The *Slow Media Manifesto* and Its Impact on Different Countries, Cultures, and Disciplines

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Abstract. The article presents the evolution of the Slow Media Manifesto, a project which was launched in 2010. The Slow Media Manifesto was a collaborative work written on a web page in German. The Manifesto can be perceived as a different media, a different reaction to the online versus print media debate. It is a media which puts the accent on sustainability, monotasking, discursive content, social distribution, etc. The present study looks at the case of this project from its beginning to nowadays.

Keywords: slow media, sustainability, translation, journalism platforms

Introduction

In 2010, Benedikt Köhler, Jörg Blumtritt, and Sabria David published the Slow Media Manifesto on the 2nd of January (Blumtritt et al. 2010). It was a collaborative work, written on a web-based collaborative real-time editor the days and nights before. It picked up conversations between the authors during the last months, starting with a discussion on Twitter, continuing on conferences, in blog posts, in the comments of blog posts, and at kitchen tables. The Manifesto also was a reaction to a specific phase in the German media debate, which was a non-constructive fight between online media and print media, each one claiming to be the universal solution. We, authors, felt that in these times of transition it was time to look at media and society from a different angle. We were – and still are – searching for 'appropriate reactions to this media revolution [that] are to be developed and integrated politically, culturally and socially'.[1] Referring to Carlo Petrini's term of 'slow food' (Petrini 2001), we named our concept 'slow media,' defining criteria for how 'good' media can work in our times. Several Anglophone authors had already used the term 'slow media' in publications, like Tyler Brûlé (see Butterworth 2009) and Jennifer Rauch (Rauch 2009).

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1   The Slow Media Manifesto (http://en.slow-media.net/manifesto), (German original http://www.slow-media.net/manifest)

The Slow Media Manifesto was written in German, picked up an Italian concept of slowness, and referred to Anglophone publications. So, the Slow Media Manifesto had, from its beginning, an intercultural and discursive character: it is the result of conversations and wants to talk to people.

This paper retraces the viral spread of the Manifesto from its beginning and brings together reactions, backlinks, and debates from all over the world. It adds relevant international sources to the work of Jennifer Rauch: 'The Origin of Slow Media: Early Diffusion of a Cultural Innovation through Popular and Press Discourse, 2002–2010' (Rauch 2011). According to the databases she used, Jennifer Rauch focused mainly on English sources. She writes:

> While this study sketches the general contours of Slow Media's origins, emergence and diffusion, it probably does not represent the full range of worldwide discourses about this sub-cultural movement. [...] The study also likely under-represents non-Anglophone discourses about Slow Media, since foreign-language sources were largely absent from the databases that I used. (Rauch 2011)

As we can trace the backlinks on our German and English blogs, we can add especially a lot of non-English sources. These sources show that the Slow Media Manifesto was adapted and adopted all over the world, essentially in the Northern Hemisphere, adding Australia, Brazil, and South Africa. The Slow Media discourse is a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary phenomenon.

Translations and adaptations

One of the very early reactions to the published manifesto was a tweet by Wolfgang Blau, who was – at that time – chief editor of 'Zeit Online,' the website of the leading German weekly newspaper. He claimed an English translation as he wrote:

'Worth reading: "The Slow Media Manifest"[2] (in German only, thus far). So, we translated the manifesto into English and set up a slow media blog in English with the translated manifesto and several translated blog posts.' Most of the international links refer to this English blog. Only a month later, on the 19th of February 2010,[1] French readers translated the German manifesto in French and announced it on Twitter.[3] It was widely spread in France via Twitter, blogs, and newspapers. One of the reactions was an invitation to speak at a French conference at the European Council in Strasbourg (Les Assises du Journalisme, in

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2   Blau, Wolfgang, @wblau, 3rd January 2010, Web (Twitter). https://twitter.com/wblau/status/7327194804.
3   Le manifeste des slow media. In: OWNI.fr (http://owni.fr/2010/08/04/le-manifeste-des-slow-media-traduction-fr/) French translation by Enikao (Nicolas Doll).

November 2010). The conference showed that there are equivalent discussions on slow media, slow info, and the future of journalism in France. Five days after the launch of the French translation, a short paraphrase of the Slow Media Manifesto was published in Italian,[4] referring to the French translation.

On 23rd June, 2010, Geert Lovink, the Dutch-Australian media theorist, picked up the English translation of the manifesto and posted it in full length on his mailing list *nettime* (Lovink 2010). Five days later (28th June 2010), Bruce Sterling also posted the complete English translation on his Wired Blog 'Beyond the Beyond' (Sterling 2010). As Geert Lovink told me later on a conference, Bruce Sterling had read the manifesto originally on *nettime* before he handed it on to his own readers.

After those two publications, we recognized wide international reactions such as several Russian translations[5] and several Ukrainian translations.[6] The manifesto was widespread in Russia, as we can see by the web search for the Cyrillic transcription of the authors' names.[7] The quoted Russian translation also shows 94 comments, proving that people are debating the statements and adopting and continuing the discourse in their local contexts. Recently, the Manifesto has been translated into Spanish[8] and Catalan[9] by the readers (the Spanish translation is from the German, the Catalan from the English manifesto).

Another multiplier for international response was an interview on Slow Media that I gave for the Goethe Institute.[10] It was translated into English, Spanish, Chinese, Ukrainian, Portuguese, and Arabic, and published on the local Goethe websites in China, UK, Australia, Lebanon, Gulf Region, Egypt, Mexico, Chile, and Brazil. The international departments of the Goethe Institute decided whether the subject was of local interest.

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4   Slow Media Manifesto. Italian paraphrase (http://www.lsdi.it/2010/slow-media-manifest/).

5   See, for instance: http://habrahabr.ru/post/98367/.

6   See, for instance: http://www.mandala.org.ua/voprosy-i-otvety/slow-life-novaya-filosofiya-zhizni-chast-1.

7   Google search for Бенедикт Кёлер, Сабрия Дэвид и Йорг Блумтритт: http://bitly.com/TyntFO.

8   Manifiesto de los 'slow media' (http://www.slow-media.net/manifiesto-de-los-slow-media).

9   Manifest dels 'slow media' ('mitjans lents'): http://www.slow-media.net/manifest-dels-slow-media.

10   Zickgraf, Arnd: Die Neuentdeckung der Langsamkeit – Slow Media. In: www.goethe.de. January 2011. (http://www.goethe.de/wis/med/pan/de7049870.htm).
     English version:
     http://www.goethe.de/wis/med/pan/en7049870.htm?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter.

The wandering manifesto

Graph 1. Global response to the Slow Media Manifesto

The viral spread of the Manifesto was enormous. It was referred to from over 30 countries: France, the Russian Federation, the United States, the Netherlands, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Hungary, Ukraine, Japan, Israel, Norway, Spain, Italy, Turkey, Canada, Australia, China, Mexico, Colombia, South Africa, Brazil, Indonesia, India, Finland, and, of course, Germany. Most international references came from France, the USA, and Russia. The references are continuously added on the Slow Media blog.[11] If the Goethe Institute interviews were added, the list would also add Egypt, Lebanon, the Gulf region, and Chile.

The web sources are sometimes uncertain and confusing. They are popping up on the Internet and vanishing again, moving to other sites. Some show no author or no publishing date. Without a clear legal notice, not even the country is easy to identify – like in the case of an Anglophone reference with .com-domain from Belgium. Some backlinks lead to languages which are not easy to identify. But even considered that the list of references is fragmentary, the global chart (Graph 1) shows a clear picture: a division between the Northern and the Southern Hemisphere. Slow media is referred to around the Northern Hemisphere, regardless of cultural differences between the USA, Europe, the Russian Federation, and China. Included are from the south of Australia, Brazil, and South Africa.

A hypothesis on the Slow Media North–South divide would be that discussing slow media relates to a special phase in technological development. It seems to be the moment when people realize that technological progress is ambivalent and also comes with dark sides that have to be considered. As we say in the preamble of the Manifesto:

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11   The international backlinks are continuously collected and published on the blog: http://www.slow-media.net/resonanz.

In the second decade, people will not search for new technologies allowing for even easier, faster, and low-priced content production. Rather, appropriate reactions to this media revolution are to be developed and integrated politically, culturally and socially.[12] (Blumtritt, David, Köhler)

Slow media claims reflection and consciousness and advocates a thoughtful progress. Further research would have to analyse which cultural and economic parameters correlate with being attracted by the slow media concept. Another interesting question would be the reverse perspective – what correlates with not needing to talk of slow media? There seem to be two options: Either those countries are not yet technologically developed enough to have this kind of problems (which would mean they will think of slow media in ten years) or they do not have to respond to Slow Media because they already (or: still) proceed gently and embrace technology in a reflective and conscious way (which would mean we could learn from that).

Conclusions

The Slow Media discourse is related to a phase of transition and fundamental change in societies that are linked to technological progress. A recent study by the authors of the Slow Media Manifesto on Slow Skills and Slow Lifestyles shows that the fundamental aspects of slow media – focus, discourse, attachment, sociality, and quality – are deeply connected to digital change and the needs of a post-digital society. Speaking of disruptive changes and offering a new perspective to respond to them, the Slow Media Manifesto was spread around the world. It was recommended, passed on, criticized, advocated, taught, and rethought via word of mouth, in blogs, comments, in television, on mailing lists, in newspapers, on radio stations, on conferences, and on the street. It has been discussed at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute among Dada, Futurism, and Bauhaus as 'Discourse and Manifesto of the Avant-Garde'.[13] It inspires people to think of how they want to communicate in a web forum, how they want to interact with their customers.[14] It inspires people to create new journalism platforms that dedicate themselves to more thoughtfulness and quality in journalism and to write for readers instead for advertisers.[15] It even inspires people to think of

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12 The Slow Media Manifesto (http://en.slow-media.net/manifesto (original German: http://www.slow-media.net/manifest).

13 Curriculum 'Electronic Arts Overview' at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Fall 2011: http://www.arts.rpi.edu/~century/eao11/eao11.htm. Lecturer Michael Century.

14 Michael Schubert: Slow Media als einen Beitrag zur höheren Kundenorientierung http://www.media-treff.de/index.php/2010/01/05/slow-media-als-einen-beitrag-zur-hoheren-kundenorientierung/.

15 Thomas Krüger: Wenn weniger mehr ist. In: Vocer. Web. http://www.vocer.org/de/artikel/do/

what design can be and how they can transform reused beloved things into new designed works of daily use.[16]

Translations and personal recommendations had a catalytic effect on the viral spread around the world. The Slow Media Manifesto evokes debates and discussions that cross the borders of language and culture. It still moves because people talk, wonder and care about, and like to share it.

The Slow Media Manifesto became in practice a most wonderful example of its own theory.

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