Between commerce and mission: the case of TRUSO.TV, a local television station

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ABSTRACT

Topics covered by local media will always have their own audience. One of the advantages of local media is the ability to create content specifically formatted for Internet users (e.g., live broadcasts or video content). It can be assumed that both the value and quality of the presented information depend on the journalistic skill level of the local editorial team. The way new media are handled reflects the state of traditional media. Those with an established reputation that has been built over years of fulfilling a social mission do not need to fear new technologies but should instead view them as an addition and a way to build credibility and trust among new viewers.

New media allow local stations to engage audiences in local community affairs, providing diverse content (cultural, educational, sports and entertainment programmes) that responds to a wide range of audience interests. This is evident in the case of TRUSO.TV, which produces a variety of content formats. Local television stations require constant funding, typically supported by advertisements from local businesses. However, the current media consumption trends may affect the effectiveness of these advertisements.

This article has attempted to demonstrate that a local television station with a long-standing tradition does not need to fear losing its audience. Despite the growing importance of new media, local broadcasters play a crucial role in local communication. It should be noted, however, that the conclusions regarding TRUSO.TV cannot be extrapolated to cable television stations in other cities. Elbląg is where television has existed for 30 years, giving it a brand and recognition among its residents, which may facilitate fulfilling its mission.

Introduction

The concept of "new media" has undergone significant transformation since the 1970s, reflecting the dynamic development of technologies and forms of communication. Over time, the distinction between "old" and "new" media has become more pronounced, though scholars remain divided on how to define the term precisely. The continuous evolution of media technologies requires researchers to adapt their tools regularly. This issue becomes particularly crucial in the context of local media, where survival in the digital age often depends on navigating in a dynamic and uncertain virtual environment.

The case of TRUSO.TV, a local television station in Elbląg, illustrates how local broadcasters strive to adapt to changing conditions by leveraging new media platforms, such as social media, to fulfil their mission. This paper aims to explore the role of new media in the operation of local media, particularly within the framework of local communication. It also seeks to answer the key question: can local broadcasters sustain their activities independently in the digital environment?

The term "new media" has been used in the academic literature since the 1970s. Today's understanding of this notion has little in common with what it meant several decades ago. A boundary has emerged separating "old media" from "new media", though researchers do not share the same viewpoint on this matter. Roman Konik believes this may be due to the "multipolarity of media development processes and their multi-layered interaction" (2016, p. 21). The author characterizes new media in communicative, sociological, aesthetic, technological and practical contexts. When analyzing the issue of new media, attention should be paid to their historical evolution and changes in both operational models and aspirations. Additionally, new media technologies age quickly. Their dynamic nature causes them to be replaced by newer solutions. It is necessary to continually adapt research and theories to these changes (Konik, 2016, p. 22). As Krzysztof Wasilewski writes, the scientific contribution regarding the impact of new media is insufficient, with the local communication system being the most susceptible to changes brought about by the development of the Internet (Wasilewski, 2014, p. 163-154).

This paper attempts to answer the following research questions: How do traditional media fulfil their role and mission when faced with new media? Can a local broadcaster independently function and sustain broadcasting activities in a virtual communication environment? It seems that a definitive answer to this question does not exist. It

could be assumed that the development of the Internet affects traditional media. However, the proper use of social networking sites may allow a local television station to fulfil its mission not only within its regional area.

Conversely, improper use or poor management of communication channels may hasten their decline. An additional goal of this article is to present unique research findings regarding the use of new media by a local television station and to analyze their significance in local communication. The findings from the research may help adopt the strategy to reach audiences and give small broadcasters a chance to survive. The subject of analysis is the Elbląg market, specifically the only cable television operating in the city, TRUSO.TV.

Local media

Commercial television in Poland dates back to the early 1990s, emerging as an alternative to the existing national channels owned by the state monopoly - Polish Television (Telewizja Polska). The first stations operated mainly in local areas, often broadcasting illegally due to the lack of proper legal regulations. This situation lasted until the first licences were granted under the Broadcasting Act, which was passed in 1992. Local television stations in Poland are closely tied to cable networks. Viewers have always had high expectations for this medium, often considering it a form of public television (Filas, 2012, p. 11). According to Ryszard Kowalczyk, local media fulfil their role by informing residents of specific local government units (municipality, district, province) about current events in their area. They address issues important to residents as well as watch over the actions of local authorities (Kowalczyk, 2008, p. 97). In addition, they serve as an important room for dialogue as well as exchange of ideas, viewpoints and opinions. They became a tool for social influence, communication and passing information. Local media should be defined as a means of gathering, selecting, shaping, preserving and diffusing information (Balczyńska-Kosman, 2010, p. 112). Grażyna Piechota writes that one of the strengths of local media is their ability to cover topics that are relevant and close to the audience (2011, p. 78).

Local media categorization can be based on the way of preserving information [printed (press) and electronic (the Internet, television, radio)] and on the scope of its distribution [regional (one province), sub-regional (several districts), micro-regional (district and city with district rights), local (municipality or city with municipal rights), and sub-local (district, housing estate, village)]. The range of broadcasts affects the scope of interest for local media. This distinction is fading due to the Internet, which is being used to broadcast traditional media, including local media. The Internet also provides space for creating interactive tools for social communication (Kowalczyk, 2008, p. 90-94). Smaller owners run over 150 local television stations that broadcast in Poland. It is common for local newspapers, television stations, and online portals to be run by individuals or groups of people connected to the area. Local Newspapers Association [Stowarzyszenie Gazet Lokalnych] and Local Media Association [Stowarzyszenie Mediów Lokalnych] are organizations that bring together such entities (Local Newspapers Association, 2024). They aim to represent local media's interests and highlight their role in society. In addition, they provide space for experience exchange among their owners. The existence of such organizations is key to maintaining the independence of local media (Local Media Association, 2024). There is also the Polish Local and Regional Television Association [Polskie Telewizje Lokalne i Regionalne] based in Elbląg, which brings leaders of local media from across Poland together. It represents 50 local television broadcasters that air their programmes in over 180 cities (Polish Local and Regional Television Association, 2024). According to the research conducted by the National Media Institute (Krajowy Instytut Mediów), the viewership of local television stations in Poland stands at 4.9 million. The most popular stations include WTK, followed by lubelska.tv and TV Olsztyn. TRUSO.TV, a local television station in Elbląg, has 37,195 viewers (2024).

One challenge that local media are faced with is the emergence of media operated by local authorities, which may impact their independence. Dorota Głowska and Adam Pliszka state that authorities should not manage media but create space for them to function freely. Additionally, there is no legal basis for local governments to run their media, as such actions violate Article 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, namely the principle of lawfulness (2014, p. 75-83). Another issue is the discretionary nature of public institutions and related entities in commissioning advertisements and other paid content — a problem that does not affect only the local level but also much bigger broadcasters. A further challenge is lawsuits filed against local journalists, which can significantly hinder their work. This highlights how crucial the protection of freedom of speech is for the functioning of democratic

journalism. Finally, local media often face resistance from institutions that sometimes refuse to cooperate, making it difficult for independent local media to obtain information. These media must often repeatedly request, verify and confirm information, which is even more challenging when the provided information is incomplete or irrelevant. This issue illustrates that pro-municipal or pro-government media have an easier time obtaining and publishing information as they operate in line with the authorities' expectations (Freedom Foundation, 2023, p. 9-13).

The presented challenges are not exhaustive but have been outlined due to their impact on the reliability and sustainability of local media. A potential solution could be the abolition of government-run media, the change of laws regarding defamation and the protection of freedom of speech, and the implementation of local media public support programs, which would let them maintain their independence (Batko-Tołuć, 2024).

Three decades of TRUSO.TV.

TRUSO.TV is the longest-operating non—public medium in Elbląg. It has been producing daily news programmes, magazines, documentaries and other television formats for three decades. It documents events and the city's history and actively contributes to shaping them. Because of the programmes, the residents can better understand the region's culture and heritage. Many local creators have gained deserved recognition and attention on its air. As Juliusz Marek, a former owner of a local medium, admits, local television in Elbląg has become a permanent part of contemporary city life, becoming a piece of its modern history.

Going back to 1990, when the first local elections in free Poland were held, and the Elbląg Voivodeship still existed, the press and electronic media beyond the city focused mainly on the provincial authorities. The city was not a point of interest due to the small scale of events and its many challenges, which were practically in every aspect of life. However, a reflection that these numerous problems could be addressed more effectively through communication with the public emerged soon. The only existing local newspaper — an organ of the Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party [Komitet Wojewódzki PZPR], published weekly Elbląg News [Wiadomości Elbląskie] — ceased its publication in the winter of 1990. Attempts were made to replace it with other publications, but none succeeded, and Elbląg Press gradually started to lose its readership.

A station founded by the Elbląg Radio Broadcasting Development Society [Towarzystwo Rozwoju Rozgłośni Radiowej w Elblągu], called Radio-El, was a pioneer in the success of local media. The efforts of then-editor-in-chief Witold Werner gave the station immense popularity in the city and surrounding areas, even before it was officially licensed. It began broadcasting on June 10, 1992. The radio covered key events, addressed the concerns of Elbląg residents and carried out numerous initiatives for the local community. It operated until 2012 when it was replaced by Radio Elbląg (Cultural Lexicon, 2024). In 1993, a tender was announced for the construction of a cable network in the city. The project of VECTRA Cable Television Ltd. from Gdynia [Telewizja Kablowa VECTRA Sp. z o.o z Gdyni] was chosen from the submitted offers. It included 18 television programmes, mostly foreign, with a local channel featuring text-based messages. A year later, the first television broadcasts aired, including coverage of New Year's Eve celebrations, the Elbląg edition of the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity [Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy] and the Miss Elbląg beauty pageant. On March 13, the first Reporter programme aired, and it was intended to be a weekly news programme. The station began regular broadcasts in August under the name Vectra-El Television [Telewizja Vectra-El], with minimal technical resources: a small room, one camera, a VCR and a computer. This was enough to produce a half-hour programme on Saturdays and Sundays. Over time, the station expanded, gaining new premises (a hallway in a hotel annexe on Jaśminowa Street), where the main station was established and a small television studio was created. In 1995, a daily programme called Elbląg News [Wiadomości Elbląskie] began to air at 05:30 p.m., then repeated at 08:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. VECTRA obtained its first broadcasting license in 1996, and the programme was registered as Vectra-El Television (Telewizja Vectra-El). Further licences, under the name Elbląg Television (Telewizja Elbląska), were issued in 2002, at which point Juliusz Marek became its licensee and owner. Today, the broadcaster is TRUSO Media Ltd. in Elbląg, and the programme is called TRUSO.TV (Cultural Lexicon, 2024). Over the years, the station has undergone several programming changes, provided airtime to young Elbląg residents and hosted programmes created by "e-światowid" television. As early as 2009, it also appeared online and posted its content on tv.elblag.pl, it allowed over a thousand people from Poland and abroad to share their materials via the website (Marek, 2009, p. 477-

489).

TRUSO.TV is a private broadcaster operating on its own budget. It fulfils a mission typical for public media — informing about important events and promoting local sports. It also performs educational, cultural, integrative and opinion-forming functions. Over the past thirty years, it has broadcast nearly 10,000 episodes of Elbląg News [Wiadomości Elbląskie] and other programmes focusing on history, education, information and public affairs. The digitalization of television was also a part of Elbląg's medium history. In 2008, Elbląg Television was included in the operator's digital programming offerings, expanding its viewership. A year later, the residents of Braniewo gained access to the programme. Today, TRUSO.TV reaches a wider audience through VECTRA's cable network, broadcasting to 20 cities across the Warmian-Masurian and Pomeranian provinces. According to research conducted by the National Media Institute [Krajowy Instytut Mediów], the viewership of local television stations in Poland is 4.9 million, and TRUSO.TV has 37,195 viewers (KIM, 2024). Over the years, the station has faced many challenges. The first was financial; due to this fact, it began producing commercials that have been in high demand among local businesses since 2000. However, changes in customer habits and the rise of online shopping are just some factors that have led to a decline in the value of advertising on local television. The second challenge was maintaining journalistic independence. The third was the lack of qualified staff, as local media are often a starting point for journalists and camera operators who seek to advance their careers in larger media centres. The fourth challenge was competition, which today exists mainly on the Internet—it is cheaper to run and can be operated by a single person. All these factors affect the ability of local media to carry out their mission.

TRUSO.TV as an example of new media

Magdalena Szpunar, who hypothesizes that the emergence of new media does not eliminate traditional media but leads to their coexistence and interaction, presents media change as focusing on the convergence between new and traditional media. Szpunar emphasizes that new media introduce a new quality of communication that differs from traditional forms yet does not entirely replace them. She argues that new media are characterized by interactivity, enabling users to participate actively in communication. Users cease to be passive recipients and can influence the content and its presentation. She points out that new media bring forth new features

and possibilities, such as information accessibility, the ability to modify content, and interactive forms of communication. A crucial aspect of her analysis is that traditional media do not disappear in the face of new technologies; instead, they adapt and interact with new media, which can enhance the media offering. The author highlights the significance of these changes for media culture and how consumers engage with media content, which is essential for understanding the contemporary media landscape (2020, p. 45-67).

Henry Jenkins defines media convergence as a process in which content flows between different media platforms and various media industries collaborate. In his view, convergence also encompasses the migratory behaviours of media audiences, meaning that users consume content and actively participate in its creation and distribution. Jenkins emphasizes that convergence does not eliminate old media; rather, it leads to their interaction with new forms of communication, resulting in new media models and a changing communication landscape (2008, p. 15-30).

For local television stations, being present on Facebook is a chance to survive on the market and a way to fulfil their mission. Through this platform, they can play an important role in informing and educating local residents. Additionally, it allows them to build an audience and interact with viewers, which results in active engagement in regional matters. Social media also provide space for wide-reaching promotion of events and initiatives, which can contribute to revitalizing the local economy. Rafał Polak indicates that local media have a significant impact on building the identity of local communities and on integrating residents. By reporting on local events and promoting social initiatives, the media contribute to the activation of residents. He also addresses the challenges local media face, such as competition from national media and new technologies that are changing how information is consumed (2009, p. 110-120).

The television station in Elbląg had to adapt to the times. Initially, its website served as an informational portal containing contact details and programming information. As the habits of the new generation evolved, changes were made to attract and retain viewers. Facebook became a key tool, with quick and diverse content in short forms capturing the attention of Elbląg residents. The social media page has 24,000 followers (TRUSO TV, 2024). It features posts about Elbląg and occasionally the surrounding region. Historical photographs and recordings from past decades bring the city's history

to life. This approach to managing the page requires a new outlook on journalism, focusing on engaging the audience and encouraging interaction. As Anna Miotk writes, social media is for those whose target groups are already present on such platforms (2013, p. 81). It can be assumed that the target audience for local television is active in new media since every Internet user resides in a specific region and likely wants to know what is happening in the area. The Internet brings this information closer (Siudak, in. Babecki, Żyliński, 2016, p. 160). The purpose of analyzing the content of posts was to identify the thematic scope of the published materials. The posts were categorized thematically, and the frequency of each type of content in April was determined.

TRUSO.TV, as a modern medium, introduces several differences compared to traditional forms of communication, such as television or print media. Here are the key aspects that distinguish them. TRUSO.TV. It engages viewers through interactive live broadcasts and the ability to comment and share content on social media platforms, unlike traditional media, which often have a one-way communication flow, TRUSO.TV allows viewers to participate actively in programs and discussions. Modern media, such as TRUSO.TV, leverages digital technologies, enabling rapid content updates and responsiveness to current events. Traditional media often adhere to fixed schedules and longer production cycles, which can limit their ability to react swiftly to changes (KRRiT, 2023). It tailors its programs to the local needs and interests of the community, enhancing their appeal. Traditional media often provide more homogeneous content that may not address the specific needs of diverse audience groups (Goniak, 2012, p. 163-187). The presence of TRUSO.TV on platforms such as Facebook and YouTube allows for a broader reach to audiences and facilitates dialogue with viewers. Traditional media have limited interactive capabilities compared to modern platforms. It enables viewers to watch content at any time and from any location due to its online availability. In contrast, traditional media often require access to a television or radio at a specific time. TRUSO.TV differs from traditional media through its interactivity, speed of communication, content personalization, and the use of modern digital technologies. These features make the station more flexible and better suited to the needs of contemporary audiences, establishing it as an example of a new medium in the digital age (TRUSO TV, 2024).

Thematic scope of TRUSO.TV posts in April [%]

The analysis conducted in the paper aimed to understand how local media, specifically TRUSO. TV, engages its community through various forms of content published on Facebook. The methodology was based on the following steps:

1. Facebook was chosen as the primary channel for analysis due to its popularity among local communities and the fact that TRUSO.TV actively uses this medium to communicate with viewers.

2. The posts selected for the analysis were identified based on their interactions (likes, comments, shares) and the diversity of formats (video, text, graphics). The focus was on posts that generated significant community reactions, indicating their potential impact on local social life.

3. The posts underwent both qualitative and quantitative analysis. This involved examining the number of interactions and the content and context of the posts to understand their role in building social bonds and local cultural identity.

In summary, the selection of specific posts for analysis was driven by their high level of interaction and format diversity. Posts related to sports events, changes in public spaces, or local cultural initiatives were particularly significant because they represent key topics, address issues important to the residents of Elbląg, generate discussion, and indicate a high level of community engagement with the discussed themes. They display various content and illustrate different approaches to communication and audience engagement.

The aim of the analysis was to investigate the role of local media. This included understanding how TRUSO.TV influences social interactions within the local community, identifying effective communication strategies, determining which content formats generate the highest engagement and why, and reflecting on the value of content. The study sought to examine how the type of published content affects the community's perception of local media and its role in public life.

Chart 1:
The author's research is based on the analysis of TRUSO. TV's Facebook page.
Source: https://www.facebook.com/TrusoTV [accessed: 01.05.2024].
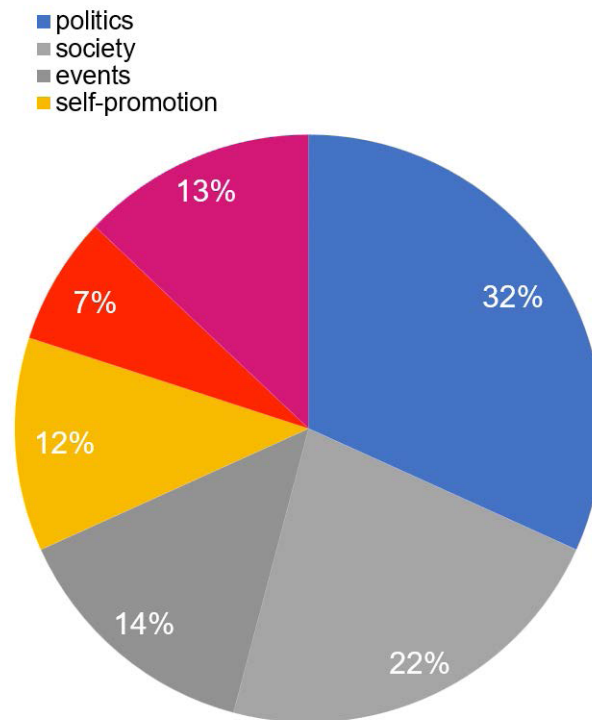
In total, 84 posts were published on Facebook in April. Most were related to political and social topics and presented in various forms, such as short reports from politicians' press conferences or interviews with newly elected city officials. Social topics covered investments in the city, new support programs for people with disabilities offered by the Elbląg Social Services Centre (Elbląskie Centrum Usług Społecznych) and updates to tram stop signs.

A significant portion of the Facebook space was dedicated to events—mainly video invitations to events organized by Elbląg institutions such as the Elbląg Hospice of Doctor Aleksandra Gabrysiak, MOSIR Elbląg, the Elbląg Library and the EL-Active Sports Promotion Association. The third most common category was posts related to culture, education and sports, including coverage of rehearsals at the Aleksander Sewruk Theater for the play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and the opening of a roller rink at the city ice rink. The second-to-last category was self-promotion, featuring content such as the Our Elbląg ("Nasz Elbląg") local government magazine, promotional spots like Don't Sleep or You'll Be Voted Out, presidential debates, and the It's Worth Knowing (Warto wiedzieć) programme, all produced by TRUSO Media Ltd., the local broadcaster of TRUSO.TV.

The least frequent category was "Other", which included posts about accidents, interventions or court cases. The first conclusion from the analysis is that the high number of presented content types might prevent viewers from becoming bored, as they are delivered in different ways: long and short reports from conferences, videos with background music and no commentary or stand-up announcements for upcoming local events. Direct video uploads without additional links are popular and result in more views and reactions. This is evident in a one-minute post about the Energa Basketball Elbląg game, which received 207 likes, six comments and ten shares.

Image 1:
Analysis of TRUSO.TV's Facebook page
Source: https://www.facebook.com/TrusoTV [accessed: 01.05.2024]

[Translation of the text from the image: They showed a real fighting spirit! Energa Basketball Elbląg team was promoted to the second league. Congratulations!]

While other media outlets, especially commercial ones, offer their viewers more modern ways of accessing content, local television tends to rely on safer solutions, such as maintaining a Facebook account. However, as the content analysis shows, promoting one's materials can lead viewers to resent the poster. Dorota Jędrzejewska and Rafał Niemczyk note that social media communication should be conducted thoughtfully. In their view, Facebook should not serve as an advertising board, as overloading users with information is a flawed strategy. Instead, providing users with value-added content, such as helpful information or practical tips, is better supported by original graphics or special offers (2013, p. 102). These types of content can be found while analyzing TRUSO.TV's profile. They could bring even greater success to the broadcaster if properly managed. Jerzy Mikułowski-Pomorski points out that local media do not play a key role in forming strong social bonds at the local level. They may strengthen or weaken existing ties, but their role is not to actively build social bonds (1990, p. 269-270). However, one could agree that local media play a significant role in public life. They serve as a platform for opinions and viewpoints, as seen in the social media content regarding the restoration of city walls.

Image 2:
Analysis of TRUSO.TV's Facebook page.
Source: https://www.facebook.com/TrusoTV [accessed: 01.05.2024].
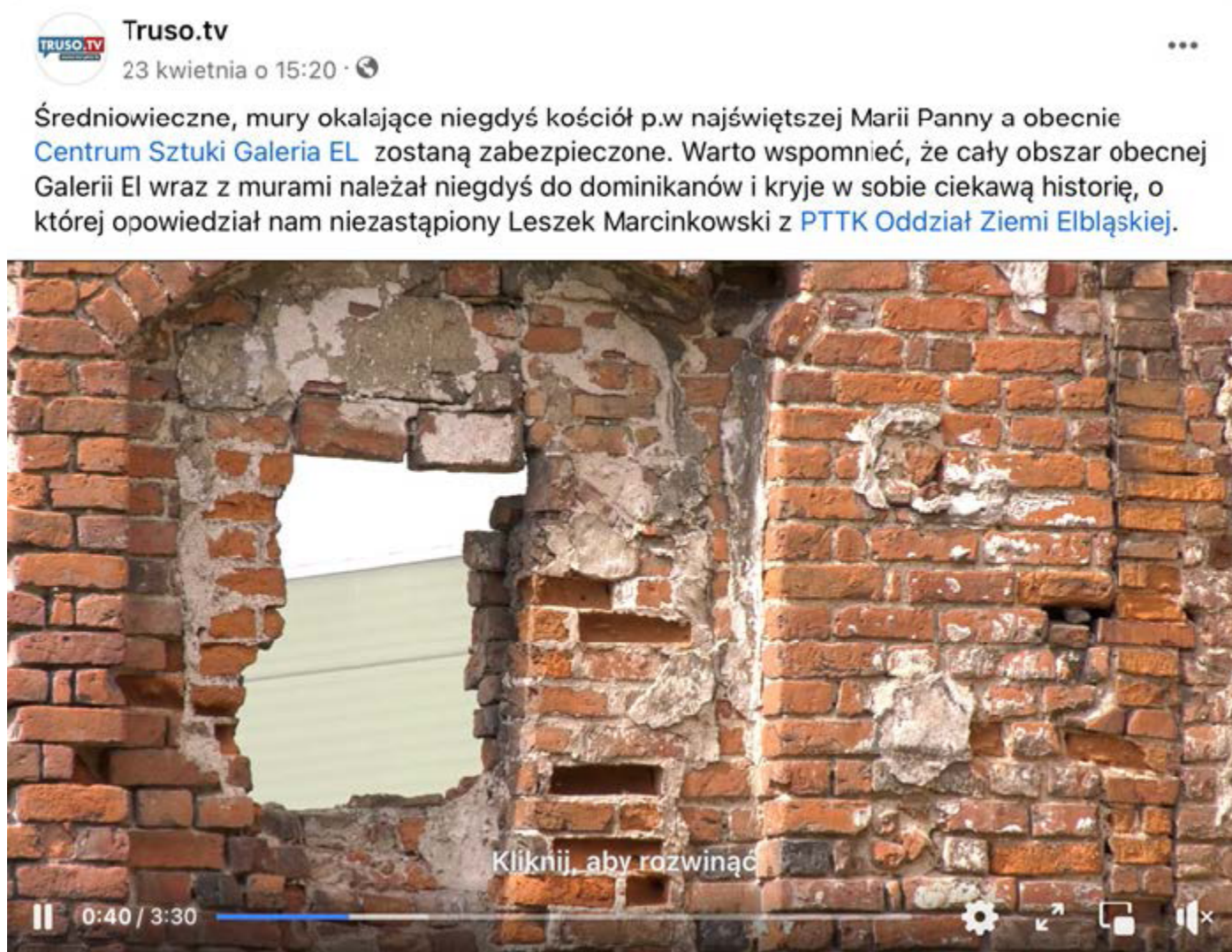
Translation of the text from the image: The medieval walls that once surrounded the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, now home to the El Art Centre Gallery, will be secured. It is worth mentioning that the entire area of the current El Gallery, including the walls, once belonged to the Dominican monks and holds an intriguing history, which was shared with us by the invaluable Leszek Marcinowski from the PTTK (Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society) Elbląg Branch.

The above post generated nearly 250 reactions, 7 comments and 34 shares. In today's communication, even a "like" or "heart" can express opinions — whether in favour of or against a particular issue. Stanisław Michalczyk writes that: "Informed people, aware of both the sense and possibilities of collective and individual action to meet their individual, collective or social needs, become more engaged and effective on both an individual and social level. The place where people can live like this becomes closer to them, beyond simply being their place of birth or residence".

The opinions presented confirm that local media significantly shapes social bonds and local cultural identity. They affect the quality of interpersonal relationships, although they do not play a creative role. As Grażyna Piechota notes, local media do not create bonds. Instead, they strengthen and maintain the existing community by reflecting the actions of the local society. Jeremy Rifkin writes that effective communication should be tailored to the social or cultural context in which it takes place. This means using the appropriate language and form of communication to achieve the desired effect.

Another example supporting these arguments is a post announcing a parking ban near Elbląg Cathedral. Although the topic might seem minor, the post sparked significant engagement as it addressed a

Image 3:
Analysis of TRUSO.TV's Facebook page.
Source: https://www.facebook.com/TrusoTV [accessed: 01.05.2024].

Translation of the text from the image: No more parking near the Elbląg Cathedral.
What do you think about it?

change affecting Old Town residents who frequently park near the church. The video accompanying the announcement generated numerous comments, likes, and shares.

Zygmunt Bauman and Tim May state that the world comes to the recipients, even if they do not move. This happens through electronically transmitted voices and images — "this process of detaching communication from local constraints causes communication ties to become asymmetrical" (2004, p. 160).

Conclusion

Topics covered by local media will always have their own audience. One of the advantages of local media is the ability to create content specifically formatted for Internet users (e.g., live broadcasts or video content).

It can be assumed that both the value and quality of the presented information depend on the journalistic skill level of the local editorial team. The way new media are handled reflects the state of traditional media. Those with an established reputation that has been built over years of fulfilling a social mission do not need to fear new technologies but should instead view them as an addition and a way to build credibility and trust among new viewers.

New media allow local stations to engage audiences in local community affairs, providing diverse content (cultural, educational, sports and entertainment programmes) that responds to a wide range of audience interests. This is evident in the case of TRUSO.TV, which produces a variety of content formats. Local television stations require constant

funding, typically supported by advertisements from local businesses. However, the current media consumption trends may affect the effectiveness of these advertisements.

This article has attempted to demonstrate that a local television station with a long-standing tradition does not need to fear losing its audience. Despite the growing importance of new media, local broadcasters play a crucial role in local communication. It should be noted, however, that the conclusions regarding TRUSO.TV cannot be extrapolated to cable television stations in other cities. Elbląg is where television has existed for 30 years, giving it a brand and recognition among its residents, which may facilitate fulfilling its mission.

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