The cost of the digital revolution

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We are all familiar with digital media, from online news and 3G phones to apps and iPads, but what are the implications of the shift from print to online on energy use and greenhouse gas emissions? Does buying a newspaper have a smaller or larger environmental footprint than browsing online? How does accessing news online change our reading habits? And how might the business change in the future, as eReaders become more widespread and personalised printed newspapers become possible?

These are some of the questions that will be addressed over the next two years by researchers at the University who will be working with the Guardian News and Media Group (GNM) to track what they do, and assess the energy requirements of the news industry in a number of

future scenarios.

Known as Sympact, the project is led by Dr. Chris Preist from Bristol's Department of Computer Science and Dr. Mike Yearworth from Bristol's Systems Center, and is carried out in partnership with the University of Surrey.

The project will be building systems models to help explore the different ways the news industry might look in the future, and what its environmental footprint would be. The approach of the research team is unique in that it will integrate a number of systems-based approaches, including environmental life-cycle analysis, models of customer behaviour and models of future technological change.

Speaking about the project, Dr. Preist said: "Using these different approaches and working out how these things fit together will be a challenge, but an analysis of these combined factors has not been done before."

The project has implications for the wider media industry, as Dr. Preist explains: "We are aiming to share the results with the wider media industry as the project progresses. For the Guardian, they want to understand how the environmental impacts of their business might change as technology transforms it, so they can plan in advance how to keep their impacts down."

More information: www.sympact.org/

Provided by University of Bristol

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