

MEDIA CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RELIGIOUS-STUDIES WEB PORTAL DINGIR.CZ

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Резюме

Емануел Орбан. Медийните характеристики на уеб-портала за религиозни изследвания dingir.cz. Увеличаването на числото на уеб-порталите с религиозна ориентация е оправдано доколкото те функционират в качеството на ориентири за масовия зрител на днешните щури времена, изпълнени с потоци информация. Това е обективна амбиция на нашия принос в описване на конфигурацията и прогреса на концептуализацията уеб-порталите. **Ние ще представим своята гледна точка по повод на спазването на жанровите, тематичните и формалните журналистически критерии.** Ще проанализираме отделните медия-комуникации където ще отделим особено внимание на типичните средства за разграничаване на обсъжданите теми. В този анализ ние ще представим основният композиционен дизайн на редакционната колегия. Ще прави това незаангажирано – за да достигнем обективна и балансирана позиция в нашето изследване.

Ключови думи: онлайн-журналистика; интернет; религиозни изследвания; интерактивност; постмодернизъм

Резюме

Емануел Орбан. Медийни характеристики на веб-портала за религиозни изследвания dingir.cz. Збільшення кількості веб-порталів з релігійною орієнтацією є обґрунтованим, оскільки вони є основою для масового глядача сьогоденних неспокійних часів, наповнених потоками інформації. Об'єктивним прагненням нашого внеску є опис конфігурації та прогресу концептуалізації веб-порталів. Ми будемо в засобах масової інформації надавати своє бачення проблеми дотримання жанру, тематичних та формальних журналістських критеріїв. Аналізуватимемо вибрані медіа комунікації, де приділятимемо особливу увагу типовим засобам розмежування обговорюваних тем. У цьому аналізі ми виведемо основний композиційний дизайн редакційної групи. Намагатимосся аналізувати незаангажовано, щоб досягти належної об'єктивності та збалансованості у нашому дослідженні.

Ключові слова: онлайн-журналістика; веб-релігієзнавство; інтерактивність; постмодернізм

Abstract

Emanuel Orban. Media Characteristics of the Religious-Studies Web Portal dingir.cz. The increase in numbers of web portals with religious orientation is justified, because they function as fingerposts for a mass viewer of today's hectic times filled with torrential flood of information. It is the objective ambition of our contribution to describe the configuration and progression of the conceptualization of web portals. We will, in medias res, make available the journalistic point of view on the issue of adhering to the genre, thematic and formal journalistic criteria. We will analyze selected media communications, where we will pay special attention to the typical means of delineation.

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tion of the topics discussed. In this analysis we will deduce the principal compositional design of the editorial team. We will confront in a disinterested manner in order to achieve proper objectivity and balanced view in our contribution.

Keywords: online journalism; web-religious studies; interactivity; postmodernism

Web portal dingir.cz is suggestively attractive for its readers due to its visual or graphic properties, its systematic arrangement and especially its theme selection. Thematically, the portal is conceptualized into main sections, of which many are organized into more specific subsections. To a complex extent, these columns achieve their proper aim, which is to convey adequately the causal principle of the specific media content. The aim of the media content is to inform the potential audience in a meritorious manner, and besides that, to contribute to satisfying of – in our case – anticipated needs of readers.

The current title of Dingir, rendered in Wordart font, is situated in top left-hand corner of the website. To the left side of the main title there is a mythological logo which determines a Sumerian cuneiform character. In top right-hand corner there is a sub-title: religious studies magazine about today's religious scene, whose function is mainly to make identification easier. The successful identification is also aided by the attractiveness and memorability of the title. The graphic layout of the internet portal is characterized by cross-fade of contrasting colours, which can be deduced from individual banners, information panels and portlets. Print version of Dingir magazine is available to readers on the server. It has, according to UNESCO category of classification of periodic print media, standard features of a popular periodical specialized in humanities.

In its meritorious essence, the periodical has a preventative aspect, its primary invention is to constantly appeal to the mass proliferation of religious sects, new religious movements and cults. A factor which partially contributes to their enormous growth is globalization, which promotes, among others, decadent features of postmodern culture. This fact is supported by the following stated fact which specifies the reason for the proliferation of new religious movements. In postmodern times we can observe that traditional religions which put emphasis on group identity lose their dominance in favour of a wide spectrum of postmodern religious cults. These together entail the phenomenon of postmodern religiosity, so-called New Age, which has been identified as a religious, or philosophical, phenomenon (Gábrišová, 2011). People are in general struggling to find meaning in officially registered churches, due to moral failures of their individual representatives, and because of that they find the philosophy of the aforementioned movements appealing. On the other hand, this could be seen as a consequence of the new religiosity which belongs to the set of programmed global changes, and which affects almost the whole of human society (Gábrišová, 2011). Religion practically becomes a model way of life, a modern human considers it something akin to a stereotype, with no interest in the transcendent. These consequences follow from immanent values presented by current social atmosphere. New religious movements are the fruit of the mainstream society, whose leaders constantly control the minds of their members and often contribute to disparaging of traditional family values. Usually these are marginal religious groups, but they present a considerable risk to society (Coney, 2003). A cult member is, in some cases, incited by the leader of the cult to despicable, unethical acts including murder to gain his reward of eternal bliss (Marrs, T. 1990). In such case we talk of ‚full-blown satanisation‘, the member in fear of losing his life carries out potential requests of the leader of the cult. We usually find out about typical hazards of religious movements from mass media, one of which is the internet portal dingir.cz we analyze.

Dingir magazine is specific in that that it offers empirically gained information, which means it analyses experiences of former members of religious cults. The scholarly standard and expertise of the periodical are guaranteed by constant feedback from peer reviews. The magazine is a quarterly

periodical, it has been published in a unified print format since March 1999 (with the exception of April 2001), the text documents are in accordance with universally established norms. The portlets are interconnected by the means of hypertext, by a simple right-click the visitor is able to visit other websites. The logo is situated in the bottom left-hand corner of the site, close to the address of the editors' office. The portal is linked to a twenty-second video [skutecny darek.cz](http://skutecny.darek.cz). This advertising spot is there to attract attention. The video impressively acts upon the visual perception organ. The static website Dingir.cz respects elementary composition criteria. As regards conceptualization, the thematic portal is oriented on scholarly journalistic articles, accompanied by illustrations illuminating the basis of the content, by which means they include the reader in the plot. The main contributors to the periodical are mostly erudite experts in the field of humanities who specialize in religious studies, theology, geography, sociology and psychology. Editors give equal space to authors from various religious denominations, regardless of their creed, i.e. their approach is impartial. Contributing writers use relevant bibliographic sources as a framework for their work.

The basic priority of the web portal is to uphold the principle of keeping information up-to-date, which is demonstrated by the publication of the latest issue of the periodical, as witnessed by the first column Topical Issue. The essential element of the aforementioned column is a depiction of the front page of the third issue of *Dingir*, which was published on 20th September 2016. To aid readers' orientation, a layout of the themes covered in the September issue is provided. The primary endeavour of the issue we analyze is to make available to the readership the overview of pressing issues of religious affairs at home and abroad. Some of the articles are kept up-to-date, especially those highlighted in pink colour and accessible via hyperclick. The editorial has been written by a renowned religious-studies scholar, editor-in-chief of *Dingir* Zdeněk Vojtíšek. Article's title, *Successful Mission of Zen*, declares the culmination essence of Zen Buddhism. The author describes the way Zen Buddhism establishes itself in socio-cultural milieu, describes its origin, historical context, and also mentions Czech personalities who practise individual techniques. The author doesn't state his personal opinion, he mostly interprets generally known facts. The foreign affairs feature *Under Pressure from Authorities* was written by Zdeněk Vojtíšek, its short lead paragraph gives us an overview of the given case. The article is selected into five subheads delineating the most important sections. From the genre perspective, the article can be classed as analytic journalism. The first subhead of the article *Origin of Community* clarifies the causality of origin of a new religious movement, which originated in the period of anti-culture at the turn of the sixth and seventh decade of the twentieth century in the US. *The typical feature of the movement is that it operates on a Christian-charismatic foundations. The protagonists of the movement have commonly evangelized or canvassed members in public spaces or establishments. The second subhead Awaiting Jeshua's Coming hints at a stereotype predominant in the lifestyle of members. The community operates on principles of Christian fundamentalism, albeit not the sound kind, the fact we will mention later. The religious movement is organized into a strict hierarchy, with the highest executive power held by The Elders' Council. Children too are included in the evangelization process, the followers of the movement support their creativity, teach them to have respect for God and prepare them for second coming of Jesus Christ. The third article under the subhead Conflicts describes negative experience of former members of the religious movement, who left the community because of manipulation which lead to aggression or even to sexual abuse. The section with a subhead Teacher's Punishment briefly mentions sanctions imposed onto the teacher for brutal physical treatment of children. She was sentenced to two and a half years in prison. The article with the subhead Preliminary Conclusion discusses the widely-known case of a dangerous sect Twelve Tibes, where German authorities became involved due to a breach of civil rights and liberties. The text of the article is of high informative value, as it is substantiated by quotes.*

Feature Events is a genre amalgamation of news reporting and journalism; in its specificity it

perceives the temporal and spatial coordinates of current events. Web media can offer true interactivity, topicality and relative independence of time and space (Bednář, 2011). Its objective is to inform readers in a pithy manner about events which took place in the last months. Interactivity is the key word to capture in full the nature of the platform for operation of electronic web magazines which also specialize in enhancing the essence of individual published communicates (Nováčiková, 2006). The readers are able to communicate with the editors via the email address of the relevant administrator of the website. The Pagan Congress in Prague is characterized by the principle of cooperation, solidarity, the protagonists are proponents of peace between nations. The Congress events aid formation of social identity. An obituary with the title A Founder of Pentecostalism Studies Died reflects on outstanding merits of Walter J. Hollenweger. The column is concluded by a short report about a visit of a Tibetan clergyman, the renowned expert on Tibetan Buddhism Namkhaiho Norba, in Prague and Bratislava in mid-August 2016.

Journalistic interview with a Zen master and martial arts expert Josef Mádl with the title My World in Intervals is, from a perspective of proper journalistic practice, well-structured, it particularly captures important chronological milestones of a personality consisting of the period of childhood, youth, when the connection of the interviewed author to martial-arts techniques originated, it acquaints us with the situation in Czech Republic. The greatest drawback of the interview is the perception of the topic in superlative tones, an absence of any criticism regarding the recognition of negative consequences of martial arts techniques, which detracts from the sense of impartiality or balance in the article. The editor in chief could have included an objective fact of constructive criticism while formulating the questions.

The column What is Dingir answers questions pertaining to the origin of the periodical, its topic of research, periodicity. The foundations on which the editorial board operates are precisely delineated. In addition, the column defines target readership of the periodical. The editorial board together with the editor in chief are objectively responsible for the content of the published media communications. Professional requirements for the position of on-line editors are much more strict compared to those of print media, because individual information is constantly updated, which means the editors are required to have the ability to process facts swiftly and distribute them appropriately to the users of the server (Waschková Císařová, 2012).

The column For Writers aims to entreat, it calls on readers to cooperate with editorial staff. One great disadvantage of publishing is that the contributors don't receive financial compensation. In case of specialist articles, a peer-review procedure is essential. The contribution is sent to two anonymous reviewers along with a form specifying the following criteria: level of expertise, originality, bibliography, requirements of form, overall evaluation, scope (number of characters), illustrations, annotations. There are several criteria playing a major role in on-line publishing, because they are pre-requisite for attractiveness of contributions published on-line, these are brevity and information saturation (the users of on-line media do not read the texts, but 'scan' them), visualisation (pictures, photographs, animations, video), topical diversity (the ability to bring about and maintain anticipation of future content) and informality of style (internet is no longer a mass medium, but a personalized one) (Kabát, 2011).

The column Themes and Articles gives a comprehensive overview of all issues of the periodical from January 1998, when the magazine was first published, until December 2015. The concept of the periodical had a multi-cultural span, it focused attention on subject matters from Eastern, monotheistic religions, it delivered extraordinary curiosities about the development of new religious movements, early religious forms and ideas, and occasionally reached into social context of religion. First issues of the magazine were published in the year 1998, as regards the visual graphic, the front page was yellow and white. The original subhead Dingir - Magazine About Sects, Churches And New Religious Movements was much more telling than the current one, very general and lacking any specifics. An ordinary reader often struggles to determine what is the magazine's orientation,

or why does it exist? On the front page of the first issue which was published in 1998 there is an explanation of the symbol of Dingir, which depicts a divine being. Following is an editorial feature of Zdeněk Vojtíšek, who discusses the adherence to basic journalistic criteria in the articles. Each media communication should, in principle, be objective, critical, properly represented and informatively saturated. The next contribution What Is What? delineates the terminology, for example church, fundamentalism, religion, religious community, sect, new religious movements, current religiosity. etc. Further there is a mention of twenty one registered religious movements. Home affairs column with the title New Akropolis has a lecture-like character with an ameliorable tint which concentrates on improving the lifestyle of an individual. The article Purification For Body And Soul is of similar character. It reflects on the activities of Dianetic scientological centre, it has a promotional/advertising nature. In the interest of objectivity, unwanted effects of the therapy ought to have been mentioned.

Feature From Abroad brings an interview with an ex-member of Rajneesh Movement, it reconstructs valuable experience of negative character which induced her to leave radically. The aforementioned movement had all the distinguishing characteristics of a sect, one of them was manipulation of members leading to abuse, more precisely to forcible accumulation of property at the expense of others.

Article Nothing to Report, Fortunately describes sect-like practices of an organization based on Canary islands. The organization has in its mission statement vehemently advocated for ritualistic suicide, this is a clear case of mental blackmail, even if it is in the name of blissful after-life happiness. Clearly present are principles of reincarnation. Here we again find financial extortion. An article with the title post scriptum which was published 1. 4. 1998, depicting God on a flying saucer, had an especially conspirational effect on the reader. He declared that he soon will come for those who are faithful to Him. The prediction of apocalypse fortunately didn't come true, moreover, there are signs of means of transport in hell UFO. The first issue is concluded by reviews of new book releases.

The column Dingir and its People is selected into six sub-sections, which laconically describe their characteristic thematic focus and objective reason of existence. The first sub-section Why Dingir contextually analyses the symbolism of the periodical, which is objectively oriented on documenting various mythological phenomenons. The second sub-section Publisher specifies the legal form of business of Dingir, mentions the founders, and also captures the primary objectives of the publishing house. The genesis of the origin of the magazine is linked with a distinguished personality of Czech religious studies scene Zdeněk Vojtíšek, the Head of Department of Religious Studies of Hussite Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague, who in his scientific pursuits concentrates on the issues of new religious movements, inter-religious dialogue, relationship between religion and psychotherapy. Zdeněk Vojtíšek is a co-author of a publication focusing on religious-studies The End of this World, with a subheading Millennialism and its place in Judaism, Christianity and Islam dealing with correlative links among individual monotheistic religions. Dingir Publishing House in its functional basis occasionally provides for needs of other legal subjects (for example Society for the Study of Sects and New Religious Movements, Foundation of Přemysl Pitter, Olga Fierzová etc.) The editorial board operates in the mode of stable stereotype, the team of writers consists of editor-in-chief and an assisting managing body. Its members are active in other scholarly educational institutions. The meetings of editorial board are documented by various behind-the-scenes photographs, available via a hypertext click, which familiarize the readers with the atmosphere in a workplace. The column Viewpoint of Editor-In-Chief delineates two most important notions which led to the origin of the periodical, within its thematic scope it maps out current issues in religious-studies sphere. The practise of the popular-science magazine Dingir copies journalistic methods of the most renowned American religious-studies expert J. Gordon Melton, which are characterized by rigorous objectivity, fixed descriptiveness and scientific disinterestedness. As for other methods, the editor has also implemented the input of British social scientist Eileen Barker and re-

search approach of a Dane Johannes Aagaard, whose importance lies in his adopting an operative critical judgment, from the point of view of an editor. The periodical Dingir attempts to implement the criteria outlined above, however, in certain cases a balanced or consistent rendering of the theme has slipped from the view of media creators.

The sub-section Graphical Design offers suggestions in regard to years 1998 and 1999, it gives the name of the persons responsible for its development, moreover it mentions the visual layout of the print version of the periodical. The sub-section Advertisements provides information about fees for announcement or display ads.

The sub-section Subscription informs web users about the possibility to subscribe to the delivery of the periodical, by post, via an electronic form available on the portal (Dingir. Časopis, cit. 12. 11. 2016), where the potential users can register and submit their request. A user can also obtain a print copy, by phoning the editorial department. Distribution of the periodical is handled by mail order service SEND.

The sub-column Bookshops gives an overview of places where the magazine is sold in Czech Republic and in Slovakia, together with addresses and phone numbers. These are located in Czech republic in cities in Morava, in northern, western and southern Czech Republic and in Silesia, by the way in Slovakia the shop is located in Bratislava. Most often the magazine is sold in bookstores.

The column Search dingir.cz contains a registry, which enables keyword search within Dingir content. It fulfills mostly informative function, the aim of which is to make navigating the labyrinth of information easier for web users.

The address of the editors and the relevant e-mail contact can be found under individual columns. Users most often use e-mail contact, because this way of communication seems more approachable for the editorial board compared to a phone interchange. The title of the email address strikes one as both pithy and logical. Editors chose the right method creating it, which is especially important in internet media. User activity associated with the choice of address and how it is managed is therefore one of the major ethical aspects of internet communication (Hladíková, 2016). The aforementioned statement clearly demonstrates a moral-ethical standard which should also serve as an inspiration to staff in other associations and editorial departments.

We will endeavour to introduce a few selected issues of Dingir from March 2003 and 2005. We will briefly outline their causal core.

Dingir Issue 3/2005

In the editorial the author notes the culmination boom in psychotherapeutic practices associated with folk medicine. Moreover he overly promotes them, which at times resembles propaganda. The author's purpose is a brief outline of the overall course of the published magazine issue.

The principal aim of the article title Who Are JUBU? is to draw a potential reader into the plot of the event discussed. The information value of the article is extraordinary, mostly it poses the most important questions of exploratory character. The author outlines the main purpose of the article in the lead as defining the issue of integrating Jewish American Buddhists into society. The core of the article mentions demographic statistics of Jews centered in Buddhist environment, it captures the causal context of their migration, it depicts their syncretic lifestyle which includes practising of various meditation elements. The author discusses the term JUBU and its historical and etymological connections.

The title of an article Whose Choice and Whose Conscience? reflects the long-lasting aversion of Jehova's Witnesses to blood transfusion in cases where life is in danger. A legitimate question of an ordinary human presents itself forthwith: Why, if I am a Jehova's Witness, can't I accept somebody else's blood? In case of the aforementioned religious movement we can talk of certain

practise of sect-like practises which lead to exclusion of an individual from a normal way of life. From Jehova's Witnesses point of view the ban described is under aggressive threat of ex-communication; their rhetoric sounds too absurd and without any sensible justification.

The title of an article *Psychotherapy and Buddha's Teachings* captures the mission of humanistic psychology and its principles. One of them is satotherapy which has a positive influence on a human individual and which incorporates many healing rituals objectively oriented on improving relationships between people.

Dingir Issue 3/2003

The editorial captures the mission of inter-faith dialogue, which started to develop after Vatican Council, Second. The article *Abrahamic Ecumenism* depicts ecumenical activities between three monotheist religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam. From theological point of view, it is not possible to agree with the trend popular in the modern world, that these religions worship the same God. Nowadays a similar line is vehemently declared by a German liberal theologian and religious studies expert Hans Küng in his publication *Global Ethic*. In the following article the author briefly outlines the aims of *Global Ethic*, proceeding chronologically. The magazine has also published a critical review of inter-faith dialogue presented by a Czech journalist and commentator Michala Semín. He comments on the consequences of inter-faith dialogue: adjusting to the world in the spirit of modernism. Practically it means that church members will stop pursuing the truth about the redemptive salvation of Jesus Christ. After Vatican Council, Second the focus has shifted away from apologetics and onto discourse promoting word piece and 'tolerant' love. The pre-council papal encyclicals have clearly pointed out the threat of modernism. One of the chief acts of modernism is privatization of religion, which has lead to the origin of various religious experimental or innovated denominations, which is characterized by constant social-psychological battle (for example for gaining confidence of members) (Dawson, 2004). However, many of them have not been legitimized in the legal sense to this day.

The article *In Abraded Skin* presents the persona of Thomas Halík, it reflects the most important data, it describes his view of life. The interview speaks of a need of inter-faith dialogue, however many statements of the respondent are questionable, for example the criticism of extreme fundamentalism, however this is a sound religious act, heralding the one God of all religions.

Conclusion. Internet portal Dingir. Cz is distinguished by clear arrangement and logical structure. Its significance lies in its aim to warn against the risks of new religious movements. Its biggest problem lies in the absence of well-honed instinct for astute differentiation between facts, verification is often absent, in many cases it seems as though the content creators purposely presented a one-sided view of the issue discussed. Despite this contention, it has an enormous number of visitors as it offers valuable information about chronological, global development of individual religions.

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