoric rise of the Greek stock exchange index (Papathanassopoulos, 1999).

However, questions concerning the decline of the press have not been fully answered. Is the decline merely due to the fact that newspapers are highly political? Is it the case that reading newspapers has become simply an elite activity: i.e. do readers buy and read newspapers merely to confirm their political convictions? If this is so, why does the majority of the public show little interest in buying downmarket newspapers? It seems that the answer is fairly simple: the bombardment of the average citizen by a continuous flow of information takes them away from the printed page; everything is now so much more readily accessible on radio and television. If they cannot find analysis in depth in television news, they can find it in radio broadcasts.

The Indifference of the Younger Generation

As in other countries (Shoenbach et al., 1999), the biggest challenge for Greek newspapers is to promote reading habits among younger people. The problem, however, is discovering how to attract young readers, especially when newspapers are becoming an increasingly rare commodity in the average Greek household. It should be noted that newspapers have never been particularly attractive to young people in Greece, but if newspapers do not attract the youngsters of today they may not attract them in the future when they are adults. This will certainly be a major problem for the newspaper industry of the future, and plans must be made urgently for schools to create reading habits (Franklin, 1994, p. 31). It is difficult to estimate the actual effect of television viewing on young people's newspaper-reading habits, and there may be other reasons that help explain the way young people are turning away from newspapers (see also Shoenbach and Bergen, 1998). Nevertheless, such issues—and those of an ageing population, economic recession, etc.—are clearly germane to an industry concerned about its future and the sort of role that it should play in its society.

Recently, the majority of Athenian newspapers have published on-line editions on the Web, but this seems to be more an effort to keep up with future developments, if not opportunities, in the communications sector than a means for attracting the younger generation.

The Paradoxes

It was noted above that the Greek media market is characterised more by supply than consumer demand. Within the context of this general paradox that

characterises Greek media, Greek newspapers provide some further and particular paradoxes.

Decline in Sales, Increase in Number of Titles

While the average circulation of newspapers in Greece is falling, the same cannot be said for the number of daily titles. Though a number of established newspapers have suspended or ceased publication in the last ten years, new titles, or old ones under new ownership, seem to be launched continuously.

Examining the annual data of the Association of Athens Daily Newspaper Owners, it is clear that in 1979 there were 12 morning and afternoon dailies published in Athens with an average daily combined circulation of 713,000 copies. In 1989, the best year for the dailies in the last 20 years, there were 22 titles with an average daily combined circulation of 1,128,589 copies. However, in 1998 with less than half of the average circulation of 1989 (500,893) the number of titles was 23. Dailies have come to contribute to the enigma of the Greek mass media, with the existence of more newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations than the small market can support.

It is equally curious that while most people in the press industry regard the launching of a new daily as a financial investment of doubtful viability, new papers appear all the time, only too frequently closing after a short period, thereby further boosting the lines of the "reserve army of unemployed". This continual increase in daily newspaper titles cannot be explained in terms of the recent increase in advertising revenues. It has rather to do with the traditional role of newspapers in Greek society, i.e. as a means for exercising

pressure within the polity. As in the past, commercial imperatives alone do not motivate entrepreneurs and other business interests who enter such small media markets as those in Greece. The entry of businessmen and ship owners and other business interests into the media scene is an important way in which these interests try to influence public opinion and to exert pressure in the political arena for their business interests. The problem, however, is that newspapers do not have the same impact as they used to in the past.

Moreover, a survey of the average number of pages in Athens dailies found that in 1980 pagination ranged from 16 to 32 pages on the average weekday, with more than 48 pages in Sunday editions. By 1997, the number of pages in Athens dailies ranged from 32 to 64 pages on the average weekday, with more than 120 pages in Sunday editions. Surprisingly, in 1999 the number of pages is still growing while the sales are still falling. A similar trend is apparent in the UK press (Franklin, 1997, p. 90).

Decline in Sales, Increase in Gifts

In 1993 when publishers saw that sales of their newspapers were declining rapidly, they decided to attempt to halt the downturn in circulations by offering their readers special offers or gifts in exchange for coupons. Since the first attempts met with some success, all newspapers started offering gifts to their readers, such as books, cars, houses, etc. But, as relevant data reveal, the continuous priming of print media with offers or gifts exchangeable for coupons only temporarily halts the decline of circulation (Papathanassopoulos, 1996). It seems that gifts and special offers have become a constituent part of newspaper publication, re-

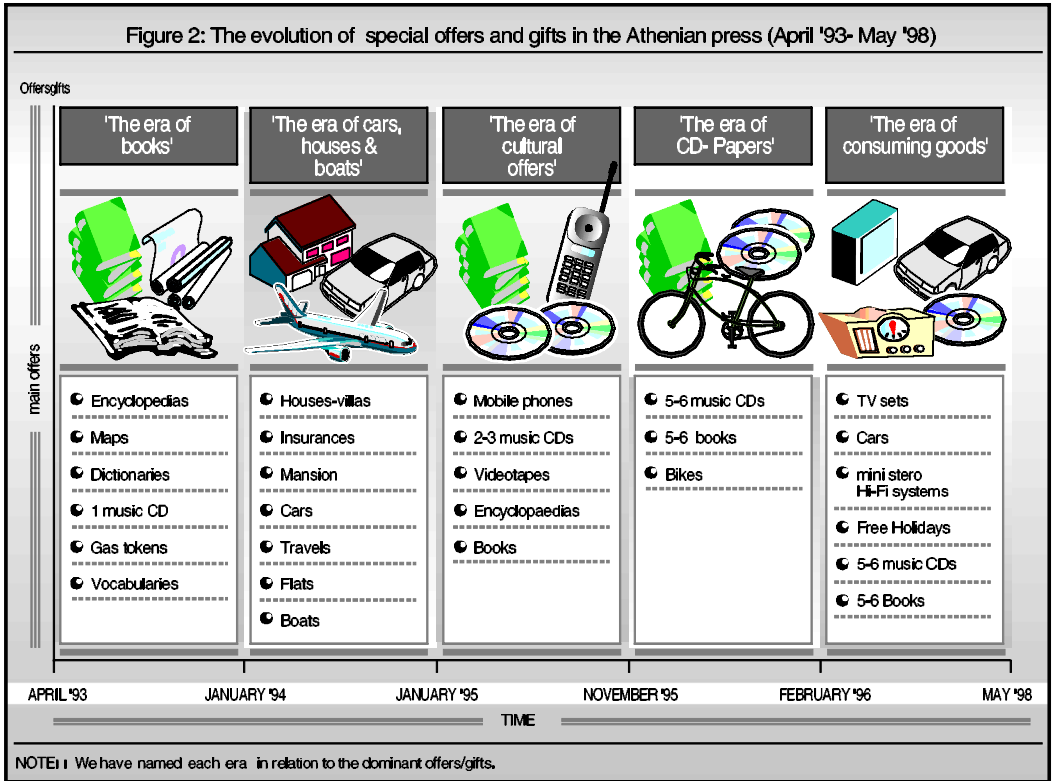


Figure 2. The evolution of special offers and gifts in the Athenian press (April '93–May '98)

sulting in significant drops in sales if the practice is abandoned (Figure 2).

Summary and Conclusions

In addition to the vast increases in pagination, supplements and offers, Greek newspapers have been changing significantly in other ways. Today's Greek newspapers have little in common with those of a decade ago in terms of content or form. Nowadays, they present their content in a much more fashionable way (more features, more news, more photos, and more specialised pages) as well as in a more convenient and manageable form. Moreover, in response both to a new editorial sensitivity to readers' interests and to the opportunities opened up by

computerised composition and page make-up, many Greek newspapers have introduced new graphics, new typefaces, and new layouts. Nowadays, all Greek newspapers have colour on most of their pages. In sum, newspapers have done everything possible to try to halt the decline in circulation.

Despite these increasingly frenzied efforts by publishers, the public buys ever fewer newspapers: Greek newspapers have declined in terms of sales, readers and advertising. The decline reflects the impact of a combination of factors such as the deregulation of Greek television, the declining interest in politics, and the loss of a younger generation of readers. The latter undoubtedly represents a major problem for the future. For their part, newspa-

pers have reacted to this decline by offering gifts to their readers as well as metamorphosing into vehicles for consumer goods rather than for journalistic content.

In effect, Greek newspapers have become more reactive than proactive to developments. But the Greek market is also unpredictable. Consequently, trying to predict the future of the Greek media market is similar to trying to predict the weather during the next five years. But it is clear that the Greek

press market, as Table 4 shows, is a two-level market. The upper level consists of the leading and larger-circulation newspapers supported heavily by their owners, who at the same time have other interests in the economy. The lower level is the domain of the smaller-circulation newspapers which struggle to survive in an extremely competitive environment. It seems possible that in the next decade market pressures will force many of these small newspapers to cease publication.

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