Arabic dailies cite little advertisement income, rising cost for step

Local dailies suspend publication to cut costs in face of growing digital media

KUWAIT: The once-a-week newspapers’ publications suspension in Kuwait has left the door wide open for speculations that this step would either be recalculation of feasibility of overall paper production or start of transformation to online copies. Journalists however considered the decision by local Arabic, Al-Qabas, Al-Rai, Al-Anbaa and Al-Jarida dailies to stop paper production on Saturdays – following in the footsteps of English dailies – as an utmost towards readers who have sentimental attachment to paper copies, who also consider the way they read the paper a daily ritual.

Economic decision

Arab and Western newspapers have been affected by digitization of papers in the past decades, including for example the Christian Science Monitor which stopped paper production in 2009 after circulation dropped to 200,000 copies while its digital copy was read by more than a million people. “This is a 100 percent economic decision aimed at cutting cost,” Waleed Al-Nisf, Al-Qabas Chief Editor said, and the newspapers agreed there are difficulties in competing against electronic means. Nisf also attributed the once-a-week suspension to loss of advertising and the economic situation. Therefore newspapers decided to stop production for a day as a means to overcome these troubles.

Al-Anbaa Newspaper Editor-in-Chief Yusuf Al-Marzouq considered the decisions by newspapers to be a beginning of permanent closure. “Newspapers have been suffering from losses for years, and it is time to rearrange their priorities,” he proclaimed.

Marzouq brushed aside speculations one-day suspension would be a daily rite for a large segment of people especially the senior citizens,” said Waleed Al-Balham, a journalist, adding the credibility of newspapers was higher than the online media and newspaper suspension was not the end of newspapers. “It is too early to talk about closure of newspapers in Kuwait because they are taking serious steps to prevent this,” said Al-Jarida, he said, would rather develop its paper copy to include more analysis, reports, interviews and features in order to counter the competition posed by the digital media.

Dr Munawer Al-Rajhi, Managing Editor at Al-Jarida Newspaper, who acknowledged newspapers were suffering severe financial issues, said the one-day suspension was not the end of newspapers. “It is too early to talk about closure of newspapers in Kuwait because they are taking serious steps to prevent this,” he said. Al-Jarida, he said, would rather develop its paper copy to include more analysis, reports, interviews and features in order to counter the competition posed by the digital media. Al-Rajhi said that newspapers would compensate suspension posed by the digital media.

Digital copies

A 2016 study by Al Jazeera Center for Studies showed internet users in the Arab world skyrocketed from 29 million in 2007 to 140 million in 2015, indicating rising number of readers of digital media. “The newspapers represent a daily ritual for a large segment of people especially the senior citizens,” said Waleed Al-Balham, a journalist, adding the credibility of newspapers was higher than the online media and newspaper suspension was not the end of newspapers. “It is too early to talk about closure of newspapers in Kuwait because they are taking serious steps to prevent this,” he said. Al-Jarida, he said, would rather develop its paper copy to include more analysis, reports, interviews and features in order to counter the competition posed by the digital media. Al-Rajhi said that newspapers would compensate suspension posed by the digital media.

Moreover, Al-Dhahir, Head of Mass Communications Department at Kuwait University (KU), said suspension of newspapers’ publication on Saturdays would have existed 5-3 years ago. Al-Dhahir, one of two years, said adventures would not advertise during holidays. Therefore newspapers would have to force to stop publication in order to save money. Abdulwahhab Al-Essa, another journalist, said the once-a-week suspension of production was only a start, “of the end of newspapers.” Abdulwahhab Al-Essa, another journalist, said newspapers were suffering from “electronic revolution,” and predicted the papers to continue publications but on a weekly or even monthly basis.

Newspapers are struggling in the face of digital age, but one should not forget many people think introduction of TV was the end of radio. They were wrong and the radio survived through development of content and introduction of interactive methods that retained its audience. Will newspapers follow suit? Time will tell - KUNA

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