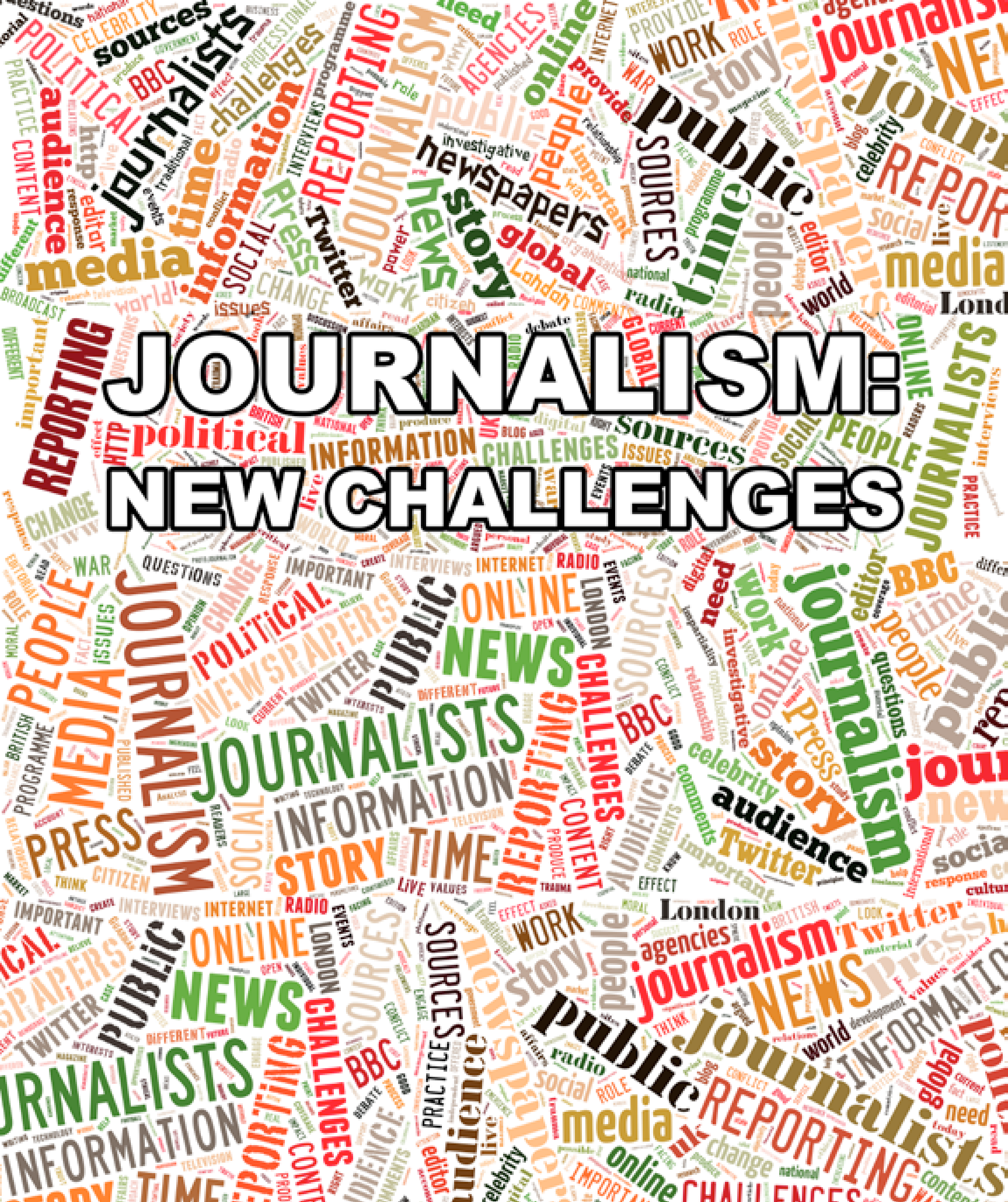
JOURNALISM: NEW CHALLENGES



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Karen Fowler Watt & Stuart Allan

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Introduction

Karen Fowler-Watt and Stuart Allan

These are challenging times for journalism. This is one point that everyone is likely to concede before proceeding to declare their personal views on what must be done to set matters right. In the UK, journalists and their critics continue to think through the implications of Lord Justice Leveson's report on the 'culture, practices and ethics of the press,' with little sight of consensus breaking out anytime soon.

As this debate over how best to rein in the scandalous excesses of certain newspapers has unfolded, it is interesting to note how often the press's perceived role as a 'fourth estate' has surfaced as a point of contention. Over the years, this idealised role has routinely served as a form of shorthand to register the conviction that the citizen's right to freedom of speech is best protected by a market-driven, advertising-supported media system. Its advocates tend to be rather passionate in their belief that journalism is charged with a noble mission of providing members of the public with a diverse 'market place of ideas' to both inform and sustain their sense of the world around them. This responsibility places the news media at the centre of public life, namely because they facilitate the formation of public opinion regarding the pressing issues of the day – and thereby make democratic control over governing relations possible. The performance of this democratic imperative is contingent upon the realisation of press freedom as a guiding principle, one jealously safeguarded from any possible impediment associated with power and privilege. In contributing to the 'system of checks and balances,' the news media underwrite a consensual process of surveillance – watchdogs nipping at the heels of the elite – so as to ensure political and corporate interests are held responsive to the shifting dictates of public opinion.

Flash-forward to today, however, and these laudable platitudes about media and civic empowerment – for that is how they resonate to some ears – risk seeming anachronistic. One may point to examples where the news media have succeeded in afflicting the comfortable while comforting the afflicted, to borrow a dusty phrase, but in the main they tend to be found seriously wanting in their fourth estate obligations. Public criticisms of the deepening income gap between the wealthy few and the vast majority of citizens (the other 99%) have continued to intensify as the global economic crisis grinds on, with state-imposed austerity measures producing severe hardship for many of society's most vulnerable. Social antagonisms, typically receiving scant media attention as concerns in their own right, are no longer hidden in plain sight – the 2011 summer riots in several British cities being a case in point. Many of those declaring their pessimism about whether the fourth estate will ever halt, let alone reverse its slide toward irrelevance contend that corporate journalism is complicit in upholding the very power structures it ostensibly strives to interrogate and challenge. Lofty fourth estate rhetoric about steadfast commitments to fearless reporting notwithstanding, public trust will not be garnered when watchdogs seem content to behave like lapdogs much of the time.

More optimistic appraisals suggest that hope for a reinvigorated fourth estate lies elsewhere, namely with ordinary citizens. More specifically, they point to the emergence of what some commentators are describing as a 'fifth estate,' namely a realm of citizen-centred newsmaking (often labelled 'citizen journalism') actively supplementing – and, in some instances, supplanting – the mainstream news media's role in covering breaking news. Just as the British historian Thomas Macaulay observed in 1828 that 'the gallery in which the reporters sit has become a fourth estate of the realm,' it would appear that ordinary individuals and groups engaged in newsmaking are signalling the potential for a fifth estate to claim its purchase. Digitally-savvy citizens intent on fashioning alternative forms of reporting are actively rewriting the rules of corporate journalism as together they cajole, provoke and inspire news organisations to fulfil their public service commitments. Declarations that the fourth estate is on the brink of collapse are wide of the mark, some insist, when there is such remarkable potential for new, enriched types of collaborative news reporting to flourish in the digital age. The imperatives transforming what counts as journalism – and who can be a journalist – present opportunities for citizen-professional partnerships based upon mutual-respect, quite possibly in ways that will succeed in democratising the dynamics of media power in the public interest.

It is against this rapidly shifting backdrop, where the normative tenets of the fourth estate ideal are being reimagined anew, that we welcome you to the pages of Journalism: New Challenges. Beginning in the next section, we will offer a brief snapshot of its chapters, highlighting the ways in which each strives to encourage a fresh appraisal of the challenges confronting journalism today – and, in so doing, contribute to current discussions about how we may best proceed to improve the quality of news reporting for tomorrow.

Section One: New Directions in Journalism

The hacking scandal and subsequent Leveson inquiry have cast a spotlight on many of the challenges facing the news industry. Chief amongst them, some argue, is the steady decline in traditional newsgathering and original reporting over recent years. The combination of a technological revolution, uncertainty over business models, and global recession has created what may be aptly termed A Perfect Storm. In this chapter, Stephen Jukes considers how cost cutting and consolidation of ownership are reducing the plurality of the news offering, potentially undermining the ability of journalists to hold authority to account. It is questionable whether the growing volume and diversity of 'user-generated content' can compensate for the deficit in traditional reporting; perhaps we are even approaching a watershed, whereby the very nature of journalism will be forever changed. Even if public confidence in the British media can be restored, it seems certain that the uneasy relationship between traditional and citizen media will continue to demand revised conceptions of news and journalism.

In contrast with burgeoning newspaper markets in some Asian countries, several newspapers in North America and Europe are closing shop or reducing their publication cycles in the wake of declining advertising sales and readership. The proliferation of online news – offering free content for readers and cheap advertising for businesses – is a key challenge to newspaper journalism in the digital environment. While some scholars and journalists are ready to say goodbye to print editions in as few as five years, newspapers remain an important part of the wider news ecology. In The Future of Newspapers in a Digital Age, Shelley Thompson reviews several pressing challenges for the field, such as writing locally but publishing globally and finding a successful business model, coming to the fore as newspapers strive to remain a driving force in shaping the public sphere.

The role the international news agencies play in shaping the global flow of news is not always recognised to the extent it should be. These agencies produce a remarkably diverse news provision, covering a dazzling array of news events around the world for their clients – national news organisations, as well as governments and businesses – in ways which, some would say, defines the news agenda. Based in the United States (AP), Britain (Reuters) and France (AFP), the three main agencies have been linked to media imperialism in the eyes of critics, not least for their perceived influence in shutting out alternative, non-Western perspectives from developing countries. In International News Agencies: Global Eyes that Never Blink, Phil MacGregor assesses how these organisations have sought to overcome such criticisms, in part by harnessing the power of the internet to expand the range and diversity of their news reportage.

Broadcasters have always been more trusted than their newsprint contemporaries, but the digital age presents challenges to the shibboleth of impartiality. A tradition firmly entrenched in British broadcast journalism from the early days of radio news, impartiality remains a legal requirement in the UK. However, some journalists and academics are currently arguing that it is an out-dated principle in the modern media landscape. They point out radio and television channels offer a diverse spectrum of views, while the online environment is home to an even greater range of opinionated communication. In Impartiality in the News, Sue Wallace engages with the debate over the importance and relevance of impartiality as a key concept. She also considers claims that it is more honest and true to be a subjective reporter, and whether audiences are badly served by present journalistic practices. In so doing, she explains why, in her view, the convergence of media - including citizen journalism social media - makes it so important for journalism students and trainees to develop their own public persona.

The changing nature of the audience - against a background of increased choice and debates about the attention span of listeners and viewers – has put the role of current affairs journalism under intense pressure. Striking a balance between calling politicians and figures of authority to account with in-depth analysis of key contemporary issues while, at the same time, maintaining the interest and engagement of the audience presents a crucial challenge to journalists working for programmes like BBC Radio 4's Analysis and File on Four. Taking a historical perspective on current affairs radio journalism and charting its development from the old BBC tradition of radio 'talks' from the late 1920s, Hugh Chignell's Current Affairs Radio: Realigning News and Comment examines the essence of current affairs journalism and asks whether the genre can survive in a 'fast food' and interactive culture.

This task of holding figures of authority to account has resulted in a gradual shift over time in the relationship between journalists and politicians. The move towards a more adversarial style of interviewing presents a challenge to the country's institutions: in Radio Interviews: A Changing Art, Ceri Thomas debates whether the time has come to re-calibrate the political interview in order to secure continued public support. He considers the role of the radio interview on programmes, such as BBC Radio 4's Today, and - again with an eye to historical perspective - concludes that journalists working in mainstream media should reassess the style and conduct of interviews in order to operate successfully in a radically altered media world.

In contrast with newspapers, magazines remain relatively buoyant in terms of sales, but the rise of online and celebrity sites presents challenges with regard to packaging content and the fragmentation of targeted audiences. With a focus on consumer magazines and their evolving digital model, Emma Scattergood in The Changing Landscape of Magazine Journalism assesses the future for features journalists. She considers how magazines endeavour to promote specialised content in a challenging marketplace – including strategies whereby digital brands are cautiously developed alongside more traditional conceptions of magazine journalism in hard copy. Limited resources frequently complicate these ambitions, which means magazine journalists are under constant pressure to be innovative in their efforts to produce human-interest features that are certain to stand out amongst other magazines on crowded shelves.

Blogging and social media's contribution to a realignment of the relationship between journalists and their audiences is discussed by Einar Thorsen in Live Blogging and Social Media Curation. Journalists are facing challenges to preserve traditional standards, such as verification of information and sources, whilst also capitalising on the opportunities afforded by the immediacy, transparency and interactive nature of online communication. Thorsen analyses these issues through two case studies: one focuses on 'live' blogging and elections, and a second looks at the role of social media in the Arab Spring. He demonstrates how journalists face new challenges in relation to social media curation, whilst the emergent forms and practices also present a wealth of opportunities.

Familiar notions of 'the audience' look rather different on the internet. Our ability to track online audiences using technology creates an unprecedented opportunity to collect real-time data on what users do, and do not do, with news items. This type of information about users has begun to shape editorial decisions and development strategies in newsrooms around the world. In Online News Audiences: The challenges of web metrics, An Nguyen reviews this industrial trend and the challenges posed by web metrics to journalism. He argues that these challenges, if not calmly addressed, could deepen an already critical crisis – the dumbing down of news content – and bring newsroom tensions and conflicts to a new height. He contends that journalists need to foster a stronger professional culture so as to bolster their confidence and pride in autonomous news judgement, thereby empowering themselves to resist, wherever necessary, the sentiment of the crowd.

In The Camera as Witness: The Changing Nature of Photojournalism, Caitlin Patrick and Stuart Allan contend that the term 'photojournalism' is in a state of flux, its meaning being shaped by a myriad of changing factors. The chapter outlines several of the guiding tenets informing professional conceptions of photojournalism from the earliest days of photography, before discussing the rise of digital photojournalism and with it the economic imperatives shaping its professional ethos. Against this backdrop the key challenges affecting photojournalism today are addressed, namely the advent of alternative, citizen-generated types of witnessing. Especially worthy of examination in this context, it is argued, is the ongoing redefinition of photojournalism, particularly where professional and citizen news photographers are forging new, collaborative relationships in the pursuit of important news stories.

Section 2: The Changing Nature of News Reporting

The Leveson Inquiry has defined a new low in British journalism, sparked by the hacking into the telephone of a murdered schoolgirl. The subsequent revelations of malpractice have been legion. One newspaper has closed as a result and others may yet follow. Journalists and police officers have been arrested and charged, proprietors and politicians implicated. Post–Leveson, time has been called on Fleet Street's "last chance saloon" and in order to survive, the press must improve. In Truth and the Tabloids, Adam Lee Potter suggests that only journalists can save journalism, by acknowledging the commercial imperative to give readers what they want whilst accepting an absolute responsibility to give them what they need.

The relationship of trust between newspaper reporters and their readers, founded on a culture of checking facts and awareness of the law is seen by many journalists as vitally important in an age where the citizen often gets the story first. The judicial and public scrutiny of the press awakened by the Leveson Inquiry threw this relationship of trust into question, the subsequent findings generating a fierce debate over how best to raise journalism's standards. Irreverence and Independence? The Press post–Leveson presents a personal view from The Guardian's crime correspondent, Sandra Laville. She casts light on how the Leveson debate has influenced the working lives of responsible journalists; that is to say, those who would never hack a telephone or pay a police source for information.

Even though Leveson's focus was on the press, many would argue that broadcast news organisations have become risk–averse, even 'cowed' as a result of the Inquiry and its fallout. Broadcasters have also faced serious challenges of their own – the BBC, for example, has been damaged by high profile editorial decisions at Newsnight, including the programme's failure to broadcast serious evidence about the alleged paedophile Jimmy Savile, a long-time presenter for several BBC programmes. In Editorial Leadership in the Newsroom, Karen Fowler-Watt and Andrew Wilson examine how the BBC is seeking to educate its staff in editorial 'good practice' to avoid such scandals in future. They make the case that every journalist needs to assume leadership responsibilities, whatever their role in the newsroom.

In Investigative journalism: Secrets, Salience and Storytelling, Kevin Marsh argues that investigative journalism is a craft in peril. It suffers from pressures – not least financial ones - that constrain what is possible to achieve within changing newsroom cultures, often in detrimental ways. We mind less than we should because we suffer the illusion that we live in a transparent age, made possible by the web and 'data dumps,' he argues. In other words, we have come to accept the myth that thanks to citizen and social media, we can do for ourselves what investigative journalists used to do for us. This is dangerous for the public sphere, Marsh contends: without traditional investigative journalism that can disclose and reveal, point out salience and convene the public in large numbers around a compelling narrative, we cannot hold power and authority to account in any meaningful way.

Factors both external to journalism and internal to journalistic practice are reshaping the dynamics of journalists' interaction with their sources. In Journalists and Their Sources: The Twin Challenges of Diversity and Verification, Jamie Matthews considers two sets of issues arising from these changes. First to be explored is the claim made by some researchers that the diversity of perspectives and opinion represented in news has been reduced due to journalists simply passing material on from their sources. The second set of issues revolves around how developments in journalism's professional practice (e.g., those arising from the emergence of new methods and platforms for sourcing information) are impacting on the process of source verification. The twin challenges of diversity and verification are discussed with reference to journalism's civic function in educating and engaging people in the issues of the day.

In News and Public Relation: A Dangerous Relationship, Kevin Moloney, Dan Jackson and David McQueen examine a controversial and sensitive topic in news journalism: the blurring of the boundaries between news and public relations (PR). This is an age-old concern, of course, but contemporary trends in journalism are bringing simmering tensions to the boil. Underpinning these tensions are divergent views regarding the effects on democracy of the 'colonisation of the media' by PR, the process of so-called 'PR-isation'. This gives journalism three challenges to face: the news industry is in flux as its rival, the

PR industry, grows; unfiltered PR is getting into the news more easily; journalists need to be able to keep news ‘PR-lite’ so that power abuses in our democracy can be reported with clarity.

The now frequent assertions that political journalism is biased, dumbed down, over-reliant on official sources and increasingly offering subjective commentary rather than impartial information have potentially serious consequences for democratic debate. In Political Reporting: Enlightening Citizens or Undermining Democracy?, Darren Lilleker and Mick Temple explore some of the issues surrounding the reporting of British politics, and in particular the media coverage of the 2010 general election, in order to examine challenges to political journalism’s democratic role. They conclude that the nature of the relationship between politicians and journalists needs more reportorial independence as well as less mutual suspicion and cynicism. Establishing and maintaining that essential balance is essential for an informed populace, inviting further reflection on how political journalism will have to change to better serve the citizenry.

All journalists have to engage with social media, but arguably nowhere more so than in sports reporting. In Social Media and Sports Journalism, Louise Matthews and Daniel Anwar focus on the use of Twitter by football journalists, considering its effects on traditional news practice. Interviews with national and international football journalists reveal how Twitter has affected the way in which they report the news, and why it is now considered to be an essential tool for sports reporters. As well as reporting, it has other uses, including driving audience trends, increasing audience recognition and loyalty by establishing a profile or brand, and allowing effective audience interaction with journalists to inform and feedback on reporting. Alongside this, key academic concepts such as gate-keeping are outlined, suggesting that the use of social media is redefining what counts as good practice.

A perceived crisis of public trust has prompted journalists to scrutinise themselves and their craft, but a landscape of job cuts, changing working practices and the inexorable rise of social media have created an atmosphere of insecurity. In Journalism as a Profession – Careers and Expectations, Vanessa Edwards looks at how the working lives of journalists have been changed dramatically and with great speed – gone is the concept of a career for life, when a journalist trained with a news organisation and retired with a company pension forty years later. Short term contracts and freelance portfolios are now the order of the day: this presents challenges to a new generation of trainee journalists as well as to the news organisations seeking to develop reporting teams and to nurture editorial responsibility.

Freelance journalism is facing a serious challenge: there isn't enough work to go around. With ever-growing numbers of freelancers – some through choice, more through necessity – there is a surfeit of journalists willing to supply quality news reporting in a market that doesn't appear to have sufficient demand to generate the revenue to support it. So the challenges for any freelancer are simple: where is the work, where is the money and where is the future? In Entrepreneurial Journalism: The Life of the Freelance, Mary Evans explores the industry from the perspective of freelancers and those who would employ them, as well as taking an overview of a sector both besieged by – and finding salvation within – advances in new media.

Section 3: Debates and Controversies in Journalism

In News and Free Speech, Barry Richards argues that the key challenge to the freedom of journalism in liberal democracies is not from the threat of censorship by an overbearing state, although state censorship remains in force, but from several other threats to freedom of speech. These come from commercial interests, from constraining tendencies within journalism itself, and perhaps most disturbingly from vigilantes who threaten violence to demand that certain things are not said. Meeting this challenge requires journalists to know what drives these threats, and how to respond to them. Therein lies a major difficulty, that of how to resolve the classic liberal dilemma: what do we do when freedom of speech threatens harm to others?

The emergence of celebrity culture and modern journalism is the focus of Navigating the Stars: the Challenges and Opportunities of Celebrity Journalism. Nathan Farrell looks at the relationships between the organisations of societies and the types of famous people found in those societies and uses this as a means of arguing that celebrity journalism has much to tell us about contemporary culture. This chapter unpacks concepts such as 'tabloidization' and 'democratainment' and uses them to assess the democratic potential of celebrity journalism through its capacity to open up political debate to greater sections of the populace. However, Farrell also highlights some of the challenges this creates for journalists, namely: the limits to the democratic potential of celebrity journalism in a market dominated journalist profession, the 'celebritisation' of hard news (that is, the increasing framing of hard news stories in terms of celebrity), and the challenges to objectivity in relation to the competition between media outlets for access and celebrity exclusives.

In News Documentary and Advocacy Journalism, Mathew Charles examines how alternative models of journalism are emerging to counter the news values associated with the so-called mainstream media – that is, news values that are increasingly criticised for serving only the interests of the political and economic elite. In particular, he looks at advocacy journalism, which focuses on a shift away from objectivity towards the arguably more ethical practice of attachment. What happens, he asks, when the ostensibly neutral, detached reporter, positioned outside of events in order to report only facts, finds him- or herself so immersed in a story that they are transformed into a campaigner calling for real social change?

The British press play a vital role in contextualising and re-contextualising important discourses of the day to its readers. In Moral Panics: Reconsidering Journalism's Responsibilities, Ann Luce looks at what happens when these discourses are blown out of proportion and create a moral panic. The chapter begins by introducing criminologist Stanley Cohen's theory of moral panics and folk devils before turning to consider some of the most notorious moral panics in British press history. It then proceeds to examine a recent case study of press reporting of suicide through this lens, showing the reasons why responsible journalism will take every step necessary to avoid creating moral panics.

Natural disaster, accidental death, hospital-centred stories, suicide, sexual assault and murder all dominate front pages and TV running orders. Most journalists - and not just those specialists who concentrate on reporting war and human rights issues - will cover trauma at some stage in their careers. However, the standard journalism training paradigm leans towards developing skills appropriate to political and life-style reporting, and thus has little to say on the reporting and emotional skills needed when covering human tragedy - the most challenging area of journalism. In The Trauma Factor: Reporting on Violence and Tragedy, Gavin Rees examines the latest developments in trauma research and the implications it has for professional ethics and journalists seeking to work more effectively with sources and colleagues affected by trauma.

In News Storytelling in a Digital Landscape, Vin Ray asks what effect the internet is having on long-form journalism. Can narrative storytelling survive the onslaught of byte-size data and the perception of diminishing attention spans? In response, this chapter looks at how the evolution of a number of new multimedia publishers is developing long-form narrative non-fiction. Still, Ray asks, is there a demand for this kind of journalism in an age of 'snacking'? Even if the demand exists, is there a business model that could sustain it? In thinking through the implications of these and related concerns, this chapter proceeds to look at how these new publishers are turning conventional models on their heads and, in doing so, creating good reasons for cautious optimism.

The internet has given journalists the opportunity to interact with readers and hold real-time conversations. Journalism conceived of as a conversation, rather than a lecture, raises important issues about how and why journalists should respond to online comments about their reporting. What should journalists do when they are criticized – fairly, or otherwise – about how they covered a story? Being part of the conversation is not always a positive experience. In You Talking to Me? Journalists and the Big Conversation, Liisa Rohumaa looks at the challenges faced by journalists and offers some practical insights into how they can respond to feedback, stay relevant to readers, make contacts and develop their role in online communities.

Time-worn conventions of journalism call for wars to be reported in an objective fashion. Still, issues such as patriotism, national interest, censorship and propaganda severely complicate even the attempt to be scrupulously objective. Consequently, much of the reportage from war zones presents a narrative that is mostly state-led – as much partial as partisan, projecting the enemy as the perpetrator of violence – and, more often than not, likely to exacerbate the conflict. Now there is a growing acceptance that conventional war reporting, with its stress on objectivity, needs a rethink, and that a more creative and conflict-sensitive approach is needed. After examining the challenges faced by war correspondents, Chindu Sreedharan's War and Peace Journalism makes the case for peace journalism as a viable alternative. He argues that unlike conventional approaches, it supports a richer and more complete understanding of conflict situations.

The emergence of pressing and complex issues that cross national boundaries has highlighted the interdependence between the global, the national and the local. As the ways in which we consume and produce news are changing, traditional notions of "foreign reportage" are being revisited. In Global News, Global Challenges, Roman Gerodimos argues that if journalists are to continue to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in the 21st century global public sphere, new forms and formats of storytelling and reportage will have to be developed in order to respond to the emergence of 'global news'.

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Our very warm welcome to Journalism: New Challenges. We hope you will find the discussions unfolding on its pages to be of interest. As will be apparent from this Introduction's overview, each of its chapters revolves around a particular challenge to journalism that is of pressing significance. In identifying and critically assessing its features, it is our contributors' shared intention to encourage fresh ways of engaging with thorny questions – new and longstanding - from distinctive vantage points. To assist in this effort, you will find at the end of each chapter a set of 'Challenging Questions' to explore as you develop your own perspective, as well as a list of 'Recommended Reading' to help push the conversation onwards. May you discover much here that stimulates your thinking and, with luck, prompts you to participate in lively debate about the future of journalism.

Section One:

New Directions in Journalism

1 A perfect storm:

Journalism facing unprecedented challenges

Stephen Jukes

"Working in a news factory, without the time to check, without the chance to go out and make contacts and find leads, reporters are reduced to 'churnalism', to the passive processing of material which overwhelmingly tends to be supplied for them by outsiders, particularly wire agencies and PR."

Nick Davies, Flat Earth News

"There are millions of human monitors out there who will pick up on the smallest things and who have the same instincts as the agencies — to be the first with the news. As more people join, the better it will get."

Alan Rusbridger, Editor of the Guardian

The "hacking" scandal that has engulfed the British press has been described as possibly the worst crisis for journalism in modern times[1]. The tawdry practices of the tabloid press and the disdain for basic ethics have been laid bare once and for all, both shocking and disgusting the British public. But behind the lurid revelations of phone hacking, the "blagging"[2] of personal data and illegal payments to the police, lies what is arguably a far deeper crisis – a growing decline in traditional news gathering and original reporting. This assertion may seem counter-intuitive in an age of social media in which consumers of news are bombarded 24 hours a day with information through the internet, mobile phones, iPads and every conceivable mobile device now carried by man. Yet the world of traditional news gathering is undergoing sweeping changes which could arguably undermine the ability of the media to hold power to account. The combination of a technological revolution, new (and as yet not fully understood) business rules, and global recession has created, to use a cliché, a "perfect storm." rules, and global recession has created, to use a cliché, a "perfect storm." The result has been a wave of cost cutting and consolidation in ownership. This in turn is reducing the plurality of the news offering, leading to an ever more homogenised news agenda in which news gathering is being replaced by news packaging.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that modern journalism is thus facing an unprecedented set of challenges – a collapse in public confidence, a decline in original news gathering potentially weakening its watchdog role, a decidedly uncertain financial future and an at best ambiguous relationship with an increasingly influential army of "citizen journalists." Will the enormous and diverse volume of "user generated content" compensate for the growing deficit in traditional reporting? Or are we witnessing a watershed in history, a point at which the very nature of journalism is changing and challenging the deeply ingrained normative values we have all take for granted for so long?

This chapter first examines the confluence of deep-seated factors behind the current crisis in what I have called traditional news gathering[3] and their impact on mainstream British media, particularly newspapers at national, regional and local level. It then looks at the uneasy relationship between traditional news gathering and the rapidly expanding volume of user generated content which now covers the whole spectrum of media platforms and information from showbiz gossip and rioting on the streets of inner London to the Arab Spring.

Whatever happened to the public sphere?

Testimony by media owners, editors and victims of the hacking scandal to the Leveson inquiry[4] has illustrated graphically the dirty tricks that some newspapers, most notably Rupert Murdoch's now defunct News of the World[5], have employed to entrap the famous and not so famous. It was the revelation that the voicemail of murdered school girl Milly Dowler was hacked by journalists that was one step too far and outraged the public. But these lurid tales have also served to underline the extent to which British journalism has become increasingly dominated by commercial considerations and, put crudely, the need to sell newspapers. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the current crisis is symptomatic of a much deeper insecurity in the industry and that ethics were cast aside over the past decade in the drive to scoop rivals and bolster sagging circulation figures.

As such, traditional journalism appears to have moved far away from the, admittedly, idealised concept of the "public sphere" that can be traced back to the Frankfurt School and particularly the work of the German social theorist Jürgen Habermas[6]. There is hardly a place for what Habermas termed rational critical debate in the pages of today's tabloid press, dominated as they are by consumerism, gossip and entertainment. For some critics, there is little evidence to suggest that contemporary journalism fulfils the role of encouraging civic engagement and promoting public participation in policy debates (Howley, K. (2007) p. 346). Journalists and executives at the News of the World went as far in the minds of some commentators to betray what News Corp's many newspapers and networks insist is their prime function: "to hold power to account" (Lloyd, J. (2011) p. 9). Rather than being participants in a debate, media audiences have become consumers, viewed as an audience, or fodder, for advertisers.

This trend is, of course, hardly new and dates back well into the 20th Century with the advent of mass communication of film and broadcasting which led theorists of the Frankfurt School to chart the decline of the public sphere. It is not the place in this chapter to outline the rise of popular culture and consumerism or to debate the extent to which audiences are passive, suggestible receivers of media messages or are actively engaged in decoding and/ or creating meaning. But suffice it to say that in today's media world it is often difficult to differentiate between information and entertainment, fused into one as "infotainment." In her study of Reality TV, Misha Kavka (2008 p.8) observed that "...information is increasingly harnessed for the purposes of spectacle and entertainment is more spectacular when based in actuality."

From Tandy 100 to Twitter

This trend of commercialisation has been exacerbated by the digital revolution we are living through which is rewriting the business rules that sustained much of the British media (particularly newspapers) throughout the 20th Century. Of course, every generation looks at advances in technology and predicts a fundamental change. More than 100 years ago, the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde described the ability of newspapers to create what he called "publics", bound together by mass communication and not by their physical location[7]. Presciently, Tarde spoke of the "indefinite extension" of such publics and the "transportation of thought across distance". In doing so, he foreshadowed the ability of social network sites such as Facebook to embrace global communities.

It seems incredible to think that when I started in journalism thirty years ago I was using a typewriter, "sandwiches" of paper and carbon paper which subeditors would "cut and paste" into shape, not very dissimilar to Tarde's experience of newspapers in France at the end of the 19th Century. By the mid-1980s, as a foreign correspondent in the Middle East covering amongst other things the Iran-Iraq war, I was struggling to master what Fleet Street was calling "new technology". In my case, this was a Radio Shack Tandy 100, complete with acoustic coupler. Given a good phone line, and a bit of luck, stories could be transmitted back to London, followed of course by a phone call to see if the text had actually landed somewhere. But if the phone receiver happened to be the wrong shape and didn't fit into the coupler, it simply wouldn't work. Soon after that the pace started to pick up.

The 1991 war against Iraq put CNN on the map, by 1996 America Online was starting to make a name for itself, and in 1998 the Drudge Report broke the story of President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky (although it has to be said only because Newsweek decided not to run with the story). The pace has quickened still further in the last 10 years. The 2003 Gulf War saw television correspondents reporting live from the battlefront by video phone. And then something else changed – the ability for everyone to take and transmit images via their mobile phone ushered in the age of user generated content or "citizen journalism". When suicide bombers struck the London transport system on July 7, 2005, television news crews couldn't gain access to the Underground tunnels. But passengers caught up in the bombing took pictures with their mobile phones and sent them in their hundreds to the BBC and other news organisations. It was a defining moment in British media. The same had been true when the Asian tsunami wreaked its havoc on Boxing Day 2004 or when Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in August 2005.

Today, news organisations have embraced, albeit with varying levels of enthusiasm and sometimes downright antagonism, mobile phone footage and Twitter to help tell stories whether at home or abroad, rioting in London or the fall of dictatorships during the "Arab Spring. To what extent this can expand the diversity of news sources and complement traditional news gathering is examined later in this chapter.

One thing is, however, clear. The mobile phone, in the hands of a digitally literate population, has fundamentally changed the relationship between the media and consumers of news. Under the old model, journalists would tell the public what they needed to know, when they "needed" to know it (i.e. when it suited them). Today, consumers of news pull down what they need, when they need it and how they need it. Sometimes, as in the examples above, they actively contribute to news gathering. These are today's "digital natives", a term coined by the U.S. academic Robert Prensky (2001) but popularised by Rupert Murdoch in a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) in 2005. There he set out the dilemma facing his generation of "digital immigrants", none other than the owners, movers and shakers of the established media organisations. "The peculiar challenge then," said Murdoch "is for us 'digital immigrants' – many of whom are in positions to determine how news is assembled and disseminated - to apply a digital mindset to a new set of challenges."[8]

Bumping along the bottom

Seven years later, the established media organisations are still grappling with that dilemma. It is abundantly clear that the advertising model that supported newspapers throughout the 20th Century has collapsed. Younger audiences have deserted newspapers for the immediacy of the online environment; this in turn has attracted advertisers who can more accurately target their audiences online and can better track the impact of their spending (Freedman 2010, p35). The global recession has simply compounded the problem, striking the British local and regional newspaper industry particularly hard. Sly Bailey, the (now ex-) chief executive of the UK newspaper group Trinity Mirror, spelt out this double-headed blow in her evidence to the Leveson Inquiry:

> *"The pressures on the business over about the last five years have been intense, and the businesses face two challenges. One, which is structural, as we see the growth of new devices… first of all we saw the internet and now we're seeing new tablet devices and smart phones and the proliferation of news and information on those sources. And, at the same time, the business has been under the most intense cyclical pressure as a result of the poor economy… we've been through the cycle and we're bumping along the bottom…."*[9]

To cite one example, advertising revenue at Trinity Mirror's regional titles fell in the year to May 2012 by 10%, with recruitment advertising especially hard hit and down 22%. Regional newspaper editors speaking to the same inquiry estimated that advertising revenues had halved over the past five years. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that when first faced with the challenge of the Internet, newspapers made two strategic – and with hindsight costly – mistakes.

Firstly, they believed they could protect their advertising revenue in a defensive move by setting up their own web sites. But advertisers, instead of transferring loyally their business to the newspaper online presence, found they had far more effective ways of doing business. Small ads for car sales and the like migrated quickly to specialist web sites, drawing on a far wider geographic market and offering customers greater choice. Crucially, advertisers have been able to target and track the behaviour of their customers in a way they had never been able to do with newspapers. Spending on Internet advertising outstripped that on national newspapers in 2006 and that on regional newspapers in 2007. As Freedman sees it, the Internet's "ability to connect advertisers directly to consumers without the mediation of a newspaper… raises with it the possibility that the historic link between advertising and editorial will be broken and, with it, the model that underpinned the delivery of news for many years" (Freedman 2010, p.39).

A second strategic mistake was for newspapers to believe that news would have a monetary value on the web. This too has until now proved to be in most cases wrong. So far only a handful of newspapers, most notably the Wall Street Journal and Financial Times, have managed to build up successfully a paid-for online circulation. Their's is, to use the jargon, "value added" specialist news about the financial sector, a far cry from the commoditised general news or infotainment offered by much of the tabloid press, most of which is available online for free. It remains to be seen whether newspaper owners such as Murdoch can turn the back the clock on 15 years of free news on the web and persuade enough customers to pay for an online edition of The Times. That is likely to be an uphill struggle, as Sly Bailey observed shortly after Murdoch announced his "paywall":

> *"It won't be possible to charge for general content, I can't see why people would pay for high quality content when it is free elsewhere ..."*[10]

To be fair, the jury is still out on the attempts of newspapers such as The Times, The Guardian and The New York Times to build a paying online customer base. The sudden global success of Apple's iPad, with its large touch screen and ability to display high resolution photographs and graphics, has given the industry new hope. But that aside, the past five years have been dominated by falling advertising revenues, falling newspaper circulations, cuts, consolidation of operations and closures.

Circulations of UK national newspapers have been in constant decline over the past decade, actually well before the arrival of online news. According to Audit Bureau of Circulations data, the Times had an average daily circulation at the end of 2011 of 409,000 compared with 726,000 in January 2000. The Sun has shrunk to 2.53 million from 3.6 million while The Daily Mirror has more than halved to 1.1 million from 2.3 million. Faced with a dramatic loss of advertising and circulation revenues, many newspaper groups have turned to cost-cutting. In the three months between Trinity Mirror's Sly Bailey submitting written evidence to the Leveson Inquiry and her actual appearance before it the number of regional titles in the group had fallen from 160 to 140. Another regional group, Johnston Press (which took down paywalls at six of its titles after a three-month trial in 2010) cut 1,130 staff in 2008 and reduced headcount by further 768 in 2010. The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) estimates that between the end of 2008 and mid-2010 some 8,800 jobs have been lost in UK newspapers while 54 offices have been closed[11]. In its Journalism Matters campaign, launched in 2007, the NUJ did not mince its words, stating:

> *"The major media conglomerates have been falling over each other to be the most brutal in slashing staff numbers to impress the shareholders."*

Further consolidation in the UK regional newspaper industry is an inevitability, according to a report by media analysis firm Enders published in April 2011[12]. Enders argued that any recovery in advertising revenues would benefit national newspapers or television at the expense of regional titles. Enders predicted there would be "even fewer massive corporate entities, perhaps as a few as one or two within a few years", and a "long tail of small players".

Consequences for news gathering: an era of "churnalism"

This economic storm has had a devastating impact on the craft of journalism and traditional news gathering. In 2009, Nick Davies, an investigative journalist with The Guardian who has played a major role in exposing tabloid phone hacking, broke the taboo that dog does not eat dog by writing a scathing book about the state of the media. Entitled Flat Earth News, it sets out Davies's central argument that less and less original news is being generated. Partly because of the cost cutting that has been examined earlier in this chapter and partly because of the need for speed, fewer stories are being written, fewer stories are being checked and increasingly newspapers are falling back on agency copy (within the UK principally from the Press Association) and public relations material. Davies (2009: 59) states:

> *"This is churnalism. This is journalists failing to perform the simple basic functions of their profession; quite unable to tell their readers the truth about what is happening on their patch. This is journalists who are no longer out gathering news but who are reduced instead to passive processors of whatever*

material comes their way, churning out stories, whether real events or PR artifice, important or trivial, true or false."

This damning verdict on the media is supported by academic research that Davies commissioned for the book at Cardiff University. Their researchers examined the news sections of five mainstream newspapers, The Guardian, The Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Independent and The Daily Mail. They found that 60 per cent of stories were wholly or partly made up copy either taken from the Press Association of from public relations agencies. A further 20 per cent of stories contained clear elements from these sources. In fact, the researchers were only able to state with any certainty that 12 per cent of the copy was original and generated by a newspaper's own staff. That shocking finding illustrates the extent to which the content of today's newspapers has been reduced to a commodity and has become infiltrated by PR. The term coined by Davies, "churnalism" has stuck and has major implications in assessing the ability of today's press to perform the function of holding power to account.

These cost cuts have led regional newspapers to introduce "hubs" or "print centres" where junior journalists often spend their time repackaging the same story in various formats – print, streaming audio and video – for several editions across large swathes of territory. Michael Williams (2011), a former News Corp executive turned academic, describes in scathing terms the environment young journalists encounter today:

"These days, young journalists who thought they might occasionally leave the office to talk to real people are disappointed to find themselves shackled to their computers, where they recycle stories and quotes off the Internet like grey water in a sewage plant."

The news output is reduced to the lowest common denominator of "a low-grade package of TV, 'lifestyle' and celebrity coverage and heavy reliance on press releases which are frequently published verbatim and unchecked" (2011: 42). The logic of the market and often the need to satisfy shareholders has had a similar impact in reducing the number of foreign correspondents for national newspapers. Although this chapter does not examine broadcasting, similar cost cutting at the BBC and commercial companies alike means that 24-hour news channels often opt for talking heads or – for conflict coverage - "arm chair generals" as an alternative to original news gathering in the field.

Phillips (2010) argues that the Internet, by increasing the availability of information, in theory at least creates better opportunities for checking material, finding alternative sources and improving the reliability, independence and therefore the democratic and cultural relevance of newspapers. The reality is, however, different. She concludes that the speeding up of modern news reporting and the need to be visible online is impacting negatively on the quality of following up routine news items, adding:

> *"It would seem that ... far from broadening and democratizing, the Internet is actually narrowing the perspective of many reporters."*

Rather than leading to an increase in original news gathering, many journalists play safe by cannibalizing copy from other newspaper online offerings for fear of missing a story. The result adds further to the homogenisation of news content. Andrew Currah (2009), an Oxford lecturer specialising in the digital economy, concluded that increasing commercial pressures driven by the technological revolution are undermining the business models that pay for news and threaten "to hollow out the craft of journalism and adversely impact the quality and availability of independent factual journalism in Britain."

The Media lose control

In addition to its economic impact, the revolution in technology has contributed to a fundamental shift in power away from media organisations towards ordinary citizens. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair, in his parting shot at the media in 2007, spoke of "a radical change in the nature of communication."[13] The Media, he said, were no longer the masters of this change but its victims. He went on to bemoan the impact of web-based news, blogs and 24-hour news channels to draw the conclusion that standards were unravelling. He spoke of a "Media that increasingly, and to a dangerous degree, is driven by impact." So did Blair call it right? Certainly he didn't pull his punches but nor did he really address the idea that there may be some sort of trade-off or relationship between traditional news gathering and "new media" or "user generated content."

Clearly, instant communication is often driven by image, is emotionally charged and can be superficial when compared to an analytical newspaper story. On the other hand, it is certainly true that such technology in the hands of citizens has delivered a wealth of content we would never have otherwise seen. Only five years ago, Blair was referring to blogs as the latest invention. Today, we can see the impact of Twitter, a global phenomenon in its infancy when his speech was made. Twitter, where messages are limited to 140 characters, was launched in 2006 and had just 400,000 "tweets" posted per quarter in 2007. Today the volume is estimated at more than 300 million tweets *per day*[14]. That dynamic, like so many technological advances before it, has had a profound impact on the news industry both at home and, perhaps most spectacularly, abroad.

This chapter has already noted how traditional media organisations have been anxious to embrace mobile phone footage and blogs at a time of crisis such as the 2004 Asian tsunami or 2005 London bombings. But Twitter has catapulted this onto another scale as its role in the Arab Spring has shown. Twitter has become both an organising tool for protestors (whether on the streets of Cairo, Tehran or London) and a reporting tool for citizens frustrated by what abroad has often been state controlled media. As such, Twitter has blurred boundaries still further as "Twitter streams" related to a single topic combine seamlessly information from citizens and reporting from mainstream media organisations; fact and opinion; objective and subjective viewpoints; news and entertainment. In a fashion far more extreme than imagined by Blair, Twitter has produced "hybrid and networked publics of journalists and citizens working concurrently" (Papacharissi & Oliveira 2011: 13). Even news organisations have contributed to the blurring of boundaries through their own "tweets", partly in the form of traditional breaking news and partly in the form of comments from individual correspondents. So just what is this stream of information? Does it stack up when judged by traditional news values of being fair, objective and free from bias? Does this user generated content stand alone or is it, at best, complementary to a traditional feed of news about a specific subject?

Papacharissi and Oliveira, in their study of the coverage of the Egyptian uprising, found that this particular Twitter stream reflected "a mix of traditional news values and values specific to the platform of Twitter" (2011: 14). Information that was not deemed by participants in the stream to be relevant was not re-tweeted and so tended to lose significance (much in a way less important information is relegated to the bottom of a traditional news story or is cut out altogether). But other features were not necessarily compatible with normative news values. The instantaneous nature of communication may mimic breaking news but also militates against fact checking and is often very subjective. Many tweets expressed solidarity with the uprising, making it difficult to separate fact from expressions of camaraderie. Above all, tweets blended "emotion with opinion and drama with fact" reflecting deeply subjective accounts and interpretations of events (2011: 21). While this study focused on one of the top foreign stories of 2011, the Twitter streams that captured the same year's London riots displayed a similar mix of fact and fiction, rumour mongering, scare mongering and – in cases – incitement to violence.

Twitter has one other blurring feature – it deeply divides practising journalists. The Guardian Editor-in Chief Alan Rusbridger has said that anyone who believes that Twitter has nothing to do with the news business is misguided. It is, he said, a highly effective way of spreading ideas, information and content and where things happen first:

> *"News organisations still break lots of news. But, increasingly, news happens first on Twitter. If you're a regular Twitter user, even if you're in the news business and have access to wires, the chances are that you'll check out many rumours of breaking news on Twitter first. There are millions of human monitors out there who will pick up on the smallest things and who have the same instincts as the agencies — to be the first with the news. As more people join, the better it will get."*[15]

Love it or hate it, Twitter has become a major new factor in shifting the power relationship between the news industry and the public. Instead of waiting to be told what is news by the experts, journalists, the playing field has been levelled in what is essentially a peer-to-peer model (as opposed to a traditional one-to-many model).

Change is here to stay

The combination therefore of technological and economic change has thrown the news industry into flux. The ravages of cost cutting as newspaper advertising and circulation figures drop have led to journalist job losses, fewer regional titles and a shrinking volume of traditional news gathering. As the Leveson Inquiry has shown, the intense pressure to sell newspapers has forced some tabloid journalists to cut corners and jettison the most basic code of ethics in their quest for scoops. Cast adrift in this storm, mainstream news organisations are caught between the fear of the Internet and the hopes that they can navigate their way to safety by embracing it. It is this uneasy relationship between the straitjacket of traditional reporting and liberating potential of user generated content that characterises today's news environment. On the one hand, the Internet opens up new ways of presenting content in multi-media formats, new ways of generating stories, of accessing sources and of contacting a global audience. It would not be the first time that newspapers have adapted to ensure their survival faced, as they have been, with challenges throughout the 20th century from newsreels, radio and television. On the other hand, the drive for instant communications can lead to less fact checking, more errors, "churnalism", a heavy reliance on news agencies and press releases and an increasingly homogenised news offering. In such an environment, journalists become packagers of content rather than investigators of stories.

This messy combination of opportunities and threats (when viewed from the traditional values of western journalism) is still being played out. As Davies points out (2009: 395), bloggers and citizen journalists do uncover untold stories. But against that, he counters: "The Internet is also functioning as a kind of information madhouse, frantically repeating whatever fragments of 'news' happen to make it into the blogosphere, much of it nonsense..." This dynamic has almost certainly already changed forever the privileged, once omnipotent position of journalists. News is no longer the preserve of a chosen elite and the nature of news gathering is exposed like never before, "placing notions of journalistic objectivity and impartiality, the holy grail of professional journalism, under scrutiny" (Fenton: 2010). But however much they might be on the defensive, established news organisations still cling to these normalised news values. Mainstream news organisations "for the most part, decline to surrender their traditional editorial control, agenda-setting functions or gatekeeper authority when deciding who is permitted to enter 'their' news domain, under what conditions, when and how" (Cottle 2009: xi).

This chapter started out by outlining the main challenges facing journalism today – the collapse of public trust, the way in which new technology and cost cutting are combining to reduce the volume of original news gathering and the tortured relationship with social media and citizen journalism. It is true to say that the history of Anglo-American media over the past 150 years shows that every generation of journalists has tended to view technological advances or structural shifts in the industry as a threat to their profession and values. In America, the "penny press" newspapers of the 19th Century were accused of vulgarity and sensationalism by the establishment press, in the 1950s newspapers and radio joined ranks against the new force of television, and in the 1990s the advent of the Internet in its first incarnation caused TV presenters such as CBS's Dan Rather to rail against the "Hollywood-isation of news" (Mindich 1998).

It may be tempting fate to argue that this latest wave of changes is any different from those in the past but it seems safe to say that this time the role of the journalist has been changed for good. Whether trust can be re-established lies, in the case of the UK, in the hands of journalists themselves and their capacity to build a credible regime of self-regulation in the wake of the hacking scandal. Only sustained investment by media organisations and imaginative new economic models will be able to safeguard the future of traditional news gathering. As for social media, the blurred boundaries between fact and fiction, objectivity and subjectivity, together with the inherent challenge to the established media, bring a diversity of view that deserves to be valued in its own right. This duality is set to continue as the digital revolution calls into question our established concept of news and makes the "Internet boom" of the late 1990s look positively Victorian by comparison.

Notes

1. For example, media commentator Steve Hewlett wrote: "The Leveson Inquiry, set up in the midst of quite possibly the worst crisis ever to engulf the press (and journalism) in modern times, has on the face of it a truly monumental task." Hewlett, S., 2011. PCC2 can learn a lot about privacy from TV. British Journalism Review, 22 (4), 23.
2. Blagging is the practice of obtaining under false pretences private information such as health and phone records.
3. I have used this term to refer to news gathering by journalists employed on or working for mainstream news organisations. It stands in contrast to "citizen journalism" which tends to be used in reference to members of the public. In an age of blurring boundaries, many definitions have been attempted. According to Stuart Allan (2006), writing about the history of citizen journalism in Citizen Journalism – Global Perspectives, it is "more often that not associated with a particular crisis event… it is described variously as grassroots journalism, open source journalism, participatory journalism, hyperlocal journalism, distributed journalism or networked journalism, as well as user generated content…"
4. The Prime Minister David Cameron announced a two-part inquiry investigating the role of the press and police in the phone-hacking scandal on 13 July 2011. The inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the press and has been chaired by Lord Justice Leveson.
5. News International's News of the World, Britain's best selling Sunday newspaper with a circulation of 2.8 million, was closed on 10 July 2011.
6. The concept of the public sphere is most closely associated with Jürgen Habermas and his influential work first published in 1962 The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. It is for Habermas instrumental in the constitution of a liberal democratic society.
7. Tarde, writing in L'Opinion et La Foule, translated as The Public and the Crowd, originally published in 1901. A compilation of his works can be found in Clarke, N., 1969. Gabriel Tarde on Communication and Social Influence – Selected Papers. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
8. Rupert Murdoch, Speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), 13 April 2005. www.newscorp.com/news/news_247.html
9. Evidence to the Leveson Inquiry 16 January 2012. Transcript p.81 http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/evidence/?witness=sly-bailey
10. Sly Bailey, quoted in The Guardian, 4 March 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/mar/04/sly-bailey-trinity-mirror-paywalls

11. See NUJ campaign “mash-up”: http://maps.google.co.uk/maps/ms?hl=en&safe=off&ie=UTF8&msa=0&msid=116069118730922972880.00045d5ef442b3823ae51&ll=54.316523,-3.55957&spn=8.980297,18.676758&z=5&source=embed
12. Enders Analysis, 2011. Regional Press left behind in Media Bounceback http://www.endersanalysis.com/content/publication/regional-press-left-behind-media-bounceback
13. Former Prime Miniser Tony Blair speech on public life, 12 June 2007. Full text: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6744581.stm
14. According to TechCrunch, 30 June 2011, http://techcrunch.com/2011/06/30/twitter-3200-million-tweets/
15. Alan Rusbridger, Andrew Olle lecture 2010 given in Sydney, Australia on 19 November 2010. http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/nov/19/open-collaborative-future-journalism

Challenging Questions

- One of the traditional roles of the media is considered to be the ability to hold authority to account. Does the advent of social media make this task easier or more difficult?
- Governments and corporations are often accused of using “spin” to manipulate public opinion through the media. Have the changes in today’s media landscape made this easier or more difficult for those wishing to “manage” a message?
- Should we see the rise of “citizen journalism” as a threat to journalism and traditional news values of objectivity, impartiality and freedom from bias?

Recommended reading

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Currah, A. (2009) *What’s Happening to our News: an Investigation into the likely Impact of the Digital Revolution on*

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Rusbridger, A. (2010) Andrew Olle lecture given in Sydney, Australia on 19 November 2010. Full text available on: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/nov/19/open-collaborative-future-journalism

Williams, M. (2011) I've Seen the Future and it's Crap, *British Journalism Review*, 22 (4), p37-46.

2 The Future of Newspapers

Shelley Thompson

"The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

Thomas Jefferson (1757)

"Every time a newspaper dies, even a bad one, the country moves a little closer to authoritarianism; when a great one goes, like the New York Herald Tribune, history itself is denied a devoted witness."

Richard Kluger, former journalist and Pulitzer prize winning author

Reporters for The Rocky Mountain News arrived at work on the morning of 26 February 2009 not knowing that Rich Boehne, the chief executive officer of Scripps (the newspaper's owner), would be announcing at noon that the nearly 150-year-old newspaper would be publishing its final edition the next day (Vaughan, 2009, Ryckman, 2009). Investigative reporter Laura Frank later recalled that when she learned of the newspaper's closure, she had been working on a news story about "gas drillers and welders and people losing their jobs". As it turned out, the story would never be published. The closure of The Rocky Mountain News left Denver, Colorado, a city of more than 600,000 residents, with only one newspaper. Its closure was quickly highlighted by media commentators as being part of a global trend where declining circulations - and thereby advertising revenues – were knocking one newspaper after the next into bankruptcy.[1]

What was happening in the United States, many feared, would soon spread to the UK. Here more than 100 local and regional newspaper titles have been closed outright, temporarily suspended publication, or been consolidated with other newspapers (Curran, 2010, Greenslade, 2011). The newspaper industry's ongoing struggle with declining readerships proved to be an important feature of the discussions prompted by the Leveson Inquiry into the phone hacking scandal, which reported in November 2012.[2] There it was observed that the trend of newspaper closures and staff redundancies, evidently at its height in 2007-8 due to the economic recession, raised significant questions about the very potential for newspapers to survive. Critics wondered aloud whether the days of the newspaper were numbered.

Even more confident projections of the newspaper's future conceded that it may not be too long before newspapers ceased to appear in their paper and ink editions. According to The Center for the Digital Future (2012), for example, print newspapers in the US have just five years left. Citing declining sales figures and an increasing pattern of newspaper readers going online for their news, the Center believes that few newspapers will continue to exist in their printed form. Only newspapers with a global reach like The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal, on one end of the spectrum, and local newspapers that publish weekly or twice weekly, on the other end, may prove viable in this format. A more upbeat assessment is offered by Phillip Meyer (2009), who gives newspapers until 2043 or 2044, a calculation based on declining readership patterns in the US since the 1960s. In the second edition of his book, The Vanishing Newspaper, he cautions that he is not predicting the end of print newspapers so much as observing a trend that may well continue.

Although some may be ready to write newspapers' obituaries, disagreeing only on how long it will take, others are not so sure. Piet Bakker (2011) reminds us that newspapers and their websites remain important and relevant today because they are the only media that primarily focus on news and journalism. Here a contrast is drawn with television, with its emphasis on devoting significant time to entertainment programming. Bakker also points out that globally newspapers remain a key source of news for citizens, with at least a quarter of the adult population readtable to be economically viable (Calhoun, 1992, Curran, 1991, Fraser, 1992, McNair, 2000). Beginning in the next section, we turn to consider newspapers' transition onto digital platforms in the late 1990s and early 2000s so as to provide a broader context to our enquiry. As we will see, it is useful to understand what newspapers went through at the time in order to understand where the industry is today, and where it may be heading tomorrow.

Going online

Online journalism, as advocates rightly suggest, has the opportunity to connect the public to news organisations in ways that foster democratic debate and discussion. Cottle (2006) points out that it has the potential to open traditional media to a wider variety of views and voices, which by definition would help to democratise news reporting. At the same time, new technologies have enabled citizens to begin publishing on their own and, in so doing, contribute to newsmaking outside of mainstream sources (Allan, 2006, Greer and Mensing, 2006, Matheson, 2004).

For newspapers, going online has posed a series of challenges associated with providing local content on a global stage. Newspapers, traditionally, have been defined by geography, but they are not constrained by the same borders when they move on to the internet (Thurman, 2007). As such, they face more audiences spread across time and space, which can present problems for journalists to meet the diverse needs of these audiences who may be in other parts of the world. For example, during the September 11, 2001 attacks, ordinary citizens sought out alternative perspectives in international news markets, including trusted UK news sources like The Guardian (Zelizer and Allan, 2002). The perspectives offered by news sites in foreign countries were more critical of the Bush administration's response to the attacks than US news organisations had been. Some were heartened to see such criticisms, while others complained such sites were anti-American in their orientation. Newspapers were becoming increasingly aware that their news provision was being read – and critiqued – by distant readers who would never see that day's print edition. This changing sense of their audience posed challenges for covering major events.

Before delving into these challenges in more detail, it is important to set out some historical context on the publication of newspapers on the web. Newspapers have had websites since the 1980s (Shedden, 2011), although the frequency and sophistication with which they have published online has steadily increased over the time since (Greer and Mensing, 2006). Early online newspapers offered little in the way of original content, often replicating only some of what appeared in the print edition and with few images, no real multi-media content. Since 1997, US newspapers publishing online offered an increasing amount of multi-media content and a greater volume of content overall (Greer and Mensing, 2006). The same can be said in the UK as the first online newspaper, the Electronic Telegraph (now called Telegraph.co.uk), was launched on 15 Nov. 1994. That first online edition was printed on a 'grey background and with tiny thumbnail pictures' and was not a 24-hour operation (Richmond, 2009), which would be strange in today's converged, 24-hour news environment where newspapers routinely use multimedia storytelling to report the news. Almost from the outset, it was apparent that the internet would expand opportunities for people to express their opinions beyond letters to the editor and vox pops, offering new opportunities for interactivity (Cottle, 2006, Allan, 2006). Today's online newspapers offer readers a chance to immediately comment on a variety of news and editorial pieces and share the news with friends, family and colleagues through social media, which would have been unfathomable just a decade or so ago.

Additionally, publishing online allows newspapers to break news in similar ways as their rivals in 24/7 broadcast news, which newspapers would not be able to do otherwise. Their online presence enables them to avoid the constraints placed on space that their printed editions face. For example, the opportunity to provide original source material online, including scanned copies of documents and reports or linking to sources cited in articles, represent major advances. In this way, greater transparency can be achieved (Allan, 2006, Matheson, 2004), thereby inviting audience members to decide for themselves whether to trust the information provided. It is important for the public to consider newspapers to be credible sources of information – otherwise their role in the public sphere will be threatened. Still, even when news content can be produced in a different way on the web, some research comparing newspapers' print and online editions have found that there is little difference between the two as newspapers reprint their offline editions on their news websites (Matheson, 2004, Pavlik, 2001, Scott, 2005, Hoffman, 2006). The idea of reproducing print content online with little or no change is known as 'shovelware', a term originally used in the 1980s to describe when software manufacturers would copy a game or some other content onto CD-ROM (and later the internet) without changing it in any way to suit the new medium .

Although newspapers can provide links to source material on other websites, newspapers tend not to provide them as often as they could do. Hoffman (2006) describes links to other sources, contact details about events, and other such content as 'mobilising information' because it enables citizens to participate in the democratic process. The content itself does not motivate the citizens so much as provide them with the opportunity to engage with their communities by providing information about ways to participate (a public hearing, for example, or public protest), names and other relevant details for individuals and groups, or tactical advice about how to get involved. Newspaper websites facilitate such social networks, in other words. That said, however, Hoffman's research also found that they did not provide more 'mobilising information' than the print editions. While things may have changed in the years since, there is little doubt newspapers are continuing to experiment with ways to enhance their relationships with their readers.

Hyperlinking to other materials and sources (organisations and individuals) is one example of interactivity that we take for granted today. Not long ago, the opportunity for readers to engage in e-mail conversations with journalists was the height of interactivity (Schultz, 2000). However, today's standards for interactivity go well beyond this level. What counts as interactivity is changing all of the time, so the challenge for online newspapers is to determine how to remain up-to-date with technology and how to use it to provide the journalistic resources audiences need for democratic engagement. Enhanced forms of audience participation helps to provide the newspaper with a deeper understanding of their own readers, which then feeds back into the news decision-making process (Robinson, 2007, Allan, 2006). It gives journalists additional information about what news interests audiences – both in terms of what they read and what they comment on. However, to merely provide news of interest to the audience – rather than news in the public interest – would pose a challenge to journalistic integrity and professionalism. Emily Bell (2006), former editor of Guardian Unlimited, remembered that during her tenure the online article that was most read was about the reality-TV programme Big Brother. This meant it was important for journalists to resist the temptation to focus exclusively on those stories which happen to attract huge numbers of 'hits' on the website. She argued strongly that journalists have a responsibility to inform as much as entertain the audience, which raises important implications for thinking about their professional responsibilities.

Returning to the broader historical context, newspapers in the early days of online publishing had to consider whether they were 'scooping themselves' if they posted a breaking news story online before it ran in the print edition. In 1997, the Dallas Morning News broke a story online regarding the trial of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy James McVeigh (Allan, 2006). The newspaper was criticised for the story, which alleged a jailhouse confession by McVeigh to his attorney, when the attorney, Stephen Jones, said the confession was a hoax (and later a defense attempt to get a witness to talk). Shortly after, Jones accused the newspaper of stealing defense documents and attempted to prevent publication of the story, although the latter was moot because publishing online is immediate (Rieder, 1997). The decision to publish online had been intensely debated – in choosing to run the story in the online edition before the printed edition, the newspaper was effectively 'scooping itself'.

In these early days of online news reporting, the newspaper's print edition was the primary focus of the staff's attention, not least because it drew almost all of the targeted readership. Also, journalists at the time (and many critics of online today still agree) were wary of an internet perceived to be filled with unverified information. Today, of course, newspapers regularly choose to post their content online straightaway. In 2011, The Guardian and its Sunday counterpart The Observer announced a 'digital first' policy, whereby they would prioritise the online edition over and above the print one (Sabbagh, 2011). This policy effectively codifies a practice that many newspapers appear to be adopting these days. This helps to ensure they remain competitive in a 24/7 news environment, although carries with it the risks that they may succumb to the excitement of speculation and rumour, and end up publishing before all of the facts have been nailed down (Lewis et al., 2005, Thussu, 2003).

Looking more deeply at the issue of geography, newspapers have traditionally catered to audiences defined within specific time-space limits, as noted above. Online editions of newspapers are not constrained by the same borders, which has posed challenges from the outset of the move to the internet. In the late 1990s, research indicated that about a third of visitors to newspaper websites were from outside the print market (Chyi, 2011). Today, some British newspapers find more than half of their readers coming from outside the UK. As such, newspapers need to consider whether or not to address these readers (and potential advertisers) directly, and if so, how best to do it. The Guardian, for example, draws approximately 56 per cent of its readership from outside the UK, including a significant portion of readers from the U.S. For this reason, it has opened a Washington, D.C. newsroom to focus on coverage of politics of particular interest to this segment of its audience (Chyi, 2011). The same can be said for community newspapers' websites, which see visits from individuals that were once living within the geographic area of the newspaper but have since moved away, may be seasonal or part-time residents, or business owners/employees with an interest in the community (Gilligan, 2011). This enables newspapers to maintain a relationship with readers who once were loyal to the print edition, but is equally challenging in understanding how best to serve their needs. Given that journalists take their cues for what news to cover based on their understanding of their audience, these considerations are significant.

Turning to citizen journalism and user-generated content – i.e., contributions such as eyewitness accounts, blog posts, digital photographs or video, or even simply comments on news stories - newspapers can find themselves struggling to be as inclusive as possible. Technology has enabled a proliferation of amateur news-making, whether or not the individuals involved would consider themselves to be journalists (Thurman, 2008, Matheson, 2004). Over the years alternative news sites have pushed stories into the mainstream news, including President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky (Allan 2006) and Prince Harry's service in Afghanistan, which made headlines in 2008. Both stories were broken by The Drudge Report ahead of news reporting in traditional media, raising questions about who qualified to be counted as a journalist. However, scholars have found that few citizen reporters working on blogs – those not associated with news agencies – receive much public attention over a sustained period (Haas, 2005, Nip, 2006). Additionally, many of the 'elite' bloggers are actually professional journalists, which invites debate about the boundaries between professional objectivity and personal subjectivity.

Although bloggers tend to look to traditional media such as newspapers for topics, some have the potential to set the news agenda themselves. Others point to their influence in changing the style of news reporting, not least with short, sharp articles that are easier to read. Some newspapers are using blogs as sources to supplement their factual content with a greater range of viewpoints or opinions (Messner and Garrison, 2011). Here it newspapers need to negotiate their relationship with bloggers, whether they are fellow journalists or simply sources in a more traditional sense. The latter is useful in certain circumstances, but if overused can leave the reader with insufficient information in order to make an informed opinion. As a result, many newspapers endeavour to provide the blogger's name in order to increase transparency in the reporting, once again an important consideration where credibility is concerned.

Publishing news online has opened significant opportunities for newspapers over the years. As we have seen above, it has levelled the playing field when it comes to the 24/7 news environment, allowing newspapers to break news alongside or ahead of broadcasters. It has enabled newspapers to open discussion sections and provide readers with the chance to comment on the news in a way that extends beyond 'vox pops' and 'letters to the editor.' However, as we have observed, it poses its own challenges and continues to do so. One of the most difficult revolves around the thorny issue of how to make sufficient money for online news to cover its costs.

In search of a successful economic model

Since the 1850s, most newspapers have relied on advertising revenue for the economic viability of their operation. And circulation - the overall reach of the newspaper in terms of the number of paying customers it attracts - is a key element to determining how much newspapers can charge for advertising space (Thompson, 1989). In an online environment, advertising revenue has proven to be a vexed issue, namely because there is no straightforward way to 'monetize' the traffic to websites. This challenge is compounded by the fact that the majority of newspapers available on line do not charge a fee to users interested in reading their content. Instead, online newspapers try to justify this free access on the basis that the sheer volume of readers drawn to the site will enable them to levy a charge, in turn, on advertisers hoping to attract the public's attention with their messages (Parrott, 2010).

Newspapers providing an online edition tended to think, in the early days, that they were opening up new streams of revenue, and understandably so. However, it soon became apparent to some of them that the online editions were causing a corresponding decline in their print edition's readership, which undercut their own advertising revenue (Parrott, 2010). This decline was especially apparent in classified advertising as early as 2001. Around that time, websites like Craigslist.com, which allows individuals to advertise items for sale, became increasingly fierce competition for classified advertising in newspapers. This is not to deny that online advertising has brought in significant revenues for newspapers, however, a trend which appears to be steadily improving. Newspapers in the US received about \$3 billion in online advertising in 2007, up from \$1 billion in 2003 (Newspaper Association of America, 2012). In the case of the UK, newspapers are similarly seeing a rise in digital advertising, but not enough to replace the advertising revenue that could be charged by the print editions (Oliver, 2012). For example, Associated Newspapers reported a combined £19 million in digital advertising revenues for the fiscal year ending October 2011 for MailOnline (the online counterpart to the Daily Mail), metro.co.uk, and thisismoney.co.uk, where MailOnline saw 12.8 million views in December 2011 alone. Compare that with the £82 million revenue for the free sheet Metro, which has a daily circulation of 1.38 million (Oliver, 2012). Still, the current economic recession continues to pose serious problems, making it difficult to project into the future with certainty.

Over the years newspapers have considered a variety of online business models, ranging from providing all content free of charge, at one end of the spectrum, to securing all content behind paywalls, on the other end. While those newspapers which have been successful with paywalls tend to be niche publications – serving the interests of a specific audience group, such as business people – most commentators seem to think that content cannot continue to be provided for free for much longer. Estok (2011) points out that unless newspapers find a sustainable way to make money from their websites, they will continue to cut staff, the amount of their provision, and other expenses so as to reduce their costs - and in so doing ultimately sacrifice the quality of their content. Although he was speaking about the Canadian newspaper industry, the same logic of rationalization arguably holds true around the world.

Amongst those newspapers electing to charge for their online content, a number of strategies are being tested. The Times of London provides no access to content without paying for it, even though some commentators speculate it is at a risk of losing 90 per cent of its audience and related advertising revenue (Filloux, 2011). Others have adopted a mixed-model, with some content available for free, but with most items placed behind a paywall requiring a subscription fee to pass, or a small payment per article. Additionally, sites like the Financial Times and The New York Times have opted for a metered paywall where a set number of items are available for free each month, after which readers must pay. Even in the absence of a general strategy, however, the number of newspapers attempting to charge for news appears to be growing. The Independent announced that it would start charging readers outside the U.K. to access content, for example. The Minneapolis Star Tribune has introduced plans to launch a metered paywall, following the example of The New York Times (Coddington, 2011). And one of the largest newspaper companies in the U.S., Gannett, announced in 2012 it would launch digital subscriptions for 80 of the company's news sites, except for its flagship paper USA Today (Ellis, 2012).

Meanwhile a variety of content aggregator sites, such as Google News and Flipboard, continue to aggregate newspaper content and display it via tablet devices and smartphones. These services bring together a host of news articles from across the web in a way that is as convenient as it is free for the reader. Quite how newspapers will build loyal audiences for their content if it is being repackaged in ways beyond their control is an open question (Thurman, 2011). The notion of personalized news, and its implications for the future of journalism, is an underexplored area of the academic literature today. This is especially true as increasingly individuals, young people especially, are interacting with news almost exclusively as it comes to them through social networks (both on and offline) (Preston, 2013) and services like Flipboard include an individual's Facebook 'news' feed as part of their news digest. Academics and news organisations (the journalists and the organization owners) will watch with anticipation to see how changing technology influences the ways in which citizens engage with news so that news organisations can continue to serve (sell) news to these individuals.

Looking ahead

Readers interested in the news - and the advertisers intent on attracting their attention - are increasingly turning to the internet, which has made for a challenging time for the newspaper industries in the UK and US. The picture has seemed so grim at times that both industry and academic commentators in these countries have made predictions about the end of newspapers altogether. Still, as Bakker (2011) points out, newspapers are 'not dead yet,' and nor should they be discounted for the important role they play in society. Bakker's point stems in part from China, India and some other developing nations seeing their newspaper industries flourish, with a host of new titles appearing in the last several years and perhaps more to come (World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, 2012). These signs of hope for the global newspaper industry should not overshadow the very real difficulties elsewhere, particularly in Western countries.

Hence the urgency with which the UK and US newspaper industries continue to explore new ways to charge for (and pay for) professional journalism in a digital age. Given that alternative news sites will likely continue to complicate their efforts in this regard, now is the time to rethink what counts as newspaper journalism. Perhaps the traditional emphasis on the print format, for example, misses an important point. Whether or not readers get ink on their fingers is less important than whether they have the opportunity to read high-quality newspaper reporting. As New York Times publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr. has said, 'Newspapers cannot be defined by the second word – paper. They've got to be defined by the first word – news' (cited in Gates, 2002).

Notes

1. In the US, other newspapers serving large metropolitan areas have also closed or ceased print operations, such as The Honolulu Advertiser in Hawaii and the Tucson Citizen in Arizona. In 2008, The Christian Science Monitor, a national newspaper, ceased print operations, opting for an online-only format. And more recently, the Times-Picayune in New Orleans, which received two Pulitzer Prizes for its reporting of Hurricane Katrina, announced it would cease daily publication in autumn 2012, reducing to a three-times weekly newspaper (Carr and Haughney, 2012).
2. The scandal erupted in 2011 when it was discovered that for years News International employees commissioned a private investigator to illegally tap into the phones/voice mails of celebrities, politicians, and crime victims. Public outcry at the revelation resulted in the closure of the News of the World, the resignation of senior police officers, the arrest of several journalists, and the opening of a government inquiry that considered the "culture, practice and ethics of the press" (Leveson Inquiry, 2012). Some commentators anticipated that one potential outcome of the Inquiry would be regulation that would limit non-EU ownership of newspapers, restrict the proportion of national newspaper ownership by a single business, and strengthen cross-media ownership rules, but this proved not to be the case.

Challenging Questions

- Considering the advent of citizen journalism and online news, debate the newspapers' future relevance in society.
- How has digital journalism changed journalism, paying particular attention to the effect it has on newspapers?
- Thomas Jefferson (1787) said he would prefer newspapers without government over a government without newspapers. Do you agree with that statement? Why?
- Newspaper journalism is a special kind of journalism. To what extent do you agree?

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3 International News Agencies:

Global eyes that never blink

Phil MacGregor

One of the things we have managed to do in the last 15 years is to diversify...... We have managed to maintain the value and spread the risk of our business globally across a whole range of markets and we are not dependent on say, an individual crisis in any one market.

Nigel Baker, Vice President of Associated Press (2009)

The evolution of the online news agency has laid bare the news industries' near total dependence on a few wholesale news providers and the limitations on public discourse that it inevitably yields.

Chris Paterson (2006)

When anybody reads, hears, or looks at any news today, they will almost certainly see an impressive proportion of stories first produced by one or more of the international news agencies – outfits that are global in their reach but until recently almost entirely outside the public gaze.

The work of these "wholesale news providers" permeates print and online media. Turn to any television news bulletin, and you are likely to see film footage that originated from, or was procured by, one of the three international news agencies. The more dangerous the news scene, the more that probability increases. Media coverage of warzones, and of any major incident in the world originates as often than not in the words, photos, audio, and raw film footage coming from three main international agencies. Even if people are now beginning to know names like Thomson Reuters, the Associated Press (AP), and Agence

France-Presse, (AFP) until very recently these organisations tended to remain well below the public's radar. The journalists who worked for them were seldom by-lined or interviewed, and rarely credited on the page or in film footage. The anonymity is part and parcel of the long history of the news agencies, whose ethos is to treat news first and foremost as a saleable commodity produced in bulk to be sold to their clients.[1]

This chapter looks at how the work of the international news agencies permeates the news scene, often creating an 'off-the-peg version of events' used extensively by news outlets around the world. It looks at three main challenges linked to the biggest international agencies, namely:

- Is news diversity threatened by the continuing dominance of the international news agencies?
- How do the news agencies deal with rapid changes in world power and new markets?
- Will the role of the news agencies be enhanced or undermined by the internet's shifting democratic and digital potentials?

In reality, the three major agencies –supply the media we see with volumes of news in all formats that outstrip all the household names by several orders of magnitude. The BBC or the New York Times are small in terms of their global reach and penetration. Thomson Reuters, for example, has over 55,000 employees in more than 100 countries, with an annual revenue of $12.9 Billion in 2011 (Reuters.com). Moreover, the international agencies sit at the top of a hierarchy of smaller agencies focused at national or regional levels (Boyd-Barrett (2010). They include the Japanese Kyodo, the Russian ITAR_TASS and the Spanish EFE, to name a few. In Britain, of course, there is the Press Association, which is based in London with several offices in Europe.

In considering how the news agencies operate, it is worth noting here at the outset that the challenges they face are becoming all the more acute in an internet age. Indeed, the internet has often been perceived to be a potential threat to the very existence of the news agencies. It's linked both to the protection of their commitment to public service journalism and diversity, and to the risk of them being side-lined by the news democratisation ushered in by the web. The internet is a global network of communications that replaces the agencies' own private communication networks. So how could the agencies cope in a world of multiple voices, of instant widespread access to publishing, and with the arrival of new players like the global portals, MSN, Yahoo, Google news? On the web there is the ability of regular media like CNN or any media to publish globally and in real-time. Add to that the vigorous new web-based aggregators and distributors like Livestation and Demotix.com. All or any of these and might have used the internet to undercut the agencies with their own news and videos, while the agencies' preserve of speed was eroded.

These new global communication patterns might have spelled trouble for agencies. They had previously been in a superior position with a 'top-down', vertical structure of news ('we tell, you listen') that characterised the pre-internet agency monopolies. With social media, and online communication between members of the public, the agencies' business model is at risk. More than simply being outflanked by the internet's deluge of voices, their market edge – dependent on copyright protections, monopoly and speed – was at risk.

Before explaining their fate in more detail, however, some background on the agencies is required, and with it a view of the academic debates that have flared around their historical grip on the news-flow of the world.

How the agencies created international news

The international news agency system has been a hub of international news-gathering and distribution for more than 150 years. Today the key names are Thomson Reuters, the Associated Press (and their television wing APTN), and Agence France-Presse. Bloomberg is a new and dangerous rival to Thomson Reuters on financial news, but so far has not made much inroad into the general news market.

The agency story began with a few individuals, some luck, and the advent of electricity to support communication. Pigeons, and horses had hitherto been the fastest way to convey news and information. In the mid-nineteenth century an urgent need for swifter information exchange arose, connected with increasing trade between nations. Startling innovations in physics led to the invention of the electric telegraph system.

The key was to find a code that would let electricity convey the alphabet. Telegraph's most famous founder was Samuel Morse – the inventor of Morse code – whose signal was in 1844 sent down the first ever telegraph line that joined Washington to Baltimore. Morse did not invent electric text communication but managed to commercialise his simple code system of tapping long and short signals. Such electric communication by wire was incredibly quick by comparison with the old methods. First pioneered in the early nineteenth century, cable began to be installed around Europe and the U.S.. It was the start of the electric era of communication, the birth of the so-called 'wired world.' Cable spread fast. By 1865 over 83,000 miles of wire in the U.S. alone was dedicated to telegraphy. Over ensuing decades cable laced its way through many countries and between continents. In 1852 a cable went under the English Channel. The undersea transatlantic cable laid in 1858 linked Europe and the U.S., while in 1863 London was directly linked to Bombay, India. The Pacific was traversed in 1902. Before that, it took weeks to carry information by sea between continents, so this development changed the game of news communication. It marked a watershed that can now be dubbed as the beginning of news globalisation.

The 'wired world' was rapidly taking form, networking the globe into one system. The international news agencies were founded as this revolution began. AFP was begun by Charles Louis Havas (with his name) in 1835 using a core of translators and correspondents – at first using pigeons to fly news from across Europe from Paris. In 1845 telegraphy was adopted and quickly incorporated by the French agency. The second pioneering agency figure, Julius Reuter, exploited the telegraph especially for global financial trading. An astute entrepreneur, he made his first mark in Germany using translators to serve European financial news to clients in Cologne. To begin with, while there were gaps in cable links, he dovetailed wire and pigeons to reach clients. In 1851 Reuter moved to London and formed the Submarine Telegraph office near the London Stock Exchange, selling news by wire to commercial clients and newspapers on the wire. His most famous early success was in 1859. He transmitted a speech that he had acquired from the emperor Napoleon III across Europe as it was being spoken. Its dramatic news that war was declared on Italy was a journalistic scoop, and perhaps the first real-time distribution of news in history. Reuter's wire network expanded at considerable speed, including linking to the telegraph news agency in Russia in 1857.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Bernard Wolff ran an agency in Berlin that rivalled AFP in Paris and Reuters in London, but it did not survive. Meanwhile, in the U.S., the Associated Press was launched in 1846 in New York to help five newspapers share costs of getting news of a war in Mexico. The news co-operative they formed blossomed despite legal tussles for control. Papers from more and more states became members. The agency grew rapidly and finally settled in New York. It was the first privately owned company to operate on a national scale and has never looked back. Now centred on the west side of Manhattan, it claims to be the largest news agency, with over 240 bureaus in 100 countries, 1700 member newspapers, 6000 member TV or radio stations and 8,500 clients. (FundingUniverse.com, 2012).

News and politics were intertwined. AFP was openly propagandist for French interests in its early days, while Reuters was blatantly pro-British, and the AP was influenced by the newspapers to which it belonged. More recently, the agencies have been credited – as well as blamed – for setting the global news agenda. They tell us what is 'the news'. As Boyd-Barrett (1980: 19) notes, "they have been one of the most formative influences in the very concept of 'news' in the western world." In other words, they influenced the way news is conceived and presented, packed in tight paragraphs, omitting opinion, sticking to 'facts, ' and using an intro paragraph or 'lead' as it's called in the U.S.. The style is predicated on the need for brevity, speed, and avoiding where possible offence to people of different beliefs. Also the telegraph influenced the style towards brevity, as sending words cost money.

Since the fall of the "Iron Curtain" in 1989, there is almost no nation the big three agencies do not penetrate, including China and North Korea, to which AP gained access in 2006. Shrivastava (2007: 135) explains their scope: "News agencies generally prepare text news so it can be used by other news organisations with little or no modification, and then sell them to other news organisations and non-media subscribers, like government departments, corporations, individuals, analysts etc." Effectively the agencies gather news in all formats, send it back to head office where it is edited and prepared, and from where it is distributed almost instantly to thousands of clients worldwide to any platform – TV to tablet. What clients get depends on what deal they have chosen. For video the process is a little more complicated. In countries where agencies have few staff and cannot shoot it themselves, AP and Reuters acquire video from local news organisations. So in the UK, any gaps in AP coverage are supplied by Sky, while for Reuters in the UK the job is done by ITN.

Despite an initial threat to their core business model posed by the internet, the western agencies appear to be surviving and thriving (Paterson, 2006). This is not to suggest their funding models are simple: AFP is 40 percent financed by the French state and based in Paris (Laville, 2010), the AP is a co-operative owned and paid for by a collective of the newspapers in the U.S., while Thomson Reuters is a commercial company quoted on the New York Stock Exchange, though the controlling interest is with the Canadian Thomson family. The Reuters Trust principles still structure its news provision, although some of the protection of Thomson Reuters from concentration of ownership has been lost: the Trust's original narrow restriction on the percentage of ownership allowed to any one party was burst wide open when the Thomson company acquired 53% in 2008.

These three agencies are mostly in cut-throat competition with each other. They must serve and please clients, and do so more than rivals if they are to stay in business. Speaking hypothetically, were Thomson Reuters behind the others by five seconds in publishing an interest rate change, some clients might strongly object for fear they had lost invaluable time for financial dealing. Split seconds count. Nearly every big agency story is editorially judged by reference to competitors' efforts. International agencies are in constant touch with their customers, finding out their news needs, and adjusting coverage to provide maximum long-term satisfaction. If a client asks for a specific event to be covered like an African footballer on a trip to Europe, an agency like AFP will look sympathetically at arranging it, so long as it is not public relations or compromising their ethics in some way.

Despite their financial and ownership patterns, all three agencies today pride themselves on independence, neutrality, and freedom from political interests. That means they claim to run stories without fear or bias, and without regard to whose interests may be threatened. When Reuters started publishing details of some Swiss bankers' alleged links to the Nazi holocaust, the editorial side ignored the whiplash of fury in the reaction of their Swiss banking clients. They did that for commercial as well as journalistic reasons, because to cave in to pressure would destroy their reputation. "Reuters trades on the impartiality of its news – the fact that it is not political, that it represents both sides of the story in that old-fashioned concept of impartiality and balance. If you undermine that, then effectively you would be undermining your own business," said a recent global news editor that I interviewed.[2] Likewise all agencies operate 'Chinese walls' with their commercial departments refusing to respond to direct commercial pressures. At least, this is what they claim in public.

What really happens is more subtle and complicated – because, even for state-sponsored AFP, the customer is ultimately in charge. Agency editors would claim that reacting to shifts in market demand, for example by covering more leisure, entertainment and sports news, is acceptable and essential, but crucially differs from censoring or altering news under client pressure.

Not that they never make mistakes. One recent error was of a picture of four iranian missiles being launched, distributed by AFP. Sadly for the agency, the picture had been photoshopped to ostensibly show all four missiles firing when only three had actually done so, a deception apparently practiced by the Iranian state news agency Sepah News. The doctored AFP image was run by the New York Times, the Palm Beach Post and Los Angeles Times among others. (New York Times, 2012). Digital dirty tactics duped Reuters editors in 2006. In a photo of an Israeli airstrike on Beirut in 2006, the smoke plumes were altered by the photographer to appear blacker. But these are exceptions that prove the rule of dedication to accuracy.

The ideal of editorial neutrality arose over time. Slowly, commercial advantage began to attach to reputation based on impartiality, but this process was only fully realized after the Second World War. Because they were born in the mid-nineteenth century at the height of the European imperial and colonial era, the agencies are part and parcel of the colonial dominance of the west, a fact which has excited academic and international controversy since the 1960s.

Controversies in the agency system

The international news agencies are linked by commentators to some of the key controversies and rival perspectives facing journalism and communication around all the word. The perspectives and theories include:

- *Media imperialism*: News helps stronger countries influence weaker ones – news flows from western centres to economically peripheral countries and carries with it western values, including democratic ideals, and consumerist culture.
- *Media domestication*: Media do not take spoon-fed agency video and text – they alter it and make it relevant to their local situations and cultures. Domestication includes styling and presentation as well as modifying content such as news angles, and omitting irrelevant material.
- *Flow and contra-flow models*: Rather than flowing in one direction west to east or north to south, global news flows back and forth in many directions. A flow one way may be matched by a contra flow in the opposite direction. (Hollywood goes out globally, Bollywood comes out of India back to the developed world).
- *Homogenization*: News formats are much the same wherever you look in the world. Whatever the media, news concentrates around a very few versions of a news story, with few original stories being reproduced many times in different global outlets.
- *'Dumbing down'*: Complex or intricate debate in news stories is removed or toned down so as to engage wider publics. For instance in health news, many of the 'ifs' and 'buts' and qualifications around medical research are removed by media to make it simple.
- *Public service*: The idea that news should be for the public good so as to ensure audiences are properly informed citizens. Sometimes that means publishing news that it is 'necessary' to know, rather than what people would like to take in at the time. It is an argument linked to the quality of information provision. Public service often includes a commitment to providing diversity in news, and catering for minority interests not served by commercial,

market-oriented media.

- *News ethics*: The label often given to the journalistic virtues of impartiality, objectivity, accuracy, truthfulness, and fairness that news media often claim underpin their work routines.

The arguments made regarding news diversity have had different manifestations. Media imperialism was a key criticism of news agency news systems for many of the last 50 years. The criticism suggested undue western cultural influence was being imposed through the control of news content and distribution, the effect of which – it was feared – was to influence populations in developing countries to adopt western norms and material desires. Agency news, in other words, represented a form of propaganda aimed at expanding markets and political influence. A political movement against this alleged information imbalance arising from western dominance began in the 1960s when 'non-aligned' countries fought to offset the western media by starting their own agencies – the most important of which was the Inter Press Service set up in 1964 (Shrivastava, 2007). This agency aimed to rival the western agencies with bureaus worldwide and employ journalists who would guarantee sufficient diversity in their news reports, thus resisting news homogenisation. Inter Press Services' success and that of others was limited. The media imperialism debate, therefore, has been characterized by some as a structural dependency of the developing world on dominant 'First World' countries (Reeves, 1993). The notion of western influence still resonates strongly in critics like Rauch (2003) and Bui (2010), who maintain there remains a tendency toward homogenization of all news cultures into one American-style model.

This imperialist perspective is less common today. It is now usual to talk in less emotive terms, replacing imperialism with ideas of news or information flow, and contra-flow (Boyd-Barrett and Thussu, 1992; Thussu, 2006), encouraging recognition of the many directions and channels for information to filter around various nations and regions. Another possible counter argument to media imperialism and homogenisation revolves around the idea of the domestication of news. That means that clients who take agency products edit them again and give a local national or cultural slant, adding adjectives, or further comment and information, and relating the news to the domestic audiences with cues they will recognise. This perspective emphasises how news is altered for audiences in different regions.

Academics have examined the agencies' coverage to see, for example, how much of their reporting is included in national bulletins, and also how their material is edited to reflect national outlooks and cultures (e.g. Clausen 2004, Johnston, 2009). In these views some domestication is taking place because it can be seen that a domestic slant and styling is being put on news and video, including perhaps a local angle or some further reporting to amplify local significance. (Clausen, 2004, Sparks, 1998). Domestication is not a full answer to the argument of media imperialism. Merely changing a lead angle or styling news in a specific way does not mean a story's core messages are altered, nor that the selection of what is regarded as news is really being changed.

Working against domestication is the argument that news homogenization is taking place when agency content is used unchanged on multiple sites across the world. In other words the same news is run on different sites, so the same stories go on Yahoo as on MSN, AOL or a host of news websites and portals. A body of evidence supports the idea of homogenisation too (e.g. Bui 2011) – that agencies' content is not domesticated but used unchanged in a welter of commercial news outlets and portals. Although the sites may present the news with their own labels and web designs to appear different, when you scratch beneath the surface there is little more than clever presentation that conceals an absence of any original reporting. The reason is of course that it is far cheaper to buy news from an international agency than to go out and get it. Paterson (2006, 2011) suggests that a 'myth of diversity' hides a homogenization of news and a reduction in the amount of original reporting worldwide: retailers like portals, websites, papers and broadcasters buy their news on contract, saving the huge costs of having their own reporters scouting news for themselves. He concludes that despite apparent choice 'international news still comes from few sources – the international news agencies' (Paterson, 2006).

Behind homogenization of news, which is the argument that the same news appears on many sites over the world, lie questions about the power of market journalism and political economy and the danger of 'dumbing down' (Franklin 1997, McManus, 1994). 'Market-driven news' (McManus, 1994) is often believed to replace public service news with trivial, cheap sensationalist news such as celebrity gossip. This happens, it is said, because the public prefers trivia and non-serious news and people shy away from buying serious content that takes an effort to understand – for example, grappling with how systems of proportional representation might work. In the case of the news agencies, it might be argued they are driven or tempted to remove public service news because they seek profit. They might be tempted, therefore, to rely on providing dumbed down content, because that is what increases their appeal to clients who directly server the market. Everyone wins, but trivia triumphs.

There is evidence both ways. The first point is that agencies do not rely on popular content to please mass markets – for Thomson Reuters the core market is financiers, while the French government is the second biggest client of AFP. Anyway, within the agencies themselves, there is a strong belief in the ideal of protecting public interest news. Laville (2010) notes that AFP has a mission to protect the public interest endorsed by its journalists. This opinion is shared outside the agencies: UNESCO began a drive to support news agencies in the later 20th century because it believed the national news agencies protect public service journalism (Boyd-Barrett, 2000). There are reasons why this might be so: the agencies' political and financial clients require hard information and a balanced and accurate worldview on which to base policy or investment decisions. News that lacks necessary complexity could be dangerous for them. They need nuance and depth, and are not as interested as some members of the public in trivia, celebrity news and gossip unless it moves markets.

Market orientation has also been given as one of the key factors in forming one of the most characteristic aspects of the agency system – the news ethic of objectivity in news reporting. In historical terms, the belief that journalism should be objective – that is to say, value-neutral – can be traced to the early days of the news agencies, particularly the U.S.-based Associated Press. The agency's prime purpose from the outset was to supply newspapers, its owners, with news reports in as neutral manner as possible. Signs of partisanship and bias were removed in order to allow the most chance for the uptake of AP copy by newspapers of any political standpoint. If a report seemed biased towards a political opinion, then clients with an alternative editorial stance might refuse to become the AP's client or stop subscriptions. So the less opinionated the material, the more likely is the agency to sell to the widest client base. The telegraph system also favours 'neutrality': Words cost money. That favoured dry factual reporting, with no adjectival comment. Fact-led copy was the cheapest to relay by wire. For these reasons, AP secured its position by using neutrality as a selling point (Campbell, 2004).

Reuters, based in Britain, developed a similar ideal of objectivity but it took time. They began by being closely linked to the British Empire. They would side with Britain in its wars, but at the same time they did develop a sense of 'public service' that was regarded as being consistent with non-partisan coverage (Read, 1999). Their output was to be suitable for any newspaper, prepared in such a manner that it would be difficult to detect a political slant, bias or agenda. Independence gradually evolved at Reuters as the main value they held to guide their editing principles and practices. Such principles assured them of credibility among its publics and clients, who could be sure that as far as possible nothing was included or left out because it might conflict with a national, business, or regional interest.

A well-known turning point for Reuters was the Suez Crisis of 1956. Previously loyal to British national interests, the company at that time openly distanced itself from the official viewpoint and declared its independence of any national perspective. So they no longer referred to 'our troops' but the 'British troops' for example. They preferred not to be identified with British interests, and the change happened at a symbolic moment of the visible loss of imperial power. Reuters' move traced and reflected the shift in global influence away from Britain. Clients and the business model came first (Read 1999).

Of course objectivity has its academic critics. Some like Bourdieu (1984) would say it leads to bland, boring news that lacks mission or purpose so as never to cause offence. In any case, neutrality is rarely totally possible: In 2001 Reuters refused to bow to pressure to label the 9/11 hijackers as terrorists. That decision might alienate the U.S. audience, but it secured credibility in other parts of the world. There was no middle ground. As Paterson (2006) suggests:

> *"Because the news agencies must please all news editors, everywhere, they must work harder than their client journalists to create the appearance of objectivity and neutrality. In so doing they manufacture a bland and homogenous, but still ideologically distinctive, view of the world. Stories challenging the ideological positions of the dominant political players on the world scene (in agency eyes, the U.S.) receive little attention."*

Not everyone would agree with such an outlook, however. There are patently many anti-U.S. viewpoints in agencies' news. But an example to support it would be the reporting of the 'arming' of Iran with nuclear weapons, (vigorously denied by Iran) in which the dominant reported view sees a potential nuclear-armed Iran from the U.S. perspective. Also the amount of U.S. content in international agency copy and video is declining, as will be seen below. This view of Paterson's (2006) contends that overall, the agencies and the corporate mainstream news media relay and therefore reinforce existing global interests: Their news lacks a progressive reforming agenda, they put corporate interests before public good, and they marginalize progressive voices because those are not seen as affecting regular politics and markets. In the opinion of Thussu (2006) and many others this dominance creates a moral imperative to create alternative communication channels, either rival agencies, or a non-commercial system of news supply to help redress the balance.

How are the current challenges met?

Despite the continuing revolution ushered in by the internet and web communications, the structure of the news agencies as businesses has not significantly altered. It is true that Thomson Reuters had severe problems in 2003, suffering ill-effects of exposures to internet technologies, and having problems defining their focus. They slimmed the company down after losing money on failed diversification projects. But the agency recovered and capitalised on the boom in the mid-2000s.

By and large the international news agencies have weathered the storms since 2000 by adapting their existing business model and keeping their core values. This model is simple: Gather news everywhere, in all formats, and sell it everywhere to anyone.

Thus agencies still gain most business by selling news and video as a saleable commodity to their clients, as they have always done. Indeed the internet has vastly helped AFP, because it uses the internet for video distribution. What has changed is that the agencies' client list has grown. They have cornered the market in selling news to many start-up websites and portals. High on the list of the AP's clients, for example, is Yahoo News!, who take large quantities of news and video. Thomson Reuters, on the other hand, still sells most news in text pictures and video to banks, and commercial clients as it always did. Regular media (BBC, CNN, SKY News) also take the product as before.

There are serious complications, of course. The reality of collapsing newspaper businesses is a problem particularly for the AP and AFP. Newspaper subscribers are a core funding source. Some papers have disappeared and many are too cash-strapped to pay for the services. In response, the AP has cut subscription costs by 20% to help keep clients (Paterson, 2011). La Provence, a French regional paper, dropped AFP in 2009 because the 550,000 Euro annual cost was too high (Editors Weblog, 2010).

Still, the agencies continue to operate with organizational flair, as Shrivastava (2007) points out. They have maintained their core model, and shown a flexible approach turning many technological challenges into business opportunities. Rather than being swamped or swallowed by internet rivals, they simply sell news products to them. In 2012 AP fixed a contract to sell its video feed to the Daily Mail Online, one of the biggest global newspaper websites. The AP has even done a deal with Spotify to relay music lists (AP 2012). Where the web revolution has led to contraction and losses in advertising revenues of some media, the agencies have moved in. The well-documented decline of television staffing, (Paterson 2011) is reflected too in other media who have also cut overseas correspondents. This plays to the agencies' strengths as they can fill the gaps.

Digital changes have had little effect on the traditional style of journalism that the agencies have always followed. That is to say, the agencies' professional conduct reflects much from past statements about agencies' ethical values (Shrivastava, 2007). The agency editors term these values as the 'age-old elements' of news that are based on accuracy and neutrality. Alluding to their traditional nature, one editor called them 'that old-fashioned concept of impartiality and balance' (Thomson Reuters editor).

As an APTN editor put it: "Agencies have a mandate to be balanced and fair and they strive for that in their output."

Of the senior editors interviewed for this article, none would accept that concepts of fairness and neutrality are applied inconsistently or have changed. A news story of an event necessarily evolves, of course, but balance is never fudged because a particular client's beliefs or preferences. News is not amended to suit religious sensibilities of different regions of the world. Great efforts are made to ensure that identical editing principles are applied, even though of course a particular story will be amended for its region – for example if disaster fatalities come from several countries, the story will prioritise the numbers of dead relevant to the client of that region or country. That is not considered to fudge the principle of impartiality.

The agencies still carve up their provision in much the same way as they have always done. Their commercial focus drives them towards translating the global event into regional terms. The destruction wrought by Hurricane Sandy in November 2012 was a major story, its significance requiring interpretation in ways tailored to the particular interests of different countries or regions – one version for Japan, one for Indonesia, one for northern Europe, and so on. Not all are re-versioned. A news story about a local political debate in Bangladesh may have little interest for Dutch news consumers, and vice versa of course. In other words, there is a delicate balance between journalistic priorities and geographic and/or cultural differences that require constant attention. As an APTN editor[2] said:

> *"What we send out and what we gather is thought through from the regional point of view. So the prime news bulletins that go out to Asia are edited and collected to reflect the needs of that region."*

Such an approach to regional segmentation is true for the other agencies. In the case of AFP, for instance, the Asian countries comprise about 14.5% of the total annual output of news (Laville, 2010). As indicated there is a relationship between the global story and regional treatment. This is part of normal practice, as a former Reuters' editor explained:

> *"We do edit regionally and that is important, but there is also*

a function when we all get together, regional editors, and discuss the story, so we are editing globally as well."

Meanwhile an AFP editor said: "We recognize that in our newsgathering and distribution efforts that the interests of clients in, say, Europe are different to those in, say, Asia." In the Middle East, Thomson Reuters editors point out that the notion of interest rates is against the Muslim faith and must on occasion be avoided, while the AP editors also alluded to the range of cultural preferences across the world.

The enormous challenge of the shift in world economic power and the rising importance of the East is being met by developing this technique of regionalisation. The agencies are concentrating on the new markets. For example, Asia has become the largest market for the AFP English service, and has grown vastly in importance for the agency. These adjustments and alignments reflect changing tastes and economic relations between countries and regions. Some parts of the world are getting much richer, with bigger GDP and much more wealth per head of the population, which creates and builds new news markets and more clients for the agencies.

Even the biggest global stories are often broken down to suit individual nations and local markets. Cultural interests and sensitivities ensure content supply is adapted to region, as explained by APTN:

"It's very important to be culturally sensitive [....] with any of our producers in London, for example, we try to make them realise that there are different cultural sensitivities and sensibilities. So for example, the Middle East might have a whole different raft of concerns to Europeans. Southern Europeans are different to Northern Europeans, and again there are different cultures in Asia where they might have completely different requirements."

The APTN editor has here highlighted how the look of the agency output in Asia is considerably different to that in the west. This would be true both of both hard news like hurricanes and tsunamis, and softer news about lifestyle, travel, fashion, and technology news, as will be explained below.

Shifting values

Among the core changes to news agencies' practices in the past decade is their perception of a widespread shift in what people consider news. The then APTN managing editor Nigel Baker said in 2009:

> *"Because people had more choice they can set their own agenda and that's resulted in an increase in information obviously for sports and entertainment. Our revenues from entertainment have doubled in the past five years. They are still not a large as news but the market research leads us to believe that entertainment is a strong growth area globally."* (Nigel Baker, Interview with author)

This reveals a widespread agency shift towards softer news and to a middlebrow rather than highly serious approach due to market demand.

If you look at all sections of the media whether here or some emerging markets – if you look at Europe or North America or Latin America or Asia and the Middle East – anywhere – the customers by and large want a larger spectrum of news, so in the world of commercial broadcasters there's been a response to the middle market rather than highbrow. (Nigel Baker, Interview with author)

An APTN marketing manager interviewed in 2009 echoed the theme of changing market preferences: "A trend is for lighter stories [...] a number of people said [...] we have had enough of Iraq and constant bombs – we are looking for agencies to provide us with more light and shade" to make it less "depressing." Thomson Reuters editors backed this same point: "We are more in the entertainment business now, this is a clear reflection through the media in the internet – more environmentally specialist issues, trade relations, entertainment. Sport is a big thing we do as well."

Some of these comments support the argument that news is shifting its emphasis to softer lifestyle news, which some people might interpret as dumbing down, because it could be seen as a move from the serious to the trivial.

However there are interesting market reasons why the shift to the middlebrow market may not have eroded some public service ideals which, as explained above, means agencies take care to include serious news that may have a narrower appeal, but which serve informational needs (even if they are really helping market decision-makers). By public service is meant the news providers' commitment to what people ought to know and for news that is not fashioned only to mass market wishes. The dynamics of the internet have not undermined their need to include serious news.

A key reason is that financial clients, embassies and politicians need reliable, varied information. To some extent such demand protects coverage of neglected or unprofitable geographical zones, such as portions of Africa. Despite their huge influence around the world, none of the major agencies enjoys a global monopoly. Faced with competition from other agencies, each "has to have something that is distinctive" (AFP editor). Focussing on different regions or zones of interest is one way for the agencies to stay different. The AP is strong in the U.S and south America. AFP proudly speaks of its coverage of African affairs in terms of the way it is valued by its clients, and therefore also for the competitive advantage it offers by plugging a gap that other agencies cannot fill. So even though covering Afghanistan was very expensive, AFP still puts a lot of their resources into covering it:

> *"….in Afghanistan, we make virtually no money. I think we sell our copy to a couple of embassies and Nato or whatever. But we put a lot of our resources in to covering it, because of the broader implications."* (AFP former UK Editor)

Another factor sustaining public service journalism is the stated editorial missions of the three agencies. AP stresses its commitment to democracy and its aggressive advocacy of the importance of transparency and accountability in government in its core mission statements, "making sure the public has the information it has a right to know" (AP, 2012) . These ideals go beyond mere market advantage and are embedded in the requirements of its journalists. Thomson Reuters openly state a belief in public service, and AFP statutes commit journalists to absolute independence and objectivity (AFP Statutes, 2010).

In addition, all three consciously aim to reflect liberal (western) political ideals, especially those of human rights (to life, political self-determination, to freedom of information, and freedom from poverty). The AFP editor phrased this as a commitment to Enlightenment ideals of universalism, reflected in coverage of gender equality and women's rights across the world.

> *"We report on human rights abuses, we accept the idea that there are human rights. If you read the stories about women's rights, you get the idea that women have them, and so on [...] I think that there's an unspoken consensus that stories about women's rights are important stories, valuable stories."*
> (AFP)
> *"These are time-honoured ideals developed over decades. The recent web era thus has barely affected the professional codes of agency journalism to provide unbiased information useful to the public. In fact when Reuters was expanding in the 1990s in the U.S., it made its objectivity a market selling point – to contrast with the internet bloggers and many U.S. regular media who take political sides."*
> (Former Reuters editor).

Agencies, UGC, and social media

Can the same be said for the ways agencies go about getting and filtering news and video as it appears on the web? Social media like Twitter, Facebook, Flikr, Youtube, and Vine pose new challenges to journalists, not least because 'citizens' can publish what they see and hear around them using their mobiles, releasing pictures and words to the internet as events happen. News agencies, with their significant numbers of staff and stringers, may seem less vulnerable to this new power of instant news than many news providers who have so few staff posted abroad. But there is still the threat that their impact will be stolen by bloggers or citizens on the spot who can upload news themselves. In a case typical of many, there was an explosion of Arab citizens media publishing pictures of Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi's grotesquely luxurious palaces when they fell, before any journalists arrived.

In fact, agencies like the AP have taken social media in their stride, helping to pioneer techniques for the use of social media in newsgathering. They are especially useful in dangerous places with difficult access for journalists. In the brutally repressed Arab uprising in Syria, for example, the AP delivered clients' video straight from the citizens of its towns, shot that day by inhabitants. It pictured fire, bodies, blood, and the merciless government shelling of civilians. This was a fusion of the citizen activists fighting for their lives, with direct 'journalistic' witnessing of events through technology. The AP takes the 'journalistic' content or editorial matter from the source – in this case the citizen with video – and distributes it after vigorous checking and verification. As AP said of its first Social Media editor, Fergus Bell, he "established a network of sources in Syria we could depend on for material and helped set in place a multilayered verification process involving AP Television, the Middle East desk's regional and linguistic experts and the Nerve Center." (AP, 2012)

Do we see something new in the relationship of news agencies to ordinary citizens engaged in 'accidental journalism' on the ground? The short answer is no. It is hard to interpret this use of citizen video as any new agency practice or relationship with news sources. The work is conceived by the journalists exactly according to established professional routines. Citizen contributors are treated as news sources, just as journalists would treat any other source or interviewee. When the AP considers how to deal with the citizen voice, the solution is to embrace it as content sources for its text news stories, video packages or rushes. The sources and content are subjected to procedures that fit normal news routines. First, the AP journalists discover the news by searching social networking sites, such as YouTube, rigorously checking what it finds for accuracy, to ensure that it is what it appears to be. (There are plenty of hoaxes on the web and pressure groups or governments with a motive to fake video especially to suggest atrocity by one warring side or another).

The checks are as stringent as in any other branch of the job – identity and place checks, triangulation with other sources, and the seeking of permission by direct contact with the persons who provided the video. Technical scans are then run on the quality of the 'citizen video' for more clues to its truthfulness. Only when the gathering and packaging is done, fully checked, does the job move to worldwide distribution. The content, enhanced with the AP name, is passed to world populations via clients. It is not foolproof, but its newly pioneered social media routines are entirely in line with traditional practices of journalism.

This routine absorbs the 'citizen' content into professional behaviour, and bringing to it the qualitative intelligence skills of journalism. The commercial value of the content is provided by verification. If it is mutual exploitation between source and agency, this is more of an unspoken civil trade between non-equals, than a sharing of journalistic identity. The citizen has not suddenly become a journalist, or an equal to the journalist, at least not in the journalist's eyes. The citizen source is as a provider – giving or coaxed into giving information – but they are not afforded any special or extra bargaining power or journalistic status, though they take huge risks. In Syria 58 citizen journalists have been killed in the uprising compared to 23 reporters (AFP 2013).

Bursting into the open

News agency technologies are adapting to global networks today, it seems, just as they were when they adopted cable communications in the 19th century. For parts of agency communications, internet technologies have moved to the frontline but the systems, global organization, and routines cannot be said to have been overturned. Nor has the organising system that underpins the agency business model been modified. As Boyd-Barrett (1980) noted over 30 years ago, the agencies show "remarkable" stabilities in the framing and categorization of news across time and place. Only in the proportion of news delivered to different nations and regions is there significant rebalancing.

But, the news agencies today are visible to the public in a way they never were before (Shrivastava, 2007; Paterson 2011). Gone is their secrecy, anonymity, and avoidance of the public limelight. The shift has been enabled by web technology. In the late 1990s two agencies suddenly started to publish some political and social news direct to the public in real-time, with little delay. Thomson Reuters and AFP can be seen on their own websites – and Thomson Reuters especially has a fully-fledged website of breaking news and video. AP has introduced its own direct online video service too, which – like Thomson Reuters' site – is supported by advertising similar to ordinary commercial media (Paterson, 2006). AP has nearly 1.5 million followers on Twitter, while Reuters has nearly 2.3 million, all directing traffic to web stories. Suddenly, agencies are competing in the retail market, and their clients, such as CNN, or MSN, or the BBC, or the Wall Street Journal, are their competitors too. However, to be sure, the offering on the website is delayed. It is a cut-down and light version, slowed up so to avoid spoiling the exclusive service to commercial clients.

That is one aspect of visibility. The second aspect is a sea change in naming and branding, especially in the way web-based media label their agency material. Manywritrs have noted the way global portal and search engine sites, such as AOL, Yahoo, or MSN, unashamedly flag up their agency material. That may not seem odd unless you realise that in the past, media clients tended to hide the fact that the text and video they ran was taken from an outside source. Today the international agencies are becoming part of the world you see online, openly there, especially in text. It's too early to say what this may mean for the agencies themselves but they certainly risk becoming more of a target for public criticism. That may be welcomed: Anonymity is rarely the best basis for information provision. Visibility is bringing them into a more open relationship with the public.

A dangerous dependency?

On balance, the story of the news agencies has been a positive one. As seen from their own point of view, they are surmounting and taking advantage of some fundamental transofrmations of digital technologies. However, is their prolific production of global news a threat to local or national cultural health and the diversity of points of view?

One accusation made against the agencies is that they are gaining an ever more monopolistic position. They are feeding all media websites and platforms including tablets and mobiles. And they are providing more and more content as regular media shed staff. If the internet once seemed to herald new possibilities for multi-voiced global pluralism (and many forms of community-based 'alternative journalism'), Paterson (2006, 2007) argues many regular media and emergent news sources like portals, show a heavier-than-ever reliance on agency output. Many stories display a common reliance on agency material, especially for international news. Although portals like Yahoo put up a pretence of source diversity, Paterson claims their content is overly reliant upon the same few agencies that supply the news. The portal sites, he said, barely altered agency content and ran it unchanged. Bui (2010) notes that Yahoo News was using 57 percent of its news from AP. An earlier study showed the average verbatim content of the portals was 85 percent (Paterson, 2007). Ninety eight percent of Yahoo top stories were from APTN or Reuters, a joint survey by this author observed in 2011. Thus the concentration of international news flow into fewer hands, noted by Boyd-Barrett (1980) years ago, may have intensified in recent years. Paterson (2007) claims this follows on from the fact that television networks have reduced their own reporting since the 1980s. Production of original (non-agency) news reporting seems to be in perilous decline, according to this view.

However this picture should not be taken uncritically. Portals like Yahoo and MSN have different websites in each country (e.g. UK, France, Norway, South Korea). Even a cursory glance at the portal Yahoo in Russia shows a preponderance of BBC World Service content, much of which is probably not taken from international news agencies, but from the BBC's own reporting or other inputs. Countries, such as South Korea, Turkey, or China, and doubtless many more, seem to have news sources on the Yahoo pages that do not derive from international agencies. They are quite possibly taken from domestic national news agencies rather than the international ones. Comparative country research on that topic remains to be done. Meanwhile a further shading on Paterson's (2006, 2007, 2011) pessimistic picture of a news monopoly comes from Boyd-Barrett (2010b), who shows that the majority of international news in Indonesia is coming from the Chinese agency, Xinhua. A similar argument against agency homogenization is joined by Thussu (2012), who predicts the power of Indian media will be seen as a new and dominating influence in news provision in coming decades, rivalled and matched no doubt by China.

This would clearly reduce the homogenizing influence of agencies. It would suggest that contra-flow, would increase and soften the impact of (western) agency news on eastern audiences. One way or another, news media products from emergent countries may challenge and perhaps erode the western international agencies' position. The balance of advantage is far from stable.

Conclusions

From these observations, it seems the agencies are still crucial to the globalization of news. They appear to be charting an effective course within the realignments of digital technologies. They are absorbing new arrivals into their orbit – turning them into clients. As a result of these successful agency policies, the key issue is less to do with their survival than with what it means for citizens to experience their continuing, even increasing, capacity to set a global news agenda. Even if agencies might begin to secure the western liberal ideal of 'full and free' information exchange (Boyd-Barrett, 1992) across the world, that outcome may be gained at the price of unwelcome news homogenization. The emphasis of agencies is on short-term news and politics. Long-term interests like climate change and environmental damage don't get so much attention. A way to reverse this tendency might be to provide stronger national media or more regionally based agencies. Resistance might also be achieved through government funded news organisations, or ones belonging to ethical organisations like Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). That might require also less reliance on the commodity system of production, which is is so nakedly based on gaining the widest audiences, and which governs agencies' actions.

Agency news, collected with to sell in as many news markets as possible, has developed a style that can be seen as impersonal, even callous: The ideal of journalistic emotional detachment chosen by agencies can be seen as sparking a moral deficit, the vice of passionless indifference. Put in a more abstract way, we the public are constructed in a spectator role by the objective style of agency news, rather than a role that invites action – and this is the result of a specific impartial style of journalism.

On the other hand, the international agencies can be said to provide a social benefit in helping to stabilise the existence of public service journalism. As described, they are committed to some extent to report from areas that need to be known but are not financially viable for regular media providers. In the meantime, for better or worse, agencies remain an icon of traditional corporate mainstream news, with their ideals of objectivity and definitions of 'news', against which the concepts of 'alternative' and 'citizen' voices and movements are defined and take their meaning.

Looking ahead, the agencies' model seems to be adapting the wholesale business of news and adjusting to changing global market demand. Thomson Reuters graphically demonstrate this shift in focus when Jim Smith, the CEO, announced in 2011 a new globally focused section being set up devoted to accelerate business in growing geographies, i.e the East and Asia. "Just getting better in our core markets will not be sufficient if the majority of global growth happens elsewhere," he warned shareholders (Smith, 2011).

To conclude, this chapter has argued that the threats of internet technologies and the changing world balance of power are challenges that the three agencies are meeting on their own business terms. It has also suggested that their survival, and arguably greater dominance than before has profound implications for the public, because the agencies can be seen as monopolistic creatures that stifle the growth of other news providers, agendas, and news models. The contention in this chapter is that such a pessimistic view is not fully proven and also that there are considerable virtues in the services the agencies offer. The way things are shaping, it seems the international agencies are here to stay, a vast and often under-estimated force contributing to the public perception of politics, disaster, finance, sport and entertainment in much of the world.

Notes

1. The three international agencies mentioned have a strong grip on the global news market. Other agencies include Bloomberg, based in New York, which competes with Thomson Reuters for financial news. Also significant, the Chinese news agency Xinhua can make some claim to ascendancy in the East, since it collects and distributes news there on a large scale (and shares some with AP). This chapter has omitted Xinhua or Bloomberg as they don't have the global news reach of the big three.
2. The editors and managers directly quoted are from author interviews in 2009/10, also carried out with Dr Lian Zhu.

Challenging Questions

- Discuss the contribution to journalism made by the international news agencies. Can they still be said to be setting a global news agenda?
- To what extent do the ownership structures and/or national origins of the agencies affect their claims to independence?
- Can the international agencies be described as the friend or enemy of original news reporting?
- What impact have social media and citizen journalists had on the international news agencies?

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4 Impartiality in the News

Sue Wallace

"The days of middle-of-the-road, balancing Left and Right, impartiality are dead"

Peter Horrocks

Modern media and impartiality

In 2010 a respected senior Middle East editor was sacked by CNN for a message on Twitter, because of criticism of the way she had commented on the death of a Muslim cleric. She had been fiercely condemned for a perceived lack of professionalism. Following the Arab Spring, the BBC was examining its own output, conducting a review of its reporting of those events of 2011 and later, on its national radio, television and online services. The concern connecting the two events is the concept of impartiality, a legal requirement for broadcast news in Britain. However, in the 21st century media landscape, the principle of impartial reporting is being challenged more strongly than ever. Contributory factors include the proliferation of television channels – hundreds have become available, with access aided by digital switchover in 2012. At the same time, convergence has blurred the distinctions between traditional news forms such as print, radio, television and online. Meanwhile citizens have benefited in their own exchanges through social media networks. Blogs and micro-blogs can be regarded as among the more recent entrants into the public sphere(s). With so much traffic in information publicly available, the question is increasingly being asked whether impartiality is a necessary requirement of news reporting. Indeed, it might be suggested that subjective, or opinionated reporting is more honest and true.

This chapter will consider current challenges to the notion of impartiality. It examines arguments about the need to retain the principle as a legal requirement in the UK for broadcast journalists, a requirement which is particularly fiercely contested over television news, but also applies to radio reporting. At its heart is a question for all those who want to be journalists: whether it is better to reveal or withhold personal opinions. The chapter reviews the origins of notions of objective journalism, and the debate about its place in the modern news industry. It considers suggestions for a reworking of the tradition, such as the 'radical impartiality' proposed within the BBC, or partisan reporting in the style of British newspapers, and the impact such changes might have on the public's trust in journalism. This chapter also discusses whether audiences, particularly young people, are badly served by present journalistic practices, and suggests what the debate may mean for journalism students and trainees.

Development of the tradition of impartiality

When the British Broadcasting Company began broadcasting news in 1922 (to become the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1927) it instigated a long-lasting tension between government and the broadcasters. Initially prevented from reporting anything considered to be controversial, the BBC's head (and first Director-General of the corporation) John Reith developed an argument that the radio service should be allowed to report significant events and views as long as it did so impartially. Notions of objectivity and impartiality are closely related, however Harcup (2009) disentangles the two: "impartial reporting is normally defined as being neutral, while objective reporting is taken to be the reporting of verifiable facts " (2009: 83). He also notes McQuail's (2000) definition that impartiality means "balance in the choice and use of sources, so as to reflect different points of view, and also neutrality in the presentation of news – separating facts from opinion, avoiding value judgements or emotive language or pictures." (2000:321). Impartiality, then, became a defence against fears that broadcasting had such a power to sway public opinion that it might encourage dissent. When Independent Television News (ITN – part of the new commercial broadcasting operations) was established in 1955, ending the BBC's monopoly of news broadcasting, it was a condition that it should present any news with due accuracy and impartiality, such considerations also extending to programming on matters of political or industrial controversy, or public policy (Allan 2010:60). With just two broadcasting organisations in the country (BBC and ITV) it was still considered necessary to guard against one-sided – potentially misleading, if not inflammatory – reporting. Since the mid-twentieth century, impartiality has remained a requirement, not only of the BBC, but also one imposed on UK broadcasters by regulatory bodies, the latest of which is Ofcom, established by the Communications Act 2003. Ofcom's Broadcasting Code (2011a) states the principle that news, in whatever form, is reported with due accuracy and due impartiality. Impartiality is defined by Ofcom as not favouring one side over another, and due impartiality as being adequate or appropriate to the subject and nature of the programme. As the BBC's College of Journalism (2012a) notes: "Impartiality requires a journalist to actively seek out and weigh the relevant arguments on any issue and to present them fairly and without personal bias." However, the College of Journalism (2012b) also acknowledges that impartiality is a complex requirement which may only be achieved over time, for example when a story is developing very fast and it may not be possible to get interviews with all participants immediately.

The same stricture of due accuracy and due impartiality is placed by Ofcom on reporting of matters of major political or industrial controversy and major matters relating to current public policy. This applies not only to Britain's public service broadcasters (PSBs), the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Five, but also other output such as Sky News and UK licensed foreign channels. Guidance notes (Ofcom 2011b) point out that a research study into public opinion on the subject in 2003 found that three-quarters of 4,000 respondents said impartiality in news was a good thing, and accuracy was viewed as even more important.

Moreover the provision of reliable news is considered to be a requirement for a healthy democracy. Citizens need to be well informed to be able to participate in, and contribute to society. McQuail (2010) examines normative theory, or "how the media ought to, or are expected to be organised and to behave in the wider public interest" (2010:161). He observes that common expectations are the provision of a diversity of information, opinion and culture, and the support of the democratic political system. Rules on impartiality might be seen as a way of ensuring such diversity of coverage.

The challenges to impartiality

Nevertheless, the broadcasting scene in Britain no longer consists of just the "comfortable duopoly" (Peacock 1986: 36) of the BBC and ITV. We live in a multi-channel age, with television programmes available by satellite, cable, and digital relay, many not sourced in the UK. The complexities of the situation might be illustrated by the case of Press TV Limited, the company based in London and broadcasting news from an Iranian perspective. As Ofcom reports (2012), during 2011 it was engaged in a sanctions case with Press TV about an interview with a Channel 4 and Newsweek journalist, Maziar Bahari, which was obtained under duress while in an Iranian prison. Ofcom ruled that this was a serious breach of the broadcasting code, and a £100,000 fine was imposed on Press TV. During the hearing, however, Press TV suggested that editorial control of its channel rested in Tehran, which led Ofcom to offer to license that overseas operation. Receiving no response to the offer, Ofcom revoked Press TV's licence to broadcast in the UK, with the expectation that the channel would be removed from the Sky TV platform by the end of January 2012. This protracted and difficult dispute is an example of the international domain within which the UK broadcasting regulator must operate.

Meanwhile, in the modern multi-platform environment, audio and video reports, often resembling traditional television and radio programming, are also available online. Leaders in the field of news and magazine websites include those such as guardian.co.uk and dailymail.co.uk which originate in newspaper organisations. Unlike broadcasters, newspapers have never been subject to laws requiring that they abide by conditions of impartiality. Indeed, they are known for their partisan support for commercial interests and also political parties, particularly at election time. Famously The Sun ran the headline "It's the Sun wot won it" on the day in April 1992 when the Conservatives celebrated an unexpected election victory over Labour. (In 2012 the paper's owner, Rupert Murdoch, told the Leveson inquiry into press and standards that the headline was tasteless and wrong because 'We don't have that sort of power'. He did, though, agree that the Sun's support for Labour before the 1997 election (which the party won) would have required his approval (Dowell 2012). Another of the media interests owned by Rupert Murdoch's company, News Corporation, is the most popular American cable news network, Fox News. This has been repeatedly held up as an example of right-wing bias in its reporting despite its mission statement to provide "fair and balanced" coverage (Sergeant 2011).

Arguments for change

In any case, the internet is an unregulated forum for views of all styles and forms. Opinionated arguments and comment are readily available. Anticipating digital switchover in Britain in 2012, an Ofcom discussion document noted that "the expansion of digital channels and the internet mean there are now very many more sources of news than ever before. In future, when multiple sources – some regulated for impartiality, and others not – are all available through the same reception equipment, issues may be more complicated." (Ofcom 2007). Put more bluntly: "With dozens of news sources in addition to the BBC, what's the point of impartiality rules? It's a waste of time" said Simon Hinde of AOL (Ofcom 2007: 5.53).

Even BBC chiefs seem to favour change. "The days of middle-of-the-road, balancing Left and Right, impartiality are dead" said the corporation's head of television news, Peter Horrocks, in a speech at Oxford University in 2006. His comments brought an immediate backlash: "The BBC triggered outrage yesterday by calling for the views of extremists and fundamentalists to be given the same weight as those of mainstream politicians" reported the Mail Online (2006). This neatly illustrates the argument made in a seminal article by Gaye Tuchman (1999) that objectivity is a strategic ritual to defend journalists and their reports: "To journalists, like social scientists, the term 'objectivity' stands as a bulwark between themselves and critics" (1999: 297). Noting the time pressures that journalists usually face in their work, she outlines such standard practices as balancing a statement from one political party with a contradiction from an opposing party, without verifying which of the conflicting opinions is true. Indeed, the article notes that such "truth-claims" may be non-verifiable, each representing one possible reality (Tuchman 1999:300).

Impartiality rules might equally be regarded as a defence for journalistic practices, just as the apparent abandonment of those rules might lay journalists open to criticism, such as that from the Daily Mail. The BBC's editorial guidelines, with their advice on how to approach controversial subjects to maintain impartiality, and action to take in difficult cases, could be regarded as promoting just such 'strategic rituals'. One foundation for the latest version of the guidelines came in the recommendation of the Neil Report in 2004 that reporters should provide "facts in their context, not opinion, practising openness and independence of mind and testing a wide range of views with the evidence" to achieve impartiality and diversity of opinion (BBC Press Office 2004). The report by former BBC news executive Ron Neil was in response to criticism of the corporation's editorial standards in the Hutton Inquiry, which included consideration of Andrew Gilligan's infamous broadcast at 6.07am on Radio 4's Today programme on 29th May 2003, claiming that the Labour government had "sexed up" a dossier on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (The Hutton Inquiry 2004). The BBC's chairman and director general both resigned following the Hutton Report. Neil's recommendations, including the establishment of a College of Journalism, aimed to provide a defence for the BBC against future criticism.

The BBC position

However, the more recent BBC argument is more subtle than a complete abandonment of the principle of impartial reporting. In his speech in 2006, Peter Horrocks went on to say: "I believe we need to consider adopting what I like to think of as a much wider "radical impartiality" – the need to hear the widest range of views – all sides of the story. So we need more Taliban interviews, more BNP interviews – of course put on air with due consideration – and the full range of moderate opinions. [...] So get used to hearing more views that you dislike on our airwaves. This wider range of opinion is a worthwhile price to pay to maintain a national forum where all can feel they are represented and respected." (Jarvis 2006). This call for a "radical impartiality" can be seen as a response to the argument identified by Ofcom (2007) that "impartiality rules are now resulting in similar types of news being delivered by an ever expanding number of channels, and that such 'plurality' is not the same as diversity of voice" (2007: 5.42). In addition there is also concern about the increasing disengagement from news particularly among young people and ethnic minorities. Ofcom's qualitative research showed that 64 percent of young people (aged 16 to 24) believe that much of the news on TV is not relevant to them. Some ethnic minorities also considered that they were not treated fairly in news reporting. (Ofcom 2007: 61-63). Such trends had been markedly extended since previous research in 2002, including the migration of the audience to online sources of news.

A further consideration which might affect BBC policy is its ambition to provide a universal service, according to the respected American commentator Jeff Jarvis (2006). He suggests that Peter Horrocks in his speech is "responding to the internet age by trying to open the megaphone wider to more voices – to mimic that internet itself. This springs from the BBC's license-fee-supported mission to supply "a universal news service" even in what Horrocks says is "a fragmented and segregated society", in which fewer people believe they are being heard or served" (Jarvis 2006). Jarvis himself does not support the strategy. Instead, he favours the action he identifies in American journalism, of moving away from "the old, outmoded creed of objectivity" to the British newspaper tradition of partisan reporting. "The internet is imposing on American journalism that British newspaper model of many viewpoints; it is in the debate that democracy emerges" (Jarvis 2006).

Opinionated broadcasting

This immediately conjures up the spectre of Fox News, Rupert Murdoch's American cable news network, reportedly one of the world's most profitable news organisations (The Economist 2011). It was launched in 1996 with the proposed ambition to provide "fine, balanced journalism", but a real mission to bring conservative talk radio to television, according to Matthew Butler writing for guardian.co.uk (itself a liberal leaning organisation). Critics have accused Fox News of trading in right-wing propaganda, including smears and bigoted comments, according to Butler (2011). It has been claimed that such a service is bad for democracy. However, Fox News executives underline the distinction between biased opinion, and what they consider their channel is really providing – passionate broadcast. They also argue that there is a clear division between their daytime news programmes (intended to offer comprehensive coverage of issues of the day) and their conservative-leaning, opinionated evening shows (Sergeant 2011). While conservatives might argue that Fox News merely provides some balance to a generally liberal media, critics point to consequences such as those outlined by Fairleigh Dickinson University. The university's Public Mind Poll asked people living in the state of New Jersey about current events In the U.S. and abroad (such as the Arab Spring). One finding was that "people who watch Fox News, the most popular of the 24-hour cable news networks, are 18-points less likely to know that Egyptians overthrew their government than those who watch no news at all" (Fairleigh Dickinson University 2011). Findings such as this led to the widely publicised conclusion that "Some News Leaves People Knowing Less".

In 2003 the then British government regulator ITC (Independent Television Commission) rejected complaints from viewers in the country about bias in coverage of the conflict in Iraq by Fox News, which holds a British licence. The verdict was that the organisation had not breached the programme code on 'due impartiality' because the regulations did not require broadcasters to be 'absolutely neutral on every controversial issue' (Jones 2003). This ruling was welcomed by Chris Shaw, Channel 5's controller of news and current affairs, when he argued for more biased and opinionated broadcast journalism in Britain. In a debate organised by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, he said that "news with a slant" would create real diversity. Countering those claims, Richard Tait, ITN's former editor-in-chief, warned that if British broadcasters were allowed to copy American formats, then the public's high trust in broadcasters would plummet. In support of his argument he cited a recent opinion poll showing that only 6 per cent of people trust newspapers while 70 per cent trusted television news, describing the latter state of affairs as a public good. "But I don't think we can go on doing news on TV as we do it at the moment" concluded Chris Shaw, who looked forward to a time when he could find coverage on TV which "chimed" with campaigns by newspapers like the Sun, Daily Mail and Daily Mirror (Jones 2003).

Broadcasting with a deep-seated bias?

Part of Chris Shaw's argument was a conviction of a deep-seated bias in British broadcasting. He stated, "Every news programme already comes with a ready-made set of prejudices. It is the same on both BBC and ITN: a middle class, essentially liberal and English, but not British, point of view" (Jones 2003). This, he suggested, was a cause of some groups, such as the young, ethnic minorities, and people less well educated, feeling alienated from broadcast news, and switching off. The idea that it is simply impossible to produce journalism with no bias at all, has backing in the academic world, as well as among some journalists. The very act of producing news involves the selection of information and opinions which may be influenced by bureaucratic, organisational, cultural, economic and political factors, the argument goes. "News and journalism, in short, are social constructions," sums up Brian McNair. "News is never a mere recording or reporting of the world 'out there' but a synthetic, value-laden account which carries within it the dominant assumptions and ideas of the society within which it is produced" (McNair 2009: 40-41). Journalists may claim to tell the truth, but that "begs a rather awkward question: namely, whose definition of what is true is being upheld as 'the truth'?" (Allan 2010: 71). Journalists' routines and practices are likely to privilege some sources of information over others. Impartiality can therefore be seen as an unattainable ideal.

The need for trust

This might suggest that openly biased reporting is more honest than that which claims to tell the truth but may nevertheless be skewed. Journalism, indeed, "might benefit from a sense of its own subjectivity" (Charles 2011:2). BBC support for opinionated broadcasting has been further reinforced by Mark Thompson, as the BBC's director general. In a Whitehall seminar he proposed that existing rules to guarantee impartiality were becoming outdated in the internet age, and that British broadcasters should be allowed to provide a channel like Fox News:

"Why shouldn't the public be able to see and hear, as well as read, a range of opinionated journalism and then make up their own mind what they think about it?" (Sherwin 2010). However, he was not suggesting a change of direction for the BBC. Instead, he said that: "Having a broader range of channels would actually strengthen that enduring tradition of impartial journalism across BBC, ITN and Channel 4. They would continue to be trusted" (Sherwin 2010). Trust is a key idea here, and it may come to be more important than traditional notions of impartiality according to Ofcom (2007). Alternative concepts, such as transparency are championed as the way to gain and retain trust, by other commentators such as Jeff Jarvis (2006). The American academic Jay Rosen has also been reported as proposing that reporters should be open about their own views while producing factual accounts with accuracy, fairness and intellectual honesty, allowing transparency to replace the ideology of objectivity (The Economist 2011).

Credibility, or loss of it, was behind the decision by CNN to sack its Middle East editor Octavia Nasr in 2010. Her credibility was said to have been compromised by a controversial tweet about a Shia Muslim cleric in Lebanon who had longstanding ties to, and voiced strong support for Hezbollah – classified by the U.S. State Department as a foreign terrorist organisation (CNN Wire Staff 2010). The message she posted on Twitter after hearing about the death of Ayatollah Fadlallah stated : "Sad to hear of the passing of Sayyed Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah…One of Hezbollah's giants I respect a lot" (BBC News US & Canada 2010). She maintained she was referring to his views on women's rights. However, in a blog posting the journalist afterwards said that the message was an error of judgement and something she deeply regretted. "Reaction to my tweet was immediate, overwhelming and provides a good lesson on why 140 characters should not be used to comment on controversial or sensitive issues, especially those dealing with the Middle East" (CNN Wire Staff 2010).

The impact on journalism students

Highly sensitive news events, such as conflict in the Middle East, particularly expose the arguments about impartiality and claims whether the practice is being observed not.

Hence the decision of the BBC Trust to carry out a review of the corporation's journalism on the events known as the Arab Spring, including protests and uprisings most notably in Egypt, Libya, Bahrein, Syria and Yemen (BBC Trust 2011). The review of impartiality is focused on the corporation's national radio, television and online journalism. However, the increasing use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook has added a modern twist to the long-standing debate. As we have seen, the tight constraints of Twitter can mitigate against the provision of context to any comment posted. Nevertheless, it is increasingly used as a reporting and also newsgathering tool. The micro-blog is just one means by which ordinary people can contribute to journalism, particularly if they are witness to extraordinary events. Other social media, such as Facebook, also provide ways of reporters developing participatory journalism with groups and individuals. 'Amateurs' can further contribute to the public conversation through blogs, podcasts and video material.

One apparent difficulty is that such routes provide space for private as well as public communication. There is a danger that it could be difficult to separate the two for those practising journalism. As the social media editor for BBC News, Chris Hamilton (2011) has noted, this may introduce an element of risk for staff in news organisations. The BBC itself has a range of guidelines on personal and public use of social media, including the need for journalists writing on 'official' Twitter accounts to avoid openly partisan comments. The BBC's concern is to maintain its brand and commitment to the principles of impartiality. However, for journalism students and trainees, whose use of social media begins as private communication, it is suggested that they may need to be educated in developing their own professional persona as reporters and observers of the social and political scene. In this, they will need to have regard to the debates surrounding the concept of impartiality.

Factors to consider include the need to sustain public trust in journalism, but also to engage the audience. Transparency may be aided by an openness about reporters' personal views. Opinionated reporting, such as that seen in British newspapers, may be judged to be more honest, or attractive. Nevertheless, while complete impartiality may be an unattainable ideal, it can be seen to provide some guarantee of accuracy and fair dealing in reporting important events. And the principle, challenged as it is by developments in the news industry and audience expectations, still remains a requirement on broadcast journalism in the UK.

Challenging Questions

- Impartiality rules have helped to alienate young people from traditional broadcast news.
- The concept of impartiality is outdated and has no place in modern broadcasting.
- Journalists who express their opinions are more honest than those who try to be impartial.
- Consider the role of impartiality in building trust between journalists and their audiences.

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5 Current Affairs Radio: Realigning News and Comment

Hugh Chignell

"In the 1970s some people in Broadcasting House were asking how are we going to put into the network something which people would find more challenging, less superficial, more demanding, more authoritative, more first hand."

Michael Green, current affairs broadcaster

There are some questions about journalism which require us to look back to achieve an answer as well as studying the present and speculating about the future. This is certainly the case in that most British form of radio, the single subject current affairs programme. Separated from the day-to-day noise of news and tasked with explaining the world to the listener, programmes like the BBC's File on Four and Analysis, set about analysing their subject with a degree of seriousness and commitment which is hard to find elsewhere in radio or television. Where does this curious radio genre come from? Does it really have a place in the modern fast-paced world where we demand not only to have things explained but also to engage in interaction? Can serious, demanding and difficult radio survive in the radio landscape of the twenty-first century? For the current affairs producer, finding answers to some of these questions is essential for the survival of the genre. Their quest is to make the demands of difficult ideas and policies digestible for the modern listener.

This chapter will look at the origins of radio current affairs in the old BBC tradition of radio 'talks' from the late 1920s. It will chart the rise of the talk and the impact of the Second World War on talks style. Although British radio has been greatly influenced by American approaches the chapter will show that the development of current affairs radio in the late 1960s marked a departure from the American approach by splitting news from comment and in particular in the creation of single subject current affairs programmes. The two main examples of the genre are Analysis and File on Four and these are examined in detail. The chapter concludes by looking at the way Analysis has tried to address the challenge of maintaining the innate seriousness of its content in a 'fast food' and interactive culture.

Some key concepts

Current affairs broadcasting is mainly associated with British radio and television and implies a division between the factual statements of news and those programmes which include comment and analysis. This division is uncharacteristic of American broadcasting where news and comment have quite happily co-existed, although there are 'public affairs' programmes these are normally confined to National Public Radio. Now largely confined to the BBC, current affairs radio can be found in two places in the schedule. In news magazines (or 'sequences') most notably the Today programme, there are short comment items that go beyond news reporting to provide comment and analysis. A more distinctive and exceptional form of the genre, and the subject of this chapter, are the single subject current affairs programmes of which Radio Four's Analysis (since 1970) and the same network's File on Four (since 1977) are the main examples. Both programmes take a single issue and devote either 30 minutes (in the case of Analysis) or 40 minutes (File on Four) to a carefully prepared examination. In the case of Analysis the focus is on ideas and ideologies whereas File on Four is much more coventionally journalistic in its attention to social problems and policies. So, for example, in the summer of 2010, File on Four produced programmes on the lessons of oil spills; arms smugglers and banks not offering loans while Analysis featured programmes on the survival of the Euro; the 'dictatorship of relativism' and whether the older people should bear the brunt of government spending cuts.[1]

The radio talk was the main vehicle for the communication of comment prior to the establishment of current affairs programmes in the 1960s.[2] Talks were usually scripted, and therefore carefully controlled, and delivered by non-BBC staff. These expert contributors were free to express their views without tarnishing the BBC's reputation for impartiality. Typically, talks ranged from five to twenty minutes in length and covered every conceivable subject. The idea of impartiality is central to BBC radio news and current affairs and refers to the importance of objectivity or lack of bias in broadcast output. For the long-running single-subject current affairs programmes a strict adherence to impartiality may be difficult to achieve in one programme, especially, as in editions of Analysis if the presenter is brought in and has a particular political position. In this case impartiality is more likely to be achieved over a run of programmes by having a balance of presenters and other contributors over time (Starkey, 2007:99).

One way of thinking about current affairs radio, and especially on its principal home, the BBC, is as an expression of the corporation's commitment to public service broadcasting. The BBC, funded by the annual licence fee is bound by the terms of its ten-yearly charter which guarantees the independence of the BBC from government control (although in fact the BBC's history is full of attempts by governments to influence the BBC) while at the same time insisting on output which 'informs, educates and entertains'. One revealing extract from the charter reads; 'The Public Purposes of the BBC are as follows— (a) sustaining citizenship and civil society'.[3] Current affairs radio in all its forms is explicitly concerned with serving the needs of the citizen and the wider civil society.

Radio Talks

In 1928 the BBC, under the ambitious leadership of its Director-General, John Reith, obtained from the government the right to deal with controversial issues having previously been thwarted in its attempt to do so by the newspaper industry. This created the opportunity for the Talks Department to cover a much wider range of subjects including the 'current affairs' issues of the day (although that term was not commonly used until after the second World War). This opportunity was also a challenge for the BBC which had to produce talks for the rapidly growing number of radio listeners with their modern valve radio sets around which families would congregate to listen. While talks in the 1920s featured how to catch a tiger or the pruning of fruit trees, talks in the 1930s were far more ambitious. This was partly due to the pioneering work of Hilda Matheson, the visionary Head of Talks until her rather abrupt departure in 1932. Matheson developed a style of talking which was a more informal and intimate mode of address (Avery, 2006). Matheson persuaded her talkers to address the listener as an individual and not, as was previously the case, talking to the microphone as if addressing a crowd or, even worse, delivering a sermon. This more intimate style echoed President Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous 'fireside chats' of the 1930s in which he spoke to the American people about the government's New Deal and the economic crisis facing America (Loviglio, 2005: 1-37). Despite Matheson's innovative approach BBC talks remained primarily concerned not with informing listeners about national and international events of the 1930s (such as the crisis of high unemployment and poverty or the Spanish civil war and the rise of fascism) but were mainly educational in nature. Listeners were much more likely to hear a talk about the novel or works of art than they were about the rise of the Nazis in Germany.

When the Second World War began in 1939 it prompted a major and defining development in the radio talk. The BBC had never really lost its reputation for being both stuffy and boring. Too much improving and cultural uplift and not enough fun. The result was that listeners acquired an appetite for listening to European stations like Radio Luxembourg and Radio Normandy which carried English entertainment programmes. When the war began the German radio station Radio Hamburg broadcast the Nazi propagandist 'Lord Haw-Haw' whose sneering and risqué messages were surprisingly popular in Britain (Street, 2006: 191). In response, the BBC eventually found the Yorkshire novelist, J.B.Priestley to deliver a Sunday evening talk after the 9 pm news at the same time as the Haw-Haw broadcast when almost 16 million people were listening (Nicholas, 1996: 53). Priestley revolutionized the talk and paved the way for the creation of current affairs radio during the second half of the century. How did he do it? Priestley wrote about big issues; war, death, nationalism but did so in a way that connected with the listener. He showed it was possible to use radio to explain a deeply troubling situation to the radio listener. In his famous first talk he commented on the very recent evacuation of British troops from Dunkirk in Northern France. The talk centred on the role of the small boats and ferries used to rescue the troops, it was clearly meant to raise morale and contained some rather sentimental references to the English seaside. This certainly was not current affairs radio but it showed the enormous power of talk on radio to explain events in the world without patronizing or lecturing the listener and so paved the way for later developments.

The Origins of Current Affairs Radio

A distinctive feature of radio news and talks prior to the 1960s was the separation of fact-based news from the more speculative comment and analysis to be heard in radio talks (Chignell, 2011:16). This formal separation owed a lot to anxieties within the BBC about tainting the objective facts of news with the subjectivity of comment. Radio listeners liked to have their news 'straight' as one critic wrote at the time and her views that 'the BBC should keep news and comment absolutely distinct' (Richardson, 1960) were commonly held. But the sixties was a decade of change and under the radical new Director-General, Hugh Carleton-Greene, the BBC was prepared to experiment with news and comment; and so it was that the Ten O'Clock News featured both news and comment in something much closer to a modern radio news programme.

The managers of BBC radio in the 1960s were far more populist, more audience aware, than their ultra-cautious predecessors. Men like Frank Gillard, who was responsible for radio at the time, realized the grave threat of television and the need to make radio more responsive to the listener. The success of the Ten O'Clock News led to the launch of a lunch-time equivalent, The World at One, still a feature of the Radio Four schedule. This new programme had a regular presenter, William Hardcastle, a hard-drinking, cigarette-smoking former Fleet Street journalist who delighted in the urgency and flexibility of the news and comment format (Hendy, 2007: 48). Hardcastle was a radio innovator who pioneered the use of the 'vox pop' to gather public opinion and the use of the telephone interview, for example with a local newspaper editor to gather information. This approach to what came to be called a news 'sequence' combined the journalistic skill of the presenter with modern radio techniques and in so doing mirrored the American use of famous news anchors (such as Walter Cronkite and Edward R. Murrow). This 'transnational' quality of radio broadcasting was also present in television where BBC output influenced, for example, US approaches to drama while US game shows appeared on ITV. As Michele Hilmes has argued, British public service and American commercial broadcasting 'represent two sides of the same coin'. (Hilmes, 2012: 3). So it is no surprise that radio news and comment should become 'Americanised' at a time of widespread cultural exchange (not only in broadcasting but also of course in film and popular music). The result of Hardcastle's approach at The World at One was to initiate a shift in Radio Four's identity with brisker and sharper edged news and current affairs at its heart.

There is a clearly a problem with this historical account of an increasingly transnational form of radio. If comment on radio was successfully absorbed into programmes like The World at One (and later The World This Weekend, 'PM' and most importantly, the Today programme) how did it then disentangle itself to create single subject current affairs radio? What was the route from Americanised, anchored news and comment to a very much more British form of current affairs? The answer lies in that inconvenient truth that history is not linear, not a one-way street. Sometimes innovation can produce a reaction which reaffirms traditional values. This is precisely what happened towards the end of the 1960s in BBC radio and led to the launch of that most challenging, even elitist, of programmes, Radio Four's Analysis. Disillusioned with the news-and-comment journalism which had become so dominant, two men, a producer and a presenter[4], created something so different from William Hardcastle's The World at One that it was anti-journalist! On 10 April 1970 a programme was born which rejected conventional journalism and replaced it with the carefully, and expensively, crafted opinions of experts and people called 'current affairs broadcasters'.

Analysis

The launch of Analysis, over forty years ago, was full of deeper significance for those who made it and the BBC itself. This was a time (1970) of considerable uncertainty about BBC radio. The controversial policy paper, Broadcasting in the Seventies was seen by many as a rebuke to traditional ideas about public service broadcasting and especially those associated with the first Director-General, John Reith. There was general feeling that standards were dropping and traditional Reithian ideas were being rejected as BBC radio tried to provide for audiences in the age of television (Hendy, 2007: 67). The response of the BBC to this now very familiar 'dumbing down' argument was to start making deliberately challenging and difficult radio programmes, especially on Radio Four. Enter Analysis. This was a single subject current affairs programme that would be based on rigorous research and would deal with difficult ideas about social issues. In the words of the Controller of Radio Four at the time this would be a 'tougher' programme; it would be 'more thoughtful, tougher in intellectual terms'. (Whitby, 1970) So this was proof, if it was needed, that the BBC could still produce challenging and serious programmes.

The first Analysis was broadcast on a significant day for music fans. 10 April 1970 was the day that Paul McCartney announced the break-up of the Beatles. It was the end of one era, the 'swinging sixties' and the beginning of new, more serious, times; and Analysis was certainly serious. The presenter, Ian McIntyre, announced that the subject of the 45 minutes, prerecorded programme, was 'a general look at the current state of the economy and its future prospects'. What followed included a rather academic summary of an American Brookings Institute report on the British economy and then contributions from a Harvard professor and an Oxford economist, a Swiss banker, the Director-General of the Confederation of British Industry, and two MPs. There was no music or any sound other than the voices of the participants. In subsequent editions of the programme (there were typically 30 a year) both national and international topics were covered and occasionally the format of the programme changed when there was a long interview with one person. These Analysis 'conversations' often featured Prime Ministers, Leaders of the Opposition (including Margaret Thatcher), Chancellors of the Exchequer and foreign heads of state (such as Israel's Golda Meir).

An intriguing aspect of Analysis in the 1970s was an implied critique of journalism in the approach to researching and producing programmes. It is hard to believe forty years later but there was a belief in BBC Radio that journalists were simply not the right people to make proper single subject current affairs programmes. Journalists were typified by The World at One's William Hardcastle; rather uneducated and vulgar hacks who relied on secondary sources. Fine for Fleet Street and tabloid press but not for BBC current affairs. This view is well expressed by the first Analysis producer, George Fischer;

> *"The distinction that Analysis had – and people sometimes don't seem to get this – we worked only with primary sources. In other words: we didn't work from news cuttings. If there was a House of Lords report we did actually read the thing from beginning to end. I don't recall many occasions when we had journalists in the programme. It was always 'from the horse's mouth'."*[5]..

So, on Analysis in the 1970s journalists were deliberately excluded from programmes to make way for politicians, academics or other people with direct, relevant experience or knowledge. The use of the BBC reporter, so widespread in news and current affairs today, was seen as a second rate or derivative approach to current affairs. For people like George Fischer and Ian McIntyre, the use of that stock technique of radio news, the 'two way' between presenter and reporter would have been an anathema.

Analysis and politics

Analysis established itself during the 1970s and beyond as a serious, single subject current affairs programme, as indeed the 'flag-ship' radio current affairs programme. Its focus was on ideas rather than on policies and that unique approach has continued to this day. Once a week for most of the year, Analysis continues its thoughtful and intellectual approach to current affairs and the challenges that this now presents will be the subject of the final part of this chapter. There is however, another dimension to the Analysis story and that is its intervention in the public sphere. Or to put it differently the way Analysis helped in the formation and articulation of new political ideas. The first instance of this was at the birth of what we now know as Thatcherism in the mid-1970s. The programme had established something of a right-wing flavour in its early years. The principal presenter, Ian McIntyre, was a fully signed-up Conservative and his producer, George Fischer 'an unreconstructed Right-Wing Hungarian'.[6] Added to this was the programme's keen interest in political ideas, and especially new ones; so it was perhaps unsurprising that when radical neo-liberal ideas started to appeal to members of the Conservative party that Analysis should examine them.

The way this materialized was in the choice of subjects covered, the choice of presenters and contributors. A good example of this was the programme's coverage of one of the mainstays of Thatcherism, the politics of the 'Cold War'; in particular the threat of the Soviet Union to the West. There were thirty editions of the programme devoted to Cold War themes between 1975 and 1983. Some of these were presented by the noted 'cold warrior' Laurence Martin who used the programme to denounce Soviet expansion and warn listeners of the threat posed by communism. Similarly, the vociferously anti-trade union economist, Peter Oppenheimer presented editions of Analysis on the economy often using these to show how British trade unions were responsible for high inflation rates, industrial backwardness, lack of investment and slow growth. Mary Goldring, who became the main presenter of the programme from 1975 to 1983, was an outspoken critic of social security payments and their potential to undermine the work ethic. She denounced the 'abuse' of the welfare system and of the 'poverty professionals' who worked with claimants. In this outspoken and even provocative critique she used Analysis to express another central plank of Thatcherism.

It would be easy to dismiss this right-leaning orientation as simple bias and a failure of the BBC's flag-ship current affairs programme to achieve the BBC's contractual duty of impartiality. Perhaps a more persuasive argument is that radio current affairs should focus its attention on new ideas and ideologies as these appear even if that means some sacrifice of impartiality. This may seem a rather generous viewpoint but there is evidence that Analysis has 'thrown caution to the wind' and embraced new political ideas as these have emerged not only in the 1970s but more recently. So for example, in the early 1990s ideas began to circulate on the political left that came to be known as the Third Way. These were social democratic views and attempted to move beyond the traditional ideas of left and right. Eventually they were translated into what came to be known as 'Blairism' or the ideas of 'New Labour' and influenced government policy from 1997 onwards. The details of Third Way politics need not concern us here but what was very significant was the way they were thoroughly aired on Analysis. In 1995 there were 29 editions of Analysis and a number of these had titles which at least resonated with the Third Way agenda; 'The End of Enlightenment', 'the Pursuit of Happiness', 'Thinking Ahead' 'Obsolete signposts', 'A New Kind of Democrat' and 'The End of Everything' all suggested content which would reflect Third Way concerns. Anthony Giddens, the prominent British sociologist and Third Way thinker was a contributor to two editions of the programme and, most significantly, Geoff Mulgan, another key Third Way advocate, was the presenter of four and contributed to two others.

More recently, following Labour's defeat in the 2010 General Election and the election of Ed Miliband as leader, a group emerged in the party calling itself 'Blue Labour'. The new movement distances itself from the liberalism and perceived elitism of New Labour and has attempted to reconnect with Labour's traditional working class base. This has included some controversial ideas about the value of traditional communities and the dangers of immigration. Although it is much too early to see if Analysis is providing an ideological space for these new ideas and their advocates there has been at least one edition of the programme which featured some of the Blue Labour thinkers and was devoted to the new movement. It was presented by David Goodhart, the former Editor of Prospect magazine and featured Maurice Glasman and Marc Stears, both prominent figures in the Blue Labour movement. It would appear that at the risk of losing its impartiality, there are times when Analysis has become the platform for new political ideas whether they are on the left or right.

File on Four

Although this chapter is mainly concerned with Analysis, that programme has a distinguished stable-mate in the Manchester-produced single subject current affairs programme, File on Four. This programme was the idea of the former Analysis producer, Michael Green, who was its first producer in 1977. If Analysis was founded on anti-journalistic values and traditional Reithian principles of challenging the audience with difficult and serious programming, then File on Four seemed to embrace a form of journalism in which reporters would leave the studio behind to get ‘dust on their feet’ and provide stories ‘from the bottom up’.[7] Not only was this current affairs radio made outside London and in the industrial north but was also an attempt to go beyond the cosy studio-bound world of experts and into the schools, hospitals and prisons to get the voices of ‘ordinary people’. File on Four was also made distinctive from Analysis by its focus on policy and its implementation, rather than ideas and ideologies.

Within a year of being launched, File on Four had settled into a format that remains largely unchanged to this day. In addition to the journalistic method, the modus operandi of production has also hardly changed in over thirty years. The programme itself, with its very distinctive theme music, is presenter-led by a reporter who has spent usually three or four weeks in the field accompanied by a producer. Voices of a wide variety of people are recorded including the usual policy-makers and experts but also people who had experience of policies; the harassed mums in hospital waiting rooms; the prisoners, police officers, school-teachers and nurses so conspicuously missing from Analysis. It is possible to detect here a commitment to the voices of the powerless that can give File on Four a left-wing feel compared to the more right-leaning Analysis.

After weeks researching and recording, the reporter/presenter and the producer return to the Manchester office to edit the material and produce the first draft of a script. Every Monday morning there is a run-through of the first version of the programme with the Editor present. In BBC radio a programme Editor is in effect the manager of that programme and responsible for weekly output. After this rehearsal, the Editor makes a number of suggestions described here by the current Editor, David Ross:

> *“The Monday morning run-through is a key moment in the life of any File on Four and I will always want changes to some degree whether it’s a minor tweak and polish or whether it’s a complete reworking of the structure.”*[8]

The reporter and producer then spend the rest of the day and the evening if necessary to make the changes before a second run-through then takes place on Tuesday morning, the day of the evening broadcast. The final version of the programme is then recorded and edited in the afternoon.

One of the most important duties of the programme's Editor has been to decide on the topics to be covered in the 35 or so programmes each year. At times in its distinguished history, File on Four has had the funds to address international stories, including very early reporting of the development of AIDS in Africa. In the 1980s other international subjects included food aid in Bangladesh, child labour in the US and assassination in Guatemala. It is notable that even in the international stories the focus of attention remained on the victims of events and policies. But File on Four's particular subject area was and continues to be British social policy and its consequences. As a result, law and order (including prisons), the National Health Service, education and other parts of the welfare get particular attention. At the time of writing a recent edition of File on Four illustrates some of the programme's enduring features including subject selection. The description of this recent programme on the BBC website is revealing:

> *"Jenny Cuffe talks to foster parents who find themselves battling with local authorities over the children in their care. They describe a Kafkaesque nightmare where doors are shut, telephone calls and emails unanswered, even court orders are ignored. Meanwhile, vulnerable children are treated as pawns as social workers move them from one place to another."*[9].

The emphasis on people, both adults and children, as the 'vulnerable' victims of state institutions is typical and striking. The presenter is the celebrated radio journalist, Jenny Cuffe who was a producer of Woman's Hour in the 1970s. She went on to specialize in child abuse stories and began working for File on Four in the early 1980s under the editorship of Helen Boaden (currently Director, BBC News). Like Boaden herself, Cuffe was part of the feminization of radio news and current affairs in the 1980s that entailed more women working in factual radio and more feminist themes appearing in the output. Women like Jenny Abramsky and later Liz Forgan were highly influential radio managers while presenters like Mary Goldring and Sue MacGregor moved into the traditional male territory of news and current affairs presentation. So, thirty years after her arrival at the programme, Jenny Cuffe is still making much-needed programmes on the treatment of children, in this case in an edition of File on Four produced by the long-serving producer, Sally Chesworth.

File on Four's methodical and unchanging approach to research and production has resulted in a programme that continues to impress. It could be argued that this is the most successful current affairs programme on either radio or television in the history of British broadcasting. That accolade is partly the result of the very special role of programme Editor and to the remarkable stability of programme staff. David Ross has been the Editor since 1995, ensuring the highest possible standards of what he calls 'evidential journalism'. Gerry Northam and Jenny Cuffe are two of the long-serving reporters on File on Four and the result of this stability and commitment is a current affairs programme which maintains the highest standards of radio journalism.

New Challenges for Radio Current Affairs

A striking feature of recent British broadcasting has been the decline, almost the extinction, of television current affairs. As a number of authors have described, distinguished programmes like World in Action and This Week have disappeared (Holland, 2006; Goddard, Corner and Richardson, 2007) while those that have survived, such as BBC One's Panorama have struggled to find a secure place in the schedule or a stable format. While television current affairs has declined in the face of increased competition, the radio equivalent has endured. As television news seemed to succumb to the visual gimmickry of CGI enhanced studios and carefully coiffured presenters, radio news and current affairs have maintained the same rigour and the same modus operandi that was laid down by the programme pioneers. As Panorama has wilted Today, Analysis and File on Four have if anything become more confident and respected as the BBC's main purveyors of news comment and analysis. The World at One, that controversial early experiment with a combined news and comment format has recently been rewarded with a fifty per cent increase in its allotted time to forty-five minutes.

However, great challenges remain for radio current affairs. We no longer live in the world of the 1970s when Analysis and

File on Four were launched to such acclaim and Today began to occupy its pre-eminent position as the most listened to radio current affairs programme.[10] It is a commonplace of media discourse that the attention span of the audience has reduced and the proliferation of media, including the internet and internet-based provision, has made it harder to hold audiences for a period of time. This is a fundamental challenge for radio current affairs producers who must find new ways of engaging with listeners. In addition, the rise of social network sites like Facebook and Twitter have posed new challenges as radio producers try to find ways of incorporating these new communication opportunities into their programming.

Perhaps nowhere is this challenge greater than for BBC radio's most demanding and cerebral current affairs programme, Analysis. How can this most serious of programmes survive in the age of reduced attention-spans and social networks? The current Editor of Analysis, Innes Bowen, has adopted three different strategies with varying success. [11] There is an Analysis Facebook page but the most recent edition of the programme at the time of writing had only produced six comments and fewer 'likes'. A search back through the Facebook pages of the programme reveals a few regular commenters who comment repeatedly. After the edition of Analysis on leadership (7 November 2011) there was only one listener who commented and she did so five times. The ever-patient Analysis producer eventually replied with this brave attempt to turn a fan's over-enthusiasm to some advantage:

> *"Although we don't agree with you, we hate to disappoint one of our most loyal fans. We want to offer you a sop. If you care to nominate your favourite ever Analysis programme we will podcast it during the forthcoming break, saying that you recommended it and why. Just let us know."*[12]

The Analysis Twitter account shows that in February 2012 there were 1751 followers, which is more than either the programme specific Today or File on Four Twitter accounts. However, looking at the radio network Twitter accounts it is clear that these are far more popular with 51,000 followers of @ BBCRadio4 and over 85,000 followers of @bbc5Live.

It is hard not to see the Analysis experiment with social media as unsuccessful but this surely reflects the nature of a programme which was founded on the belief that listeners want intellectually challenging and authoritative opinion rather than the causal comments of other listeners. More successful in the programme's responses to contemporary challenges have been new ways of presenting and producing the programmes themselves. At one level quite minor changes of style can make the programme more digestible. So, for example, reducing the number of contributors from the usual seven or more down to just five can help the listener to follow the argument. The slightly austere tone of Analysis has recently been lightened at times; in an edition of the programme on cultural diplomacy, the artist Grayson Perry (described in the introduction as a 'transvestite potter') explained his difficulty in representing Britain in a country like Iran, 'I might think ooh what do I pack, you know?' (Analysis, 30 October 2011).

By far the most successful innovation in Analysis has been the introduction of debates. Although not branded as Analysis the 'Radio 4 Debate' on 3 August 2011 was titled, 'Keynes vs Hayek' and produced by Innes Bowen. She wrote this very revealing blog about the event which usefully summarises the way modern radio current affairs is meeting its challenges:

> *"Who would have thought that one way for Radio 4 to catch the attention of a younger audience was to organise a debate about two dead economists, with a septuagenarian member of the House of Lords (Lord Skidelsky) as the star attraction? Last Tuesday night, around 1000 people queued around the block at the London School of Economics to attend a Radio 4 debate about the ideas of John Maynard Keynes and Freidrich August von Hayek. In the 1930s, these two giants of economic thought advocated sharply contrasting responses to the Great Depression: Keynes argued for more state intervention and Hayek for a more free market approach."* [13]

She went on to claim that the average age of the audience was 23. There are plans to run more debates this time under the Analysis banner and so connect with a new Radio Four audience of young people who want to benefit from radio current affairs and in so doing demonstrate that there is still a future for the genre.

Conclusion

Throughout the long history of the BBC there has been an attempt to explain the world to listeners through the medium of speech alone. From the early educational talks in the 1920s to current affairs in the twenty-first century, the genre has evolved to become a central part of what we think of as public service broadcasting. The challenges to the serious and sometimes demanding single subject programmes are considerable but there is evidence, in audience size and the quality of programming, that there is still a demand for radio which addresses the biggest questions, perhaps especially at a time when social and economic problems seem so intractable.

The challenge for radio current affairs producers today is to produce serious and in depth programming, the sort which can help the listener make sense of an increasingly complex global world, while engaging the listeners who may not be used to such demanding content. The obvious route of social media seems not to be the only way forward and may just pay lip service to 'connecting' and 'engaging' listeners. There does, however, seem to be potential in live or 'as live' programming which is both cost effective and appeals to a younger audience as the case of the 'Kenyes vs Hayek' debate showed. It will be interesting for students of journalism to see how this challenging but important dimension of radio output adapts and innovates in the future.

Notes

1. All information available from: www.bbc.co.uk/radio4 [3 February 2012].
2. The most complete discussion of the radio talk is to be found in Scannell and Cardiff, 1991.
3. Broadcasting: Copy of the Royal Charter for the Continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation, 2006 (Cm 6925), Available: www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust [12 March 2012].
4. The producer was George Fischer and the presenter, Ian McIntyre.
5. George Fischer, interview, 22 September 2000.
6. Interview, Analysis producer, 30 October 1998.
7. Interview, Michael Green, 29 July 2008.

8. Interview, David Ross, 23 June 2010.
9. Carers in Conflict', Available: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b019rqcl#synopsis. [3 February 2012].
10. The average weekly audience for Today according to RAJAR figures released in January 2012 was a record 7.15 million, attributed to increased interest in the economic crisis (http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2012/feb/02/).
11. The following section is based partly on an interview with Innes Bowen, 20 January 2012.
12. BBC Radio 4 Analysis Facebook page, Available: www.facebook.com/BBCRadio4Analysis, [3 February 2012].
13. Innes Bowen, 'Is Economics the New Rock and Roll?', Available: www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/radio4/2011/08, [3 February 2012].

Challenging Questions

- What do you think is the most appropriate form for modern radio current affairs? As part of a news programme like Today or single subject like File on Four? In your answer provide examples from both programmes.

- What do you think is the best way for a programme like Analysis to use social network sites? Do you agree that there is insufficient synergy between the programme and sites like Facebook?

- Listen to one example of File on Four and one of Analysis. Explain how the two programmes differ and state what you think are the particular strengths and weaknesses of the two different approaches.

Recommended reading

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6 Radio Interviews:
A Changing Art

Ceri Thomas

"If you want to drop a word in the ear of the nation, then this is the programme in which to do it."

Brian Redhead, former presenter of BBC Radio 4's Today programme

In the Spring of 2007, after he announced that he would be standing down as Prime Minister but before he named the day, Tony Blair gave a pair of interviews to the Today programme. The first was to concentrate on domestic policy, the second on foreign affairs. They were certainly significant; in some ways, I think, remarkable.

They were not billed as valedictory, but the sense that they were hung in the air. They were broadcast live - the first in slightly strange circumstances from a GP's surgery in Tony Blair's constituency, the second from an ornate room in Downing St - and they were quite long, nearly an hour in total. I remember any number of small details about the way we prepared; the gentle arm-wrestling with John Humphrys, who was doing the interviews, about content and tone; the hours of agonising about how we could even begin to make sense of ten years of a premiership. But I remember most clearly that, at the end of both interviews, Tony Blair needed to change his shirt. The intense mental focus he devoted to the interviews was hard physical effort. I had never seen that before, and I have never seen it since.

People who knew Tony Blair would probably not have been surprised. They might have recognised something coherent in his approach to politics in general and interviews in particular: he wanted to make an argument, and to win it. There are other ways of going about the job - you can pitch your case to the persuaded and take a chance with the rest - but, whether you liked it or not, this was Blair's style. That the mental effort needed to win was physically demanding was clearly old news. There were spare shirts on hand, as I recall.

If Tony Blair was determined to make an argument, we made one too. We did more than try to understand and clarify his account of a decade in power, we offered an alternative account and questioned his motives (all, of course, we would say, on behalf of our listeners). So although we approached those interviews in a way that we hoped would be precise, well thought-through, and revealing, in tone they were adversarial. Some of the papers, in fact, saw them through that prism, and wrote them up as encounters between two old adversaries, Blair and Humphrys.

In adopting that tone, the interviews were part of a solid tradition in political interviewing, which, at that point, had been present or dominant in Britain for just short of 50 years. Over the past decade that approach has come under consistent pressure on a number of grounds. Does it work? And even if it does, is it corrosive of trust in politics; part of the slew of reasons why everything from turnout at general elections to respect for people in public life has subsided?

If, day after day, we are persisting in a way of interviewing which is ineffective; and if, week after week, we are melting the institutional glue, which holds this country together, then we have a problem. How do we respond to the charge?

This chapter will try to answer that question. It is about interviews and how we conduct them. But at the same time, it is about more than just that; it is about how we in the media relate to politicians and to people in public life generally, and the values that both sides bring to that relationship.

For the mainstream media, getting this right is one of the big challenges of our time. If traditional programmes - Today, and many others - are going to remain important in a radically-altered media world, then holding the powerful to account will be a key plank in the case we make for our own survival. We need public support for our role in holding to account, but we also need public support for the way we go about it.

Shifting relationships

Like most important transitions in broadcasting, the shift in the relationship between the media and politicians from deferential to adversarial was not the product of one man or one moment, but man and moment came together powerfully and symbolically when Robin Day interviewed Harold Macmillan in February 1958. At the time, the Daily Express called it "the most vigorous cross-examination a prime minister has been subjected to in public", but with the benefit of half a century of hindsight it has taken on a wider significance. It was the moment when the broadcast interview became part of the political process in the UK.

Three years after that pivotal interview, Robin Day had become a substantial enough figure for someone to ask him to codify what he had so recently invented. He did it in ten points, ending with a warning flourish to a wannabe successor:

> *"He should remember that a television interviewer is not employed as a debater, prosecutor, inquisitor, psychiatrist, or third-degree expert, but as a journalist seeking information on behalf of the viewer."*
> (Day, 1990)

We could debate among ourselves how closely Robin Day followed his own tenth commandment - despite his warning that interviewers should not think of themselves as inquisitors, his autobiography was called 'Grand Inquisitor', and he lies in a grave inscribed with those two words - but his call to the next generation was clear. They should inquire, not argue.

In defining the job in that way, Robin Day was drawing on his own experience as a barrister. The interplay between the law and politics, the law and journalism, has helped to shape both parliament and the media over the years, and now the chief agent of change in the relationship between the two was using the etiquette of the courtroom as a point of reference for the new rules of the television studio.

It is tempting to think of the arrival of Robin Day on television as a disruptive moment, a break with the past, which set a tone that has endured ever since. And certainly - more in the way that he practised the interview rather than preached about it - that view seems to hold water. The ripples from that interview with Harold Macmillan are still washing through radio and television studios today.

Over the same period - no surprise - the practice of the law has been evolving. And since it served as an important reference point for Robin Day half a century ago, it may still have something useful to tell us.

A legal approach to journalistic practice

Broadcast interviewing and courtroom advocacy are different crafts but, thanks partly to Robin Day, they share a common footing; both lawyers and interviewers in the UK operate in adversarial systems. Definitions vary but one of the most succinct comes from the New Zealand Law Commission, that 'an adversarial system is based on mistrust in the reliability of the prosecution evidence.' Today listeners and Newsnight viewers will recognise that stance.

The alternative legal approach, which is often urged on us as interviewers, is inquisitorial; the system which operates widely across Europe and much of the rest of the world. Under it, a judge or examining magistrate sets out to establish the key facts of a case before it reaches court. For our purposes its significance is that material, which is brought to court is regarded as having been verified before it gets there. There are not the same disputes in court about the value or the veracity of evidence.

Within our shared adversarial tradition in the UK, the legal profession has one distinct advantage over journalism. Every day, in courts throughout the country, small groups of randomly-selected members of the public tell barristers whether or not their approach to advocacy is persuasive. Juries deliver verdicts, and advocacy changes as a result. The feedback to broadcasters is neither so quick nor so precise.

The long-run trend that many senior figures in the law identify is away from a grandiose, showboating style (crudely, think Rumpole) to something quieter and lower key. The evidence seems to show that the new approach is simply more effective.

One of the proponents and theorists of the new wave is Matthew Ryder, a QC at Matrix Chambers, described by the leading legal directory in 2010 as "a master of the trial process." One of his current projects is to make the case for what he calls Invisible Advocacy:

> *"It is a style of advocacy that seeks to minimise the voice or presence of the advocate. The critical points appear to present themselves.*

> *The outcome of invisible advocacy should feel obvious; a matter of inevitability; or something to which the audience has been led by its own deductive reasoning.*
> *The ultimate goal of invisible advocacy is that the listener feels he or she has been persuaded by the quality of the argument and not by the quality of the advocate."* (Chambers & Partners, 2010)

As a way of doing business, it demands more self-conscious humility than lawyers, generally, are famous for displaying (or broadcasters, you might think). But the rationale, in the courts at least, seems rounded and astute. Importantly, it is not a plea to switch from an adversarial system to an inquisitorial one - that option is not open to lawyers practising in the UK - but for a more subtle and forensic adversarial form:

> *"First, and foremost, a modern or post-modern audience is well aware of the adversarial 'show'. They see - or think they can see - the levers, pulleys and showmanship of how an advocate tries to win a case. As a result both judges and juries observe it, but view it almost as outsiders.*
> *To use a slightly inept analogy, lawyers often think that they are like Derren Brown, using skilful techniques to twist and persuade the jury just as Derren Brown fools his victims. In reality, if the lawyer is Derren Brown, the jury is not his victim but his audience. They are impressed by the techniques but see it as a show, not as reality.*
>
> *In other words, modern juries and judges have largely disconnected the techniques that give entertainment as part of the 'show' from the information that they need to reach their decision. Once an advocate realises that a modern audience will see his work as a triumph of technique but, partly for that very reason, will not necessarily be persuaded by it, it becomes obvious that the best advocacy needs to be invisible.*
> *What is more, neither judges nor juries like to think they have been persuaded by lawyers. They pride themselves on being able to see past the lawyers' techniques. What they are looking for is the meat of the argument, not the showmanship of the advocate. Ultimately, the noticeable presence of the lawyer is a distraction or - even worse - an irritant and an obstacle to*

> *reaching the right answer. Everyone's lives would be easier if the lawyer disappeared."*

The lazy thing to do at this point would be to swap 'lawyer' for 'presenter', 'jury' for 'audience', and declare a new paradigm. But the broadcast studio is not a court - different pressures and responsibilities apply - and some options available to barristers may not be open to us. There is undeniably, however, one serious intellectual challenge in all this: if a new style of advocacy is proving more effective in front of juries made up of the same men and women who watch and listen to BBC programmes, we would be failing in our duty if we did not consider the possibility that it might work better for us too.

A varied landscape

The courts might get more useful and meaningful real-time data on what works and what does not, and change accordingly, but it would be a mistake to think of broadcasters as static and monolithic. Interviewers within the same organisation, within the same programme, on the same day, use very different approaches and techniques. Any decent presenter should be able to call on the full range of techniques and approaches at our disposal.

Within that varied landscape, there is a constant; most days, to quote Matthew Ryder, we put on a largely 'adversarial show', and on the relatively-rare occasions when we think it is merited, an aggressive one. The invisible advocate's silent reprimand would be simple; the showiness does not work any more, we should change.

In fact, over time, practice is changing. Some less well-regarded tradecraft is in decline. What the former BBC Director General, John Birt, called the ''rabbit punch' (Birt, 1995) - the question without substance, designed mostly to destabilise - is thrown less often than it used to be (although politicians may still need to know the price of a pint of milk to prove that they inhabit the 'real world').

Better advocacy is certainly something we should aim for; invisibility, I suspect not. One of the reasons audiences invest trust in high-profile interviewers is because, in some sense, they think they know them; they have a sense of their personalities. A broadcasting presence as powerful as that is often built on an element of showmanship. There is theatre in what we do, and there always has been.

Before we agree to the proposition that our interviews are failing too often, we need a yardstick of success. What constitutes an effective interview? Here again, lawyers have an advantage over journalists. In court, the only thing that really matters is what works. For a barrister with an eye on his career an elegantly-argued lost case might not be a disaster, but for the defendant outcome is everything.

Broadcasting is a muddier business, and judging the success or failure of an interview is complex and subjective. Listeners are capable of telling us one thing and doing another. They might inform us (and mean it) that all they really want is for light to be shed, but tests can show that they pay closer attention to the radio, and enjoy it more, when an interview generates heat.

All the same, we can probably agree some benchmarks:

We want to elicit information; hopefully the information the audience is looking for. It is inexcusable if an interview does not manage this to some extent.

Our ambition, particularly in political interviews, is to hold to account; to challenge, interrogate, and represent other points of view.

We might look for a moment of revelation; a surprising insight into policy, politics, or character. Anybody hoping this will happen often is likely to be very disappointed.

And we want to entertain (a key difference between broadcasting and the courts). The conversation has to be engaging.

If an interview manages none of the above we do not need to dwell on it for long: it failed. Sadly, life is rarely so absolute, but even if our interviews are becoming relatively less effective over time we still have cause for concern.

Signs of a trend in that direction are elusive, although the size of the audience is potentially one useful guide. If listeners were becoming disillusioned with a sterile and predictable pantomime then you would expect them to desert us, but numbers, for Today at least, have been rising, whether you look over a ten year horizon, or twenty five. Perhaps not every outlet could say the same, but if the daily programme most closely associated with the adversarial style of interviewing is still healthy then it is more difficult to diagnose the style itself as a disease.

What about other symptoms? There is one, which might suggest a sub-conscious concern on our part with the effectiveness of our interviews: they are going on for longer. Over the past decade the duration of the big political set-piece on Today has grown. We might be persevering because we are enjoying ourselves so much. More likely, we are doing it because we are taking more time to make even limited progress.

The two measurements above are narrow and statistical. The broader one - more interesting, perhaps - is environmental: are we poisoning the water? Is the style of political interview, which has been prevalent for so long injuring politics, journalism, or both?

A question of trust

The most important currency in the trade between interviewers and politicians is trust. The balance of trade between them can shift quickly within an individual interview, but accounts have been filed for decades, and the picture they reveal is discouraging to both sides.

The polling organisation Ipsos MORI has been measuring confidence in a number of professions since 1983 through its Veracity Index. In 2011, as in the previous 29 years, it asked people who they would "generally trust to tell the truth". Politicians scored 14%, and journalists 19%. It is tempting to think that the public is describing to pollsters a collapse in confidence, but the truth is almost more troubling; they are describing a relatively steady state. In 1983, politicians scored 18%, and over the nearly 30 years of the survey the 'sector average' for journalism has been around 17%. It is very hard to collapse from those levels.

By 1983, when the Ipsos MORI survey started, the broadcast interview had been established as a part of the political process for a generation. If the style is corrosive of public trust in politics then the rust might have taken hold long before pollsters started looking for it. But if we are trying to find evidence that politics has been further damaged in the past 30 years, and that journalists have played a part in that process, that evidence is not obvious from this, the longest-running survey of its kind.

Other surveys are available, of course. The Committee On

Standards In Public Life commissions one of the more interesting which makes distinctions between different categories of journalists, and may suggest something about the dynamic between journalism and politics.

The Committee has published its Survey Of Public Attitudes Towards Conduct In Public Life every two years since 2004, asking members of the public which professions they trust to tell the truth. In it, tabloid journalists achieve roughly the same startling levels of disdain that Ipsos MORI finds (scoring between 7% and 16% over the four surveys thus far), but MPs do better, trusted to tell the truth by between 23% and 29% of people over the years. And television journalists are dramatically separated from the red tops, at levels that range between 47% and 58%.

As interesting as those base figures, potentially, is the glimpse these snapshots may give us of the interplay between TV journalists and politicians in the public mind. These particular polls have not been running for long enough to count as rock-solid evidence, but here is an interesting thing: in each of them, every time trust in politicians declines, trust in TV journalists increases, and vice versa. Is it possible that there is a zero sum game in trust between the two sides?

It is worth remembering that earlier definition of adversarial justice, which could equally well apply to the relationship between interviewers and politicians: "An adversarial system is based on mistrust in the reliability of the prosecution evidence". On that reading, mistrust is the core principle we bring to interviews; the principle on which our approach is based.

It would be easy to build a neat syllogism around that idea: our fundamental approach is to mistrust; if we treat interviewees as untrustworthy every day, people are bound to trust them less over time; it follows that we undermine trust.

What is more, a supporter of Invisible Advocacy would argue, there is no strong evidence that a showy, adversarial approach works. It might not be easy to demonstrate that it does not, but that is really only because we cannot find an accurate way of measuring the effectiveness of interviews. And, unlike the courts, broadcasters are not tied to any particular style by centuries of tradition. Robin Day led the way from deference to an adversarial approach. Someone else could lead us to the inquisitorial high ground where trust is less contested.

It is a coherent and reasonable argument, but there is a danger that it neglects one vital component: the importance of values.

So let us take those values seriously and look at the counter-arguments.

For a lawyer, the question of modifying his or her approach in court is only a tactical one: what will work best? For us as journalists, figuring out whether we should become less adversarial, values immediately come into play.

To put it at its simplest, distrust - reasoned distrust - is a core value in British journalism, and that value is a significant and interesting constraint on how much we can change, and even how much we might want to change.

We have not embraced distrust just to ape the legal system where some of our interviewers cut their teeth, we have done it because the public expects it of us (the polls surely tell us that?). Where might a more trusting approach lead? At worst, to a political and media class respectfully intertwined, mutually supportive, feigning an appropriate distance at moments when it suits them - getting away with stuff. On a clear day, we might be able to see across the English Channel and point to France where some of those horrors came to pass (though, we would have to admit, less so now than in years gone by).

So, on that reading, we distrust our interviewees because British people distrust them, and because trusting seems to lead to worse outcomes. And we distrust them because, although some people suspect that it does harm to public life, no one can prove it. We hold to our course because if, suddenly, we changed it - towards politicians, for example - we would be fearful of sacrificing some of the reserves of trust we have built up over many years. Trust probably would turn out to be a zero-sum game to some degree.

That, too, is a coherent and reasonable argument, but not without its dangers. If it holds out no possibility of change then it may also be a trap. We cannot find ourselves locked into arguing in favour of an ineffective approach to interviews only because it suits our values. We cannot cling to a corrosive approach just because we are afraid of changing it.

The cornerstone of this whole debate is the question of good faith. As things stand, when we slip into adversarial mode we assume that the people who sit opposite us in the studio are likely to be acting, to some degree, in bad faith. At best, they might want to tell us part of a story not the whole thing. Quite possibly, they will be determined to actively conceal a lot of information, which would be relevant and interesting. At worst, although few will actually lie to us, many will come as close to lying as a technical get-out clause would allow.

Faced with that set of assumptions, the incentives for an interviewee to act in good faith - to be as open, revealing, and truthful as possible - are not obvious. On the other hand, hindsight tells us that our assumptions are not stupid. Interviewees frequently do behave in those ways, so the rewards for us to change are not great either. There is a strong first-mover disincentive.

How could either side overcome that disincentive? In a much more disparate media world than the one Robin Day inhabited it seems unlikely that a single, disruptive figure will emerge, as influential as he was, to single-handedly change the terms of trade in interviews.

That leaves two other possibilities. The first would be some sort of external stimulus. Public trust in politicians could shift decisively; audiences could start to turn away from our programmes; someone could establish a causal link between the way we go about our business and the erosion of trust in the institutions of British public life. At the moment, none of those conditions seem to be in place. But perhaps the important thing is that we do not close the studio door to good faith if, at some point, the evidence tells us that we should let it in.

The second possibility is that we, journalists and politicians, act collectively to create the right conditions for a different relationship. To some extent, I think, this already happens. If the answers to our questions are candid and direct, an interview changes course. Small acts of good faith are reciprocated. This 'deal' has never been formal - nor should it be - but some politicians understand it much better than others. And there are times when we in the media could understand it, and act on it, better than we do. For anybody, on either side, looking for a way out of our entrenched, adversarial positions, a series of carefully-negotiated baby steps feels a much more likely way forward than a giant leap.

A different relationship

Against that backdrop of rumbling concern about how politics and the media affect each other there has been talk from time to time of a 'third way' for programmes like Today, neither adversarial nor inquisitorial but ‘deliberative’. If we followed that star, the argument goes, we would be more interested in problem-solving than in fault-finding; we could be the glue in society, not the rust.

Deliberative policy-making tries to reach a consensus through careful consideration of the facts. One of the mechanisms it can use is the citizens’ jury. Not long after Tony Blair gave those two interviews to Today in 2007, his successor Gordon Brown came on the programme to express his enthusiasm for the idea:

> *“I’d like to have what are called citizens’ juries, where we say to people, “look, here is a problem that we are dealing with; today it’s housing, it could be drugs or youth services, it could be anti-social behaviour; here’s a problem, this is what we are thinking about it, but tell us what you think. And let’s look at some of the facts, let’s look at some of the challenges. Let’s look at some of the options that have been tried in different countries around the world, and then let’s together come to a decision about how to solve these problems.”*
> (Brown, 2007).

On the face of it, it is an attractive proposition: mature, rational, and maybe even appealing to a British sense of fair play. If it is has not produced an obvious shift in our policy-making since Gordon Brown endorsed it that may be because it is difficult to carry through a change which can seem designed to de-politicise choices which we have always seen as inherently political. If it has not produced an obvious change in the way we make our programmes that is probably, in part, because of the risk that it would make terribly dull radio or television. Broadly speaking, it would also imply a shift to an inquisitorial approach (the facts and the nature of the problem would be agreed before anybody went into the studio).

So, just like the challenge in the adversarial/inquisitorial argument, the challenge to broadcasters from the deliberative camp is really to do with our effectiveness as part of the democratic process. Critics would say that we lack the obvious calmness and seriousness of a room filled with citizen jurors; we persist in looking for splits in parties or coalitions and ignore more serious issues; we are very bad at calibrating risk; and more than anything, perhaps, we pretend that decisions are simple and trade-offs do not exist.

On some occasions, on all of those points, we are guilty to some extent. But, of course, not entirely and not always. In our messy and unfocused way (also very British) we play a vital role in helping listeners and viewers to form their views, and for consensus or disagreement to emerge. If that were not the case politicians would not care so much about what we do. We might not play a neat deliberative role but we do allow people to think and decide.

We also have to contend with some constraints when we try to change things. The way we are perceived by the people we interview, and our place in the wider press environment, tend to fix us rather than free us. An example: in November 2008 when Jacqui Smith was Home Secretary she launched a policy to tackle the trafficking of women for prostitution. Like any policy, it was the result of finely-balanced calculations within government. It would certainly have been one of a number of policy options which were considered, and emerged from that process either as the best or the least-worst.

With all that in mind, Evan Davis asked Jacqui Smith an unusual question on Today: “What are the disadvantages of this scheme you’re proposing today?” (Today, BBC Radio 4, 19 November 2008). It was intended - genuinely, I am sure - as a way of exploring complexity, trade-offs and nuance in government, but it fell flat. Jacqui Smith paused for a time and then replied that, in effect, there were no disadvantages.

It would be easy to dismiss it as a ludicrous answer: she could have said ‘Of course there were disadvantages; here they were; but obviously there were fewer downsides to this policy than to any other on the table, which was why it had emerged as the government’s chosen option’.

In a different world, all those things would have been sayable. In this one, it is not so clear that they were. The next-day headline-writers would have done a little dance at the prospect of a government minister “rubbishing” or “disowning” a policy on air. The whole policy prospectus - which was intended to do good to vulnerable women, after all - might have been sunk while it was being launched. Uncertainty, doubt, and imperfection may be difficult commodities for us to trade in as journalists, but we are far from alone.

An age of uncertainty

Interviews define our relationship with politicians, and of all the many phrases that try to pin down that relationship, three are probably trotted out more than any others: we should "Speak truth to power"; ask ourselves "Why is this lying bastard lying to me?"; and remember that "Journalism is to politician as dog is to lamp-post".

I have never particularly liked any of those descriptions. They seem, in turn, conceited (when were we given a monopoly on the truth?), cynical (obviously), and abusive (urinating on people or institutions is frowned on for a reason). They reflect an uncomfortable certainty in the virtue of journalism and the vice of politics.

Some of that assurance is fading. The decline in the power of the written press, the rise of social media, and the light that has been shone on the way journalism has been practised in some quarters, all conspire to make those primary-colour maxims from the middle of the last century feel too vivid for a more muted here and now.

All interviews are products of their age, and our age is characterised by uncertainty. If those old definitions of the relationship between the media and politics seem cocksure, what would work in their place?

Certainly, a more equivocal definition; we are not really in a position to make a grab for the moral high-ground.

One that allows an interviewee to show good faith - to be as open and honest as he or she can realistically be - and demands that we recognise good faith when we see it.

One that begins now, and for the foreseeable future, from an adversarial point of view; from a position of reasoned distrust.

Our traditional concern about values means that we focus very heavily on our inputs to interviews. Invisible Advocacy emphasises outcomes, so it presents us with a set of intellectual challenges which are strengthened by evidence and weakened by the fact that the evidence is gathered in courts not studios.

We can learn from it. To some extent we have already begun to observe the same preferences in our audiences as barristers have seen in juries, and to absorb the same lessons. Interviews have started to change: less knockabout, more precision. But firing arrows is a more skilled and time-consuming business than flinging mud, and so the demands on us multiply. We have to understand subjects more completely, and constantly look in on ourselves from outside. Will the audience think we sound reasonable? Will they agree with our judgements? The less we rely on tricks of the trade, the surer we have to be of the facts and the evidence.

There is a danger of this appearing almost trite - hands up if you think that sounding ill-informed, irrational, and wayward in our judgements would be a good idea? - but the hidden potential is profound; we can begin to test whether there really is a zero-sum game in trust between journalists and politicians. In the past we might have built trust in our side by routinely distrusting the other. If, in the future, we can build it more quietly and patiently, through hard work and knowledge, by getting our culture and values right without suggesting that others' are wrong, then the rules of the interviewing game will have changed, and perhaps for the better.

Challenging questions

- Construct a debate between a champion of invisible advocacy and a supporter of the traditional style radio interview, drawing on examples from your own listening to radio news and current affairs programmes.

- Select an interview from a recent edition of the Today programme and analyse the questions asked. How might these questions be changed to conform to the style of exchanges used in the legal system outlined in this chapter?

- 'All interviews are products of their age, and our age is characterised by uncertainty.' Discuss this statement using examples from your own listening and reading.

- Consider the importance of trust in the context of the radio news interview.

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7 The Changing Landscape of Magazine Journalism

Emma Scattergood

"I don't believe the title 'magazine journalist' is even relevant in some parts of the sector now. I'm not sure … publishers would use it to describe their content providers' jobs now"

Lorraine Davies, Periodicals Training Council (2012)

"Information still needs to be gathered, processed, analysed, edited and presented with a spin. We still need these good old-fashioned journalism skills, so that we are doing the work for the reader."

Miranda Eason, Hearst UK (2012)

For the past 20 years there has been talk of the magazine industry being under threat, yet magazines continue to confound expectations and to survive, even thrive, in difficult times. Today however, magazines are experiencing their most testing time yet, with the industry facing massive technological change as well as a shift in how the public expects to purchase and consume editorial content.

This chapter examines the impact of these changes on the consumer magazine market. Unlike news and trade/business magazines, for which it became clear very quickly that a switch to a digital model was their only chance of survival (more on this later), consumer magazines have, arguably, been able to approach the digital revolution in a more bespoke fashion, developing digital brands rather more cautiously alongside their print offerings, and as a result, they are still in a period of transition.

Experts believe that consumer magazines will survive, but only if their journalists can step up to the challenge of not only producing appealing and engaging print content that can compete against digital offerings, but also producing additional content for their own brand's alternative platforms – and to do so against a background of limited resource in a continuing recession.

Can the print consumer magazine survive against such pressure?

And will 'traditional' magazine journalism skills no longer be valued in the same way, if the focus is being increasingly diverted away from the print brand? In fact, will the 'magazine journalist' continue to exist at all?

This chapter seeks to clarify what the new landscape means for the magazine journalist, talking to the leaders of key consumer brands such as Heat and Woman & Home, and asking how they are meeting the current challenges. However, as Tim Holmes points out in Magazine Journalism, "With the picture in the magazine industry changing almost daily, it can be difficult to assess exactly how the future for magazine journalists will finally pan out".

The background

First, some context as to where the industry stands: According to Damian Butt, MD of Imagine publishing (2011):

> *"It's a particularly exciting time now; we are at the launch of the digital revolution. The ipad has really kick-started tablets as a viable platform. It has suddenly brought home how everything links together into an almost one stop shop for buying, storing and consuming media. It is a window to the future."*

The emergence of Apple's Newstand has created a more democratic environment, allowing smaller digital publishers to access a global audience. Good content can now rise to the top, whether it is coming from an established brand or not, meaning big brands have to work harder, to ensure that they are entertaining and informative and grabbing the reader's attention.

We have consumers with smart phones and laptops, if not yet ipads and Kindles, and all able to access more magazines in more formats than ever before. Which means journalists are under pressure to produce more varied content, as Neil Robinson, digital director of IPC, explains:

> *"We are asking people to commission a story, and think, 'where is it going to be placed, and how are we going to play it out on all these different platforms?' We are also having to say to them, 'Don't be afraid to do the story to a camera' - and that is a really big leap for some of them."*

Audiences are now extremely clever at getting the different bits of information they want from different platforms and in different forms. As Sophie Wybrew-Bond, MD of Bauer's hugely successful consumer titles Heat and Empire, says:

> *"Audiences have almost become their own editors. They're editing their world because their world allows them to. And we have to be the kings of edited information, if we are charging for it."*

The journalists working on B2B (business to business) magazines were among the first to face this challenge, as Robinson explains:

> *"Google search allowed the business reader to get the industry information they wanted without needing magazines at all. B2B magazines had to be very quick to create a fresh proposition that was seen to have value again. Simple journalism, to be honest, just didn't cut it for readers anymore, so we started to offer relevant databases and so on. Now it's the curation of what the journalists write about that is still very valuable to the readers."*

The death of the magazine journalist?

Lorraine Davies of the Periodicals Training Council (PTC) sees this not only impacting upon the role of the journalist, but how journalists perceive or sell themselves:

> *"I don't believe the title 'magazine journalist' is even relevant in some parts of the sector now. I'm not sure B2B publishers would use it to describe their content providers' jobs now."*

Davies even goes so far as to suggest that aspiring young journalists today should not refer to themselves as 'magazine journalists' at all - the implication being that they are restricting their opportunities by doing so. However, for those working in the consumer magazine sector today it is still very much about 'magazines', even if those magazines are extending their offering over a variety of platforms. In other words, there is still a need for old - fashioned magazine journalists to produce a strong consumer print brand, albeit with additional multimedia skills.

Miranda Eason, Editor of You and Your Wedding (which has been lauded for being a strong cross-media brand and was Hearst UK's first consumer magazine website), is a strong believer in the importance of keeping the print content distinctly separate from online, so that the website complements the brand rather than replacing it:

> *"That is the biggest challenge for magazine journalists now – keeping the printed content looking fresh and relevant, when you are working on material with very long lead times. It's also important to keep the luxury 'treat' feel of a magazine as that's what separates the magazine from the website. Online can't recreate the indulgence of a gorgeous image running across a double page spread."*

This may explain why some consumer magazines have taken a more cautious approach to going digital, as much of magazines' continued appeal is that they offer the reader much more than the sort of information they might source online.

Wybrew-Bond agrees:

> *"It isn't right to jump in with all brands. You need to think about what you're offering. You have to look at the essence of your*

brand, and think about what suits the medium."

But whatever the brand, and whatever their job title, most 'magazine journalists' will now find themselves having to work across additional platforms to some degree - and often without a substantial increase in team numbers.

"I think the big challenge is working with the resource that you've got today," admits IPC's Neil Robinson:

"You know that the resource cannot get any bigger because the revenues just aren't growing fast enough. You are having to ask people to stretch, and re-organise the way they work, so they can be as broad as possible in terms of delivery of the story to the consumer on whatever platform. Unfortunately, every new platform that comes along adds another level of work and, for the editorial staff, that's an extra stretch."

Maintaining quality across the board

So is the quality of magazine journalism being compromised?

'There has been a view that we may sometimes have to adjust the bar to allow us to physically do the breadth,' Robinson admits:

This is one of the challenges for editors and I don't relish that thought. It is difficult to get more people on the ground to do the work, because during this transitional period, just adding another five or six members of staff means the profits go down, and that doesn't help.

The resource issue is something that will, hopefully, ease in the future as publishers find effective ways of monetising their digital offerings and more staff are better equipped for the challenge, but journalists will still need to produce fresh material for the new platforms without taking their eye off the original print product. Indeed, the quality of the print product becomes even more important when it is in competition with online offerings.

"The over-riding objective must be to give the paying customer of the printed magazine a sense of added value to their "club membership," says magazine publishing consultant and former editor, Peter Jackson. "And the website has to be sufficiently exciting to

> *persuade browsers to put down their money and join the club to discover what extra delights await them in print."*

So magazine journalists must be able to produce quality copy for two or more quite different briefs.

"Yes, journalists now have to change the way they write, depending on what they are writing for," explains Imagine's Damian Butt. But, he insists:

> *"That doesn't mean prostituting your values at all, it just means that you are going to do the longhand, very thorough, bit for the magazine, then you are going to have to change the way you write in order to do the blog. There are people who write in a very proper way, and think you should never change that whatever you are writing for, but they are facing a very grim future because the sad fact is, if you put a well written printed article on your website, no one will ever find it - it doesn't conform to the kind of principles that Google work by. The difference between 100 people reading it and 1000 people reading it, is all about writing in such a way that allows it to be indexed and found more readily. It is hard, but journalists have to understand that one print article might now be two Internet articles, or a news story and a top ten. The skills going forwards are about adaptability."*

The challenge of adopting new skills

Imagine, however, are producing magazines aimed mostly at a gadget/technology market, and the journalists they employ are more likely to be technically-minded and comparatively young. It is more of a challenge for brands such as IPC's Woman & Home, which despite being one of the market leaders, with a circulation of around 300,000, is staffed by experienced magazine journalists who may be less engaged with new formats. At the moment it is rare to have a body of staff which is proficient at both working on the print version and attending to the needs of the new platforms.

"At IPC, we have a portfolio geared towards females of over 35," says Neil Robinson:

> *"We have to jump into working across a variety of platforms,*

which requires new multimedia skills, but we can't do it without our existing staff, because they understand the audience and understand what readers want to hear. We can't just get rid of them and bring in a whole new group of 18 year olds to do it, because they wouldn't have the sensitivity to run those brands. It is a huge challenge for everyone involved. We've got to try and help the body of existing staff to build up their confidence."

Many magazines are currently at an awkward transitional stage in this respect, but on her title, Eason sees it as more of a fusion than a divide.

"Yes, many of the younger journalists are more confident online, but it boosts their confidence to be able to pass on their web-savvy skills to the staff with less experience. It works well, because their enthusiasm encourages the existing members of the team to embrace the new technologies - more so, possibly, than if they were in a drier environment such as a training course with the IT department. And, on the flipside, experience is experience. Older journalists can pass on their 'been-there-seen-it-done-it' experience to younger staff. It can be a holistic process - it doesn't have to be us and them. It's also really important to lead by example. If the editor is a champion of online, it will filter down."

Magazine editors then will have to embrace two more new roles – championing the benefits of the web to their journalists who pre-date the internet, but also ensuring that younger journalists realise magazine content can't just be information lifted from other websites.

The skills needed for the future

"If readers can get information online, they are not going to pay for the same information regurgitated in-mag," says Eason:

"Although new media skills, adaptability and the ability to work across different platforms are obviously crucial, information still needs to be gathered, processed, analysed, edited and presented with a spin. We still need these good old-fash-

> *ioned journalism skills, so that we are doing the work for the reader."*

Veteran magazine journalist and editor, Peter Jackson agrees:

> *"Magazine journalists have to remember the basic requirement of their craft is unchanged. A journalist is someone who can identify a story, obtain that story and present it in the way that provides maximum engagement with the chosen audience. Whether that is by way of print, television, radio or online is merely a question of delivery systems. Looking forwards, my advice is that aspiring journalists should, along with learning shorthand and acquiring a driving licence, also master the basic disciplines of TV, radio and online. But above all, they should remember that journalism is the medium of words, imagination, ideas and the degree to which you can bring all that together to create a distinctive style. That will stand anyone in good stead, whatever the platform."*

So, whether or not the title 'magazine journalist' maintains currency remains to be seen, but, for many observers and insiders, the industry should be wary of replacing 'journalists' with 'content providers'.

Challenging Questions

- Is the title 'magazine journalist' relevant anymore? Or should journalists now see themselves as multimedia 'content providers'?
- Are old fashioned magazine journalism skills still relevant in a digital landscape?
- Do print magazines still have a future in a digital landscape?

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8 Live Blogging and Social Media Curation:

Challenges and Opportunities for Journalism

Einar Thorsen

"Ladies and gentlemen, we can rebuild it. We have the technology. We have the capability to build a sustainable journalism model. Better than it was before. Better, stronger, faster."

Vadim Lavrusik, Journalist Program Manager at Facebook (21 December 2011)

In the early years of the web it would have been inconceivable to break news online before print or broadcast, never mind using online public platforms to source and verify stories as they unfolded. Yet this is increasingly becoming accepted practice for many journalists in an online, real-time news environment. Today journalists monitor social media for insight into political processes and as an instant indication of "public sentiment", rather than waiting for press releases and opinion polls. Citizens are actively participating in online news reporting too, through publishing eyewitness accounts, commentary, crowdsourcing and fact checking information. Established professional values are being recast in this rapidly evolving relationship between journalists, elite sources and citizens. Within this landscape some journalists have been adopting alternative forms of newsgathering and storytelling through the internet. They are facing challenges to preserve traditional standards of journalism, such as verification of information and sources, whilst also capitalising on the opportunities afforded by the immediacy, transparency and interactive nature of the internet communication.

This chapter will begin by discussing how blogging and social media has contributed to a realignment of the relationship between journalists and their audiences. Attention will be on different forms, practices and technologies used, with particular focus on the way in which the internet has been utilised by journalists in their news gathering and integrated within news websites. This will followed by a discussion of two case studies: Andrew Sparrow's Guardian live blog and Andy Carvin's use of Twitter to report on the "Arab Spring". The chapter will discuss the challenges facing journalism in relation to social media curation and the opportunities presented by emergent forms and practices.

Journalism, Blogging and Social Media

Social media is "a nebulous term", according to Hermida, "since it can refer to an activity, a software tool or a platform" (Hermida, 2011:2-3). Indeed the very meaning of "social" in this context has been widely questioned, since all media necessarily have an element that could be considered social. However, "social media" include attributes such as "participation, openness, conversation, community and connectivity", which in Hermida's view "are largely at odds with the one-way, asymmetric model of communication that characterized media in the 20th century" (Hermida, 2011:3). In other words, social media is generally understood as something that "enables people to be more than simply members of an audience" (Heinonen, 2011:53). This "culture of participation extends well beyond journalism", according to Heinonen, and "is a broad social phenomenon" (Heinonen, 2011:53).

The term "weblog" is widely attributed to Jorn Barger who coined it in December 1997 to describe a list of links on his website that "'logged' his internet wanderings" (Wortham, 2007). Since then it has been abbreviated to "blog" and used to describe "a website with regular entries, commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order" (Singer et al, 2011:203). Having evolved from online journals in the mid-1990s, blogging is often informal and personal in style, covering any topic imaginable. Despite predating the popularisation of the term social media, blogging is sometimes seen as one part of this broader definition as outlined above. Popular blogging platforms and directories include Blogger, WordPress, LiveJournal, Movable

Type, Drupal, and Technorati. Blogs differ from news websites in writing style and also by prioritising the most recent post, rather than the most important as defined by editors.

Blogging has become increasingly popularised, with several websites built entirely around this form of publishing. Some of the most famous blogs in recent years include: The Huffington Post, Gizmodo, TechCrunch, TMZ.com, Engadget, Boing Boing, Perezhilton, Beppe Grillo, Xu Jinglei, The Drudge Report and Guido Fawkes. This popularisation of blogging has also lead to news organisations appropriating the practice, with most major news organisations' websites now also featuring blogs from their editors or journalists. Live blogging, as will be discussed later in this chapter, is a specific style or genre of blogging that can be defined as "A single blog post on a specific topic to which time-stamped content is progressively added for a finite period - anywhere between half an hour and 24 hours" (Thurman and Walters, 2013:2). These updates are usually presented in reverse chronological order within the single post and may integrate audio-visual material, links and third-party content.

Social networking sites meanwhile, has been defined as "an online service enabling people to create profiles, post information and identify friends, with whom they can easily share content and links" (Singer et al, 2011:208). Examples of social networking sites include, to name a few, general networks (e.g. Facebook, Google+, Orkut, Renren, Bebo), general short message or micro-blogging sites (e.g. Twitter, Sina Weibo), business or professional networks (e.g. LinkedIn, Yammer), dating websites (e.g. PlentyofFish, Match.com), content specific networks (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest, last.fm), and location-based networks (e.g. Foursquare). Many of these social networking sites have overlapping functionality, interconnectivity and cross-posting functionality. Moreover, the field of social networking is evolving rapidly, meaning continuous changes to features and availability of services – with frequent launches of new social networks, mergers or acquisitions, and closures of unsuccessful networks.

This chapter is particularly concerned with Twitter, which describes itself as "an information network" (Twitter, 2012). Users of the service can post 140-character messages called Tweets, which can also include hyperlinks, direct links to videos and images. Conventions include retweeting (reposting someone else's message with or without adding a comment) and use of hash tags to indicate a topic (e.g. #jan25). Twitter has openly embraced the connection with breaking news, even suggesting: "It's like being delivered a newspaper whose headlines you'll always find interesting – you can discover news as it's happening, learn more about topics that are important to you, and get the inside scoop in real time" (Twitter, 2012).

The rise of blogging platforms and social networking sites has simplified access to publishing tools for ordinary citizens and subsequently increased visibility of demotic voices to both national and global audiences. People's news consumption habits are changing as a consequence too, with the internet becoming the most popular source of news for UK 16-24 year olds according to the 2012 Reuters Institute Digital News Report. Entry point for news audiences are increasingly not the website homepage, but rather individual stories that have been shared on social networking sites. Often shared by friends, family members or a direct connection between an individual and the news organisation. Of those who access news online "20% (one in five) now come across a news story through a social network like Facebook and Twitter, with young people much more likely to access news this way (43%)" (Newman, 2012). Moreover, people who access news via social networking sites are also more likely to engage in news sharing – with Facebook accounting for 55% all news sharing in the UK, email 33% and Twitter 23% (Newman, 2012). This is a remarkable impact considering Facebook was only launched in 2004 and Twitter in 2006.

The Reuters Institute study also identified a small number (7%) of "news absorbed users in the UK who access significantly more sources of news, are more likely to comment on news, and twice as likely to share news" (Newman, 2012:11, emphasis in original). These tend to be male, 25-34 years old, interested in international and political news, more likely to own a tablet (30%) and use Twitter (44%). However, whilst Facebook has become "the most important tool for referring traffic" to news websites, "Twitter has become a crucial tool for journalists" in their day-to-day newswork (Newman, 2011:6). According to Newman, Twitter "has spread rapidly through newsrooms, and now plays a central role in the way stories are sourced, broken and distributed – contributing to a further speeding up of the news cycle" (Newman, 2011: 6). Some news correspondents are also "gaining new authority and influence through their expert use of social media", Newman notes. Some even attract significant audiences in their own right, independently from the brand of their parent organisation.

The rate of adaptation by both journalists and their audiences means blogging and social networking is gradually becoming a normalised part of media landscapes across the world. In so doing, these forms of internet communication have dramatically altered the relationship between journalists and citizens, in particular when sourcing news events as they unfold. Most noticeably, such internet communication has facilitated access to eyewitness reporting of events where journalists were not present or in countries where international news organisations are either banned or restricted in their reporting.

The Indian Ocean Tsunami in December 2004 and the London bombings in July 2005 both provided UK news organisations with a wealth of iconic images and eyewitness accounts provided by citizens caught up in events (see Allan, 2006; Allan & Thorsen, 2010). The BBC's Director of Global News, Richard Sambrook, recalled an incredible response of "more than 1,000 photographs, 20 pieces of amateur video, 4,000 text messages, and 20,000 e-mails" (Sambrook, 2005). In his view, "audiences had become involved in telling this story as they never had before".

> *"The quantity and quality of the public's contributions moved them beyond novelty, tokenism or the exceptional [...] Our reporting on this story was a genuine collaboration, enabled by consumer technology – the camera phone in particular – and supported by trust between broadcaster and audience."*
> (Sambrook, 2005)

This remarkable admission demonstrates not just citizen journalism coming of age, but also an acceptance by traditional news organisations that audience material is integral to online news reporting – not least in times of crisis. In the years that followed, several high-profile events were driven by eyewitnesses accounts circulated on social media and submitted to news organisations – including explosions at the Buncefield (UK) oil depot in December 2005; the execution of Saddam

Hussein in December 2006; the attempted suicide attack at Glasgow airport in June 2007; the Burma uprising in September-October 2007, also known as the 'Saffron Revolution'; and the Mumbai attacks in November 2008.

In 2009 the disputed Presidential Elections in Moldova and Iran were both followed by civic uprisings, in part mobilised by social media use (see Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu, 2009; Mortensen, 2011; and Andersen, 2012). Twitter in particular became the hub for first-hand accounts of demonstrations and violent crackdowns on protests. Such was its perceived importance in Iran that the US State Department even asked Twitter to delay scheduled maintenance as it was seen as an important tool for protesters.

With much of this audience material published directly into the public domain, journalists had to resist the pressure of immediate republishing of images and personal accounts, allowing time to verify its origin and authenticity. Reflecting on the Iranian elections, editor of the BBC News website, Steve Herrmann, noted that Twitter allowed journalists to tap into "a huge ongoing, informed and informative discussion in Iran between people who care deeply about what is happening there and who are themselves monitoring everything they can, then circulating the most useful information and links" (Herrmann, 2009). However, for Herrmann this was more than simply a space for public discussion and information sharing:

What really stands out is the range of sources, voices and angles to be looked into. There's no hierarchy: everything's on merit, and there is of course a new set of challenges for our staff - chiefly editorial challenges, as well as a kind of chase as social media services appear and disappear (Herrmann, 2009)

Tapping into social networking platforms to gauge the sentiment of public debate debate is also increasingly common for domestic and non-crisis news too, such as the 2010 UK General Election. The intertextuality of platforms was exemplified in this case by attempts to use social media to enhance interactivity with audiences during broadcasts – television stations including ITV famously experimenting with a superimposed graph (dubbed "the worm") to indicate live approval ratings of participants in the televised leader debates (Newman, 2010; Coleman, 2011).

However, most forms of online journalism and social media had by now become such naturalised parts of the UK media landscape that they no longer necessarily registered as unique campaign interventions newsworthy in their own right. Yet the transformation for journalists has been significant. "In terms of journalistic practice," argued Newman, "this election has seen yet more giant strides in the integration of internet techniques and thinking – in particular social newsgathering and marketing" (Newman, 2010:52). These practices are no longer the preserve of early pioneers such as Krishnan Guru-Murthy at Channel 4 and Rory Cellan-Jones at the BBC. Instead, he noted, "More and more journalists are now researching, and then selling and marketing their stories directly through Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, thereby reaching larger audiences and achieving greater notoriety than they would do by relying on their employer alone" (Newman, 2010:52). This "hybrid news system", according to Chadwick (2011), saw "journalists operating in a hypercompetitive environment, interacting with each other and ordinary citizens in public, breaking stories and new information on the web, on their own blogs, or on Twitter, hours before they appeared in scheduled broadcast news bulletins" (Chadwick, 2011:18).

Different ways of understanding contemporary news dynamics have been explored, all of which challenge traditional ways of thinking about news and journalism – for example "networked journalism" (see Beckett, 2008), "process journalism" (see Jarvis, 2009), "citizen journalism" (see Allan and Thorsen, 2009), "participatory journalism" (see Singer et al, 2011), and "ambient journalism" (see Hermida, 2010). Common for these concepts is an emphasis on active participation of citizens in news work and civic life. This is not restricted to news organisations facilitating online spaces for citizens to engage in public debate (itself an under researched topic), but includes our rethinking of journalism practice in light of the enhanced interconnectivity fostered by forms of internet use.

Axel Bruns has similarly argued that we are seeing a shift away from the traditional journalism practice of gatekeeping to one of "gatewatching" (Bruns, 2005). To his mind, this is driven by "the continuing multiplication of available channels for news publication and dissemination [...] and the development of collaborative models for user participation and content creation" (Bruns, 2011:120). In so doing, "news users engaged in organising and curating the flood of available news stories and newsworthy information which is now available from a multitude of channels [...] participate in a loosely organised effort to watch – to keep track of – what information passes through these channels" (Bruns, 2011:121). In other words, citizens are engaged in gathering, processing, selecting, commenting on and distributing information to people they are connected to in a similar way to journalists. This is not replacing journalists, however. Indeed, "journalists and editors, in turn, are engaged in a form of internal gatewatching which tracks the outcomes of this crowdsourced process of investigation to identify any particularly relevant, interesting, or outrageous findings to be explored further through more conventional journalistic activities" (Bruns, 2011:121).

Bruns' notion of gatewatching is useful since it helps conceptualise an emerging practice of online real-time curation of news[1]. This can be performed in a multitude of different ways, by journalists and ordinary citizens alike. This chapter will now turn to discuss two examples of how journalists are operationalizing such a curator role, through live blogging and social media respectively. In both instances the journalists are occupying a gatewatching role by transparently harnessing information from a range of different sources and directly engaging with their audiences in the process of newsgathering and verification.

Example 1: Andrew Sparrow: Live Blogging Politics

The British national newspaper award for Political Journalist of the Year was in 2011 presented to Guardian political correspondent, Andrew Sparrow. Not for his contributions to the paper, but for his meticulous live blogging of the 2010 UK General Election on the Guardian website. During an election campaign dominated by the country's very first series of televised leadership debates, his blog provided an online meta-narrative of the day's events as they unfolded - combining his own and fellow Guardian correspondents' analysis and commentary with a curation of news reports, links, blogs and social media. Indeed, one of the examples used in Sparrow's submission to the Press Awards was his live blogging of the televised debates, further demonstrating the intertextuality of the practice and synergies with other media platforms.

With entries sometimes up to 14,000 words long, Sparrow's election live blog attracted between 100,000 – 150,000 page views on a typical day, with a peak of around 2 million page views on election night (Sparrow, 2010). At most the live blog received some 335,000 unique visitors, around 34,500 more than the Guardian's daily newspaper circulation at the time. Those visitors also contributed several hundred comments each day, with some readers even providing "useful material" for the blog and responding to questions from the journalists.

Sparrow was not the first Guardian live blogger, with the practice having been used for live reporting of sports since 1999 and for select breaking news since 2005 (see Thurman and Walters, 2013). However, starting with his politics live blog in August 2008, Sparrow has been a significant contributor to popularising the format within a news context. Emily Bell, the former director of digital content at Guardian News and Media, recalled that Sparrow had "wanted to move online because he saw that political reporting and the internet were highly compatible but not being used particularly well" (Bell, 2011). In her view, live blogging "created a form of news reporting which had both the depth and context it was hard to cram into one space constrained article". Commenting on Sparrow's award, she proclaimed:

This is not just a reward for really sparkling journalism, but the validation of techniques now open to journalists such as liveblogging. To be adding context and knowledge to real time events, was the best way to report the election. (Bell, 2011)

Reflecting on the success of his live blog election coverage, Sparrow noted how the instantaneous publishing of reports, online before print, was an integral part of this new practice. It also invited audiences to witness and engage with the process of journalism, which to him enriched the experience of being a journalist. He commented:

> *"During the first leaders' debate I could spot that Nick Clegg was winning within the first 20 minutes. So could everyone else. But I was in a position to say so immediately. If journalism is the first draft of history, live blogging is the first draft of journalism. It's not perfect, but it's deeply rewarding – on any day, I was able to publish almost every snippet that I thought worth sharing, which is not the case for anyone who has to squeeze material into a newspaper – and it beats sitting on a battlebus."*
> (Sparrow, 2010)

With live blogging "the journalist moves from a linear, one-off story to a stream of instant witnessing", according to Director of POLIS at the LSE, Charlie Beckett, "often combined with background context and analysis as well as public interactivity through comments or email" (Beckett, 2010:3). For him, journalism such as Sparrow's election live blog "does much more than aggregate content". Instead, "it is a platform for journalists to add material that otherwise would never be published", which "captures the excitement of covering an event as a journalist and conveys the atmosphere as well" (Beckett, 2010:4).

Not everyone has been celebratory of this emerging form of online journalism that challenges traditional reportorial norms and narrative structures. Journalist and blogger, John Symes, for example has suggested the Guardian's live blogging format is akin to "the death of journalism", since it "is merely just repeating all that's wrong with 24 hour rolling news" (Symes, 2011). He further argued:

> *"There is no structure and therefore no sense, and the effect is of being in the middle of a room full of loud, shouty and excitable people all yelling at once with all the phones ringing, the fire alarm going off and a drunken old boy slurring in your ear about 'what it all means.' It really is a bizarre way to run a media circus."*
> (Symes, 2011)

Symes concluded his blog post in dramatic fashion by dismissing the Guardian's "radical rewriting of the rules of journalism" as "nonsensical unstructured jumble". For him, this perceived failure was further legitimation of "the traditional inverted triangle news structure [that] has been tried, tested and still stands".

Guardian's lead user experience and information architect, Martin Belam, was "obviously bound to disagree", but responded that the value of the live blog often depends on the topic. Moreover, he agreed that the "strict reverse chronology of entries whilst a live blog is 'active' can lead to the more important chunks of the content getting buried" (Belam, 2011). Whilst musing about different ways to display summaries and signposting "conventionally formatted stories" within the live blog, he concluded that the problems are arising in part due to "the way that the journalistic usage of live blogs has evolved well beyond what the CMS [content management system] tools were intended for" (Belam, 2011).

Concurring with this view, freelance journalist and former digital research editor at the Guardian, Kevin Anderson, expressed concern "that some of the aggregation that we're doing is really difficult to navigate unless you're a news junkie" (Anderson, 2011). The preservation of traditional journalistic methods was essential to him, so "that a stream of news aggregation doesn't feel like a maddening stream of consciousness". In other words,

> *"Journalists report and choose what they think are the most important bits of information. That's one of the services that we provide, and in the deluge of real-time news, that service is actually more important than before."* (Anderson, 2011)

Rather than undermining traditional journalistic values, it would appear Guardian audiences feel the live blog is reinforcing them. In a survey conducted for the Guardian, Thurman and Walters (2013) found that readers did not consider the time constraints journalists were under to impede on the quality of live blogs. Instead, "Readers liked the neutral tone, the fact that information was corrected quickly, and the balance that they believed the mix of sources provided" (Thurman and Walters, 2013:15-16). Indeed readers considered "articles" to be more "polemical" or "opinion based", whilst live blogs "were seen as 'more factual', as they provided 'statements' readers could 'draw [their] own conclusions from'" (Thurman and Walters, 2013:16). Moreover, respondents valued live blog attributes such as timeliness, tone, community and participation, curation, and their convenience.

Guardian blogs editor, Matt Wells, declared he was "instinctively an enthusiast" of live blogging as they "provide a useful way of telling stories characterised by incremental developments and multiple layers". For him, the most valuable attributes of live blogging are "how it is so transparent about sources, how it dispenses with false journalistic fripperies and embraces the audience" and "even take input from journalists on rival publications". Moreover, these "best elements of live blogging [...] are so strong that, rather than foretelling the death of journalism, the live blog is surely the embodiment of its future" (Wells, 2011).

Yet there are other ways in which journalists can perform a similar curator role. This chapter will now turn to discuss a second example of a journalist is using Twitter, rather than a live blog on their institutional website to conduct real-time curation.

Example 2: Andy Carvin: Tweeting Revolutions

Senior digital strategist at the US National Public Radio, Andy Carvin, rose to prominence during 2011 for his prolific use of Twitter to report on the "Arab Spring" as events unfolded. He started tweeting about Tunisia in December 2010 when he had around 15,500 followers. In 2011 he went on to focus on Egypt, Libya and other countries as protests and revolts spread across the region.

Carvin's increased profile meant a rapid increase in followers of his Twitter account, reaching 42,500 in April 2011 and more than 70,500 in in June 2011 – by which time he had posted some 134,780 updates. Reportedly averaging some 400 tweets a day, he has been known to tweet more than 16 hours a day, peaking on 18 February 2011 with 839 tweets and 614 retweets in a single day (The Washington Post, 12 April 2011). Twitter even blocked Carvin's account assuming it was a source of spam because of the shear volume of tweets, though the company quickly whitelisted him after he contacted them about the blunder.

Acclaim for Carvin's work was widespread and several news organisations profiled his social media use. He is "one of the world's best Twitter accounts", according to Craig Silverman, and "a living, breathing real-time verification system" (Silverman, 2011). Megan Garber concurred, arguing that Carvin "provided a hint of what news can look like in an increasingly networked media environment" (Garber, 2011). Brian Stelter of the New York Times described Carvin as "a personal news wire", noting that his work was "widely praised in news media circles" (Stelter, 2011). Paul Farhi of the Washington Post similarly dubbed him "a one-man Twitter news bureau, chronicling fast-moving developments throughout the Middle East" (Farhi, 2011). Farhi praised Carvin for drawing on an eclectic range of sources across different platforms to explain the complexities of events:

> *"By grabbing bits and pieces from Facebook, YouTube and the wider Internet and mixing them with a stunning array of eyewitness sources, Carvin has constructed a vivid and constantly evolving mosaic of the region's convulsions."*
> (Farhi, 2011)

Grappling for a way of describing this nascent form of reporting in terms of journalism, Farhi noted that:

> *"There isn't really a name for what Carvin does — tweet curator? social-media news aggregator? interactive digital journalist? — but that may be because this form of reporting is still being invented. By Carvin, among others."*
> (Farhi, 2011)

Carvin suggested that his Twitter practice was not necessarily new, since "journalists gathering, analyzing and disseminating relevant information isn't new at all" (cited in Stelter, 2011). He would "see that as curation as well", with the innovation being in his use of social media platforms to perform this reporting. Carvin also resisted comparisons likening his tweets to a news wire, instead drawing attention to how his account is an ongoing transparent process of verification with invaluable contributions from his Twitter followers. This collaborative effort is in his view more akin to a newsroom:

> *"I get uncomfortable when people prefer my twitter feed as a newswire. It's not a newswire. It's a newsroom. It's where I'm trying to separate fact from fiction, interacting with people. That's a newsroom."*
> (cited in Ingram, 2012)

Having spent significant time in Tunisia and later Egypt in part through his work with the Global Voices project, Carvin had since 2004 been building up a network of contacts that included local bloggers. This meant he was able to source information quickly, using his knowledge of the local political situation to make sense of eyewitness accounts and acting as a conduit of information when the uprisings began. For Carvin, his Twitter feed was about presenting the “emotion and atmosphere” from eyewitnesses as they reported on events in “real time”:

> *“Part of what I’m trying to do is capture the perspectives of people caught up in the middle of the action in real time. For all of the countries that have experienced revolutions, there are people tweeting eyewitness reports, capturing the emotion and atmosphere of the situation. I retweet a lot of those exchanges, because it’s like observing an oral history in real time.”*
> (cited in Connelly, 2011)

His formal job as a digital strategist, rather than a reporter, also afforded Carvin the flexibility to experiment with social media tools – including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and Storify - and in so doing pushing boundaries of conventional reporting. Reflecting on his platform of choice, Carvin professed that he was actually “really agnostic”, noting instead that “it’s a matter of whether the people I want to talk to are on there, about who’s using it and what information I can glean from it.” (cited in Kiss, 2011).

Based in Washington D.C., Carvin did not personally witness or verify information on the ground in countries that he was tweeting about. Making a virtue of not being caught up in events himself, he argued that triangulating multiple eyewitness accounts provided a better overall understanding of what was going on:

> *It’s a form of situational awareness, something I noticed in late June when I was in Tahrir Square in Cairo and hundreds of people were injured when the police attacked. I could only tell what was going on immediately in front of me. I could smell it, see it, feel it, hear it, but I didn’t know what was truly going on, whereas when I was using social media I felt I had a better sense of what was happening on the ground.* (cited in Kiss, 2011).

Without being present on the ground, Carvin had to develop different strategies for selecting and verifying information from the deluge of messages posted publicly on the internet. Twitter hashtags for example are useful when a story first breaks, allowing him to identify key sources to follow and relevant context. However, the value of hashtags diminishes as its usage increases, making it more difficult to distinguish content from people directly connected with events on the ground. Sometimes Carvin would challenge people's tweets by prefixing a retweet with "source?", or he would ask his Twitter followers to help translate information or corroborate reports.

In March 2011 Carvin successfully debunked rumours that an image of a mortar shell proved Israeli weapons were being deployed in Libya. He used crowdsourcing to help decipher inscriptions on the shell and confirmed that it was probably of British or Indian origin. Several news organisations nevertheless continued to report the false reports about Israeli munitions being used. "In this particular case", Carvin noted, "a rumor perpetuated by several news sources was easily debunked by a group of people on Twitter who don't know each other and likely will never meet each other in person". Moreover he described his Twitter followers as "smart, curious, and skeptical", and "generous in sharing their time and skills to help me out when I need it" (Carvin, 2011).

Carvin's approach to news reporting has also attracted critics. Sky News Digital News Editor Neal Mann, for example, took a different editorial stance to Carvin when he decided not to retweet a particularly graphic image of two children coming out of Syria. Mann described the footage as "disturbing" and whilst as a journalist he might be used to dealing with such material, he did "not feel comfortable pushing it to those who aren't" (cited in The Telegraph, 2012). Carvin responded bluntly:

> *"War is hell—there's no way around that. And the growth of alternative media, social media, citizen journalism and the like now gives the public many ways to access content that would otherwise have been lost in archives. People now have the choice whether or not they want to bear witness, and I try help them make an informed choice."*
> (cited in Schumacher-Matos & Grisham, 2012)

Other critics took issue with the very notion of Carvin as a journalist, claiming his methods did not stand up to scrutiny. "To have NPR appoint a senior strategist with full knowledge that they are publishing news or information based on tweets of unknown or unvetted sources is troubling," according to technology blogger, Adam Curry. "Who knows where some of this is coming from?", he questioned, before suggesting the problem was with NPR for allowing him to report in this way:

> *"I'm not saying Andy's a bad guy or has an agenda. But I do think it's worth asking what NPR thinks it's doing."* (cited in Farhi, 2011).

Benjamin Doherty was similarly dismissive: "The troubling thing is that Andy Carvin doesn't appear to do any journalism. Nor is reporting part of his job description at NPR". He questioned the "neutrality" of Carvin's role, pointedly suggesting it would be "difficult to imagine anyone from NPR engaging in similar – apparently symbiotic – interactions with, say, Palestinians organizing protests against Israel and surviving in their job" (Doherty, 2011). In other words, both Curry and Doherty took issue with Carvin's verification process and reposting of unconfirmed reports, as well as his closeness to opposition voices. Carvin acknowledged these were particularly difficult challenges. In his view, however, his sourcing could be justified provided he retained a critical view of his relationships and was transparent about the process:

> *"Some of these folks are working to actively overthrow their local regimes. I just have to be aware of that at all times. Perhaps the answer is transparency, so a certain person might be giving me good information but I should never forget that they are part of the opposition."* (cited in Silverman, 2011)

Embracing transparency and indeed openly admitting errors was for Ingram a refreshing antidote to "restrictive social-media policies" that "seem designed to remove as many of the elements of being human as possible from the practice of being a journalist". For him such moves to restrict and control social media usage were "the exact opposite of what needs to happen if traditional journalism is to survive", with Carvin instead providing "a pretty good example of what one possible future of real-time, crowdsourced journalism actually looks like" (Ingram, 2012).

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed two case studies where nascent "social media" is intersecting with journalism to challenge conventional ideas about news. Whilst "curation" can be understood as partly rooted in traditional journalism practice, the way this is operationalised through live blogging and Twitter are unique. Martin Belam argues that: "Most video news on the internet is essentially the same kind of package that you'd produce for TV, most audio the same as you'd produce for radio, and most text-based news could be printed out". For him, live blogging "feels like a type of news reporting that is emerging as being native to the web" (cited in Wells, 2011). Central to this emerging style of reporting is a renewed understanding of and interaction with audiences – many of whom are contributing to the news process and even acting as citizen reporters themselves. However, rather than displacing journalists, they are working alongside them in a mutual gatewatching process as suggested by Bruns (2005, 2011).

There are obvious opportunities for live blogging and social media curation as highlighted by the examples in this chapter – immediacy, transparency, interaction and crowdsourcing to name a few. Equally, there are many challenges and ethical considerations that journalists need to be aware of when engaging in such practice. For example, ensuring curation is, in fact, curated and not a confusing stream of consciousness. Upholding standards with regards to verification, especially faced with a deluge of apparent eyewitness material. Providing proper attribution for such material and ensuring sources are not exploited. Finding a balance to ensure meaningful interaction with sources and audiences.

Major news organisations are increasingly aware of these challenges and working to support their journalists in adopting elements of social media in their practice. Policies for dealing with social media are gradually being adopted, though with some attracting criticism for appearing to rein in the apparent freedom associated with the internet. Aspiring journalists, Andy Carvin argues, "are going to need to be prepared to not only take really good journalistic practices and make sense of them and apply them online but also understand the strengths of social media". For him, "The tools are important for the human network they create" (cited in Rowinski, 2011).

Notes

1. It is important not to confuse "curation" with "aggregation", which refers to websites that republish content, often verbatim, from other sources. For a discussion on the challenges associated with news aggregation, see for example Bakker (2011).

Challenging Questions

- What challenges and opportunities do social media pose for journalists?
- To what extent can social media curation be considered a form of journalism?
- How can journalism facilitate participation from ordinary citizens?
- Discuss the ethical considerations required by journalists when live blogging or curating social media content.
- Discuss the forms, practices and epistemologies of live blogging and social media curation.

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9 Online News Audiences:

The challenges of web metrics

An Nguyen

"I know we have twenty million viewers but I don't know who they are. I don't know what the audience wants, and I don't care"

American journalist, as quoted in Gans (1980)

"Oh, we're writing for the editor, of course. He's the audience"

British journalist, as quoted in Hetherington (1985)

Imagine the scene. As a new journalist with a burning career ambition, you have long awaited a day when you can make a real impact on the world around you. That day seems to have come when a trusted source gives you a tip about a potentially harmful school policy that has been recently proposed for communities in your patch. The same policy, according to the source, has made devastating impacts on people elsewhere, but these are largely unnoticed in your area. With the editor's endorsement, you spend weeks researching the background, approaching people from different camps and carefully crafting all the compelling facts, figures and views together. Everyone is very pleased with the depth of the ground-breaking investigation. At the end of the day when it is proudly published on your news site, an email from your editor pops up on your computer screen. The message: the exclusive report that you hope to become the blockbuster of the day does not fare well. The evidence: the number of its page views and visitors are too low, even lower than a how-to health feature that takes no more than an hour to write. "Perhaps, we have to be more careful in considering whether to invest in this kind of stories in the future," the editor gently, and somewhat meagrely, concludes.

Welcome to the emerging journalistic culture of "click thinking". Although totally hypothetical and perhaps a little naïve, the above scenario resembles a growing number of real cases in online journalism, where web metrics – audience-tracking data, such as hits, page views, visitors – are rising to the journalist's autonomy in deciding what is and what is not news. As each and every user's IP address and mouse click can be easily tracked, recorded, aggregated and fed into newsrooms to serve editorial and commercial decisions, journalists are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain their traditional "don't care" attitude to their audiences. In this new world, their power in setting the agenda – through the use of an established, quite esoteric set of professional news values – is no longer exclusive. To play on a classic quote, news is no longer just "what newspapermen make it": it is also what the crowd wants it to be.

Such an enhanced presence of the audience in the newsroom, while bringing some hopes for a better journalism, creates a new set of professional challenges. As the above scenario suggests, using web metrics uncritically to respond to what people want might well lead to a disaster for public life in the long term. What would happen if the hypothetical editor above – and his peers in other newsrooms – decided to cut the kind of content like the potentially harmful policy above? This chapter will discuss this issue in depth, based on a review of the emergence of the "click-thinking" culture and its initial impacts on news and journalism. As will be seen, the professional challenges posed by web metrics, if not calmly addressed, could deepen one of journalism's already critical crises – the dumbing down of news – and bring newsroom tensions and conflicts to a new height. If the raison d'être of journalism is to inform and educate the public, journalists must foster a stronger professional culture that helps them to take confidence and pride in their autonomous news judgement and to resist, where necessary, the sentiment of the crowd.

The emergence of a "click-thinking" journalism culture

As a profession, journalism has been criticised for turning blind eyes to its clients' needs and demands. In most of their venerable history, as the quotes at the outset show, journalists write for an imagined audience of one – the editor – or, at best, of a few: their editor, peer colleagues, friends, family members, relatives and so on The people who read/watch/listen to the news out there – and who directly or indirectly pay for journalism – are, bluntly speaking, weightless: they have very little voice in the journalist's news decision (Allan, 2010; Green, 1999; Schlesinger, 1987). Audience research has been done frequently and expensively, but more often than not, its results only reach people at managerial levels rather than individual journalists, who simply do not care and "tend to be highly sceptical of claims made on the basis of market research" (Allan, 2010, p. 123). Meanwhile, the minimal direct feedback from the audience – in such forms as letters to editors – is often dismissed as "insane and crazy" crap (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007) "from cranks, the unstable, the hysterical and the sick" (Gans, 1980).

All this seems to have changed – at least in the online world. Since its inception in the 1990s, the ability to track the move and the mood of audiences has been hailed as one of the great advantages of online journalism. In recent years, this has come to the fore of newsroom cultures and processes and attracted fresh debates among journalism academics and professionals (Anderson, 2010; Boczkowski, 2010; MacGregor, 2007; Macmillan, 2010; Napoli, 2010; Peters, 2010a; Peters, 2010b; Usher, 2010).

You do not need to be an industry insider to see the increasing prevalence of web metrics in journalism. As an online news user, you might have noted this in the many "most viewed", "most read" or "most popular" lists out there. Indeed, it is now hard to find a news site that does not offer some lists of this kind. Behind the scene, the numbers that generate such lists are, in the words of British editors interviewed by MacGregor (2007), watched "pretty obsessively" with "a hawk eye" so that news judgment is made "on the fly" around the clock. It is now an established routine for many editors to begin news meetings with a rundown of audience data. Some are quite prepared to adjust story placement on home pages according to what is "on the chart" and, in doing so, accept to forgo their long-held practice (and prestige) of using story positions as editorial cues to audiences. In some places, including incumbents such as Washington Post, news teams that produce low traffic have been reportedly downsized so that resources can be allocated to more popular content areas. A growing number of newsrooms – e.g. America Online, Bloomberg and Gawker Media – have even started to use web metrics as a basis to pay story royalties and/or calculate staff bonuses. Judicious use of metrics, according to Tim Armstrong, the CEO of AOL, is the key to success for journalism of the future. “We really want to enhance journalism with technology,” he said. “We feel like we have a strategic window to invest in quality content” (quoted in MacMillan, 2010).

Such radical changes at the top management, not surprisingly, leave no space for individual journalists to safely ignore and leave audience data to their managers as they would in the “old days”. In some newsrooms, emails are sent every day to all staff, with dozens of performance numbers for each and every story published on the day. Some go even further, erecting fancy panels of data and graphics on the walls, so that reporters can “crunch the numbers” in real time and remain atop their individual and collective performance throughout the day. According to Nick Denton, the founder of Gawker, writers are sometimes caught standing before those big boards “like early hominids in front of a monolith” (quoted in Peters, 2010a). Thus, whether they love or loathe metrics, journalists will have to accept a constant exposure to such data in their daily job and to develop a click-driven thinking routine and culture among themselves.

Undergirding this transformation is, in a substantial part, the power of web tracking technologies. For one thing, these technologies make it easy and simple to collect and deliver real-time audience data with a relatively high level of accuracy. Indeed, tracking audience behaviours is not something entirely new: it has been used for decades to generate ratings, the currency of television industries. But the absence of satisfactory measurement methods associated with ratings has been a key reason for the traditional journalist’s dismissal of these data and ignorance of their audiences (Schlesinger, 1987). Online, some serious drawbacks of television ratings methods – e.g. the use of unrepresentative panels to extrapolate to general audiences, or the inability of tracking device to distinguish between a turned-on and actually watched TV set – seem to be no longer a problem. Every user’s IP address and web use history and every click on a news site can be easily stored in servers and aggregated into overall use patterns. The resulting data – which are often collected internally and/or by third-party tracking firms – are quite natural and reliable.

Online tracking technologies also create more diverse data that can provide much richer insights into audience behaviours. Software such as Thoora, a recently introduced tracking programme specifically for news sites, collects data for more than 100 attributes to assist editorial and commercial decisions. Broadly speaking, these metrics can be classified into two major categories. The first – which can be called internal metrics – consists of data about behaviours before, during and after a specific visit to the site in question. These include a long (and sometimes confusing) list of indicators that can be further divided into two sub-groups:

- Data indicating traffic to/from the site: hits; visits; unique visitors; which geographical areas users are from; which sites are they led to the site from; what time of the day they visit the site; whether they are a new or returning visitors; where they go after the session; and so on.
- Data indicating actual use behaviours (what users do when they are on the site): how many people read/watch/listen to an item (i.e. how many times a page is viewed); the number of comments a story receives; how many times an item is shared via email, Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms; most searched keywords; average time spent on the site or a story; and so on.

Needless to say, editors and reporters can gain from these data a sense of whether, and how, a story, a topic, a section or the whole site attracts audience interests and attention. For those on the business side, these data form the currency of the online news industry: they are sold to advertisers, as individual indicators or as composite indices representing overall performance concepts – such as "audience engagement" or "audience growth". Some tracking software can even use real-time data to pin down to the pennies the advertising income that a particular story generates, based on the number of clicks on advertisements on the page.

The second broad group of data – external metrics – involves what is trendy on the web in general. These metrics help journalists to know what topics are likely to attract users and eyeballs and thus what stories might need to be covered on their site. They ultimately serve as a tool for journalists to improve and maximise internal metrics. AOL, for instance, has its own software to keep track of trends on social media – e.g. hot topics on Facebook or buzzes on Twitter – and, based on that, offer "on-demand" stories to users. Meanwhile, the leader on the "big board" at Gawker is a "machine-like person" named Neetzan Zimmerman, whose job is to discover viral topics on the web and produce short posts about those topics for the site (Phelps, 2012). External metrics are also used to guide reporters and sub-editors in producing "search engine-optimised" headlines and stories – i.e. those containing certain trendy keywords that people are likely to use on search sites. For instance, if the data indicate that a person related to a news event is searched frequently on Google, it is better to use his/her name in the headline or somewhere in the top of the story, so that it has a better chance to come up on Google's search results. At TheStreet.com, there is a dedicated "SEO guy" whose job is to do just that: Search Engine Optimisation (Usher, 2010). Many journalism training courses, including those by accreditation bodies like the National Council for the Training of Journalists in the UK, have integrated SEO as a compulsory part of their agenda.

Against the above historical backdrop, such move from gut feelings to systematic metrics in news judgement – or the "rationalisation of audience understanding", as Napoli (2010) calls it – represents quite a dramatic, radical transformation in the way journalists perceive and relate themselves to audiences. For many, this enhanced presence of audiences in the newsroom is a healthy move towards a more caring, more scientific and more democratic journalism than ever before. Nikki Usher (2010) – a former journalist and now an academic – argued that audience tracking "turns journalism from elitism of writing for itself and back to writing what people are actually looking for". In a similar vein, a young US-based British journalist places web metrics third in her ten reasons for online journalism to be better journalism, arguing:

"Online newsmakers can see — in real time — how many peo-

> *ple are reading our stories, how important those stories are, and who thinks so. Being a successful journalist means paying attention to those numbers and responding to what people want and need, rather than what we think they want and need or – worse – what we think they should want and need."* (Henry, 2012)

The issue, however, is not that simple. For if journalists forwent their traditional news judgment to go with whatever people want, journalism could face a further decline in its standards and other critical problems, which is the focus of the next section.

A new race to the bottom?

When Tim Armstrong declared in Business Week that web metrics are a "strategic window (into) quality content" at AOL, he raised more eyebrows than enthusiasm among observers. A reader labelled "AOL's play" as a "new death of journalism" while another called it a dance between the editorial and the commercial, asking: "How long would it take to sweet-write your audience into accepting pandered palaver?" Meanwhile, a media blogger was quoted as saying:

> *"My fear is that once they start analysing where their traffic comes from and where their dollars come from, they decide maybe journalism should go after Hollywood celebrity and sports figures who are doing dope."* (Macmillan, 2010)

These worries are legitimate. Web metrics, internal or external, have the ultimate aim of attracting the largest possible audience attention to news sites. This might sound perfectly desirable: what else can be better for a journalist than having their output reach the largest number of readers? The problem is that the kind of news that can maximise audiences is often the so-called "news you can use" – news that caters to the lowest common denominator of all tastes, addressing the most basic, least sophisticated and least sensitive level of lifestyles and attitudes. In practice, it often means soft news with high entertainment and low information values (McManus, 1992). People want this news in massive numbers partly because they can be consumed at ease. Meanwhile, hard news about serious public affairs – which is believed to be what people should and need to consume in order to function well in democratic societies – does not always have such wide appeal: it demands, among other things, a serious cognitive effort and a sustained interest in public life that a substantial portion of the audience might not have or feel the need to have.

Evidence of this is not hard to find. In the 19th and early 20th century, the popular press thrived in England with a service philosophy that is aptly captured in the following widely circulated rhyming lines on Fleet Street: "Tickle the public, make 'em grin. The more you tickle, the more you'll win. Teach the public, you'll never get rich. You'll live like a beggar and die in a ditch." Today, tabloids like the Sun and Daily Mail are sold in several millions copies per day in the UK while even its bestselling broadsheet, Daily Telegraph, has a circulation of less than 600,000 (as of writing). A similar trend is happening online: recent research shows that most read/viewed lists on news sites feature mainly trivial, sensational and entertaining stories – i.e. sex, crime, celebrities, "how-to" advice, human interest and the like (Bird, 2010; Boczkowski, 2010). As users are more and more exposed to those lists, this trend is likely to continue in the long term.

The implication of all this is huge. If journalists were to faithfully and uncritically follow the sentiment of the crowd reflected in web metrics, they would have to think about providing people what they want to consume and can consume at ease, rather than what they need to consume and must consume with effort to become informed and self-governed citizens. That would translate into an intensification of an already perennial problem of journalism: the dumbing down of news, or the trend to making the news, in the words of a British journalist, "bright, trite and light" (quoted in Franklin, 1997). In other words, if metrics were to dominate online journalism, they would be likely to stimulate a massive online migration of the many traditional print and TV tabloid practices. These include, among others, "the sensationalisation of news, the abbreviation of news stories, the proliferation of celebrity gossip, and the more intensive visual material such as large photographs and illustrations" (Rowe, 2010, p. 351).

Indeed, a visit to some current popular news sites, such as MTV News and Daily Mail, will reveal how such practices might look online: celebrity stories are given prominent space; stories squeezed to minimal lengths; content chunked into news snippets; audio/video material broken into nuggets; photo slideshows offered intensively for fun; headlines bizarrely worded to match the algorithm of search engines; and so on. Thus, rather than acting as a "strategic window (into) quality content", web metrics might add insult to an already critical injury. A metrics-driven race for the largest possible audience could be further push the news towards self-destruction. It is a "race to the bottom" – to use the words of Phu Van Nguyen (2010), a respected Vietnamese journalist who laments about the recent competition for revenues through sex and sensationalisation in Vietnam's online news media. And if all or most news decisions were guided by metrics, journalism would risk becoming a mere entertainment trade, rather than a profession that should exist primarily to inform, educate and ultimately enlighten people.

It would be naïve – I hasten to add – to think of the future of journalism in terms of such worst scenarios, for reasons that I will discuss later. And it should be noted that soft news is not always a bad thing: it has its social functions and serves certain human needs – such as the need to escape from daily routines, to gossip, or to address other private concerns. [See Nguyen (2012) for an overview of the debate on the function of soft news). But, given journalism's recent dismal past, the risk of its standards and practices being dumbed further down in the wake of web metrics is real and high.

Such risk is even more critical in the context of an online news industry that is still struggling to find a business model for itself. Despite the phenomenal growth in the size and substance of audiences, online journalism finds it hard to convince users to pay for its content. Having been offered for free since its very beginning, online news seems to have been taken for granted as such by users. Meanwhile, according to recent research, online news is yet to convince advertisers, with the majority of online advertising expenditure being allocated to non-news platforms, especially search sites. In that uneven race for advertising and under the pressure to survive, many news sites have had to resort to the traditional weapon: soft news. This trend is particularly strong among multimedia firms that are merged between news and non-news media providers. These firms, according to Currah (2009, p. 88), opt to maximise their appeal to the attention-scarce online audiences with a "digital windsocks" strategy – i.e. maximising traffic and holding users' attention for as long as possible, which "by default, ... favours a softer and more populist orientation to the news agenda".

[It should be noted that from an economic perspective, soft news has another appeal to the industry: it is often much less expensive to produce than hard news. This creates a "perfect combination" for those on the business side: it maximises the output (audience attention) while minimising the production cost at the same time. For a news industry that is still striving for revenues, that combination could serve as a strong motivating force.]

New tensions and conflicts in the chaotic newsroom

The issue is not just about the dumbing down of news. Along with the ubiquitous use of web metrics and the constant urge to compete for the largest audiences will come challenging changes to newswork and newsroom processes. The chaotic and intense newsroom will be even more stressful with the likely rise of new types of tensions and conflicts. Some of these have unpredictable but chilling prospects. If, for instance, the aforementioned metrics-based payment and staff bonus system – which is in essence a newsroom discipline mechanism – becomes common, where would it take journalism? The idea of journalists striving and competing for audiences to gain monetary rewards, rather than to fulfil a sense of public duties, is quite scary. But let us hope that this new mechanism would not follow the dark path of incentive systems elsewhere – such as that of the banking industry, where lucrative bonuses encourage many unhealthy and outrageous practices that, in part, led to our current global economic crisis.

While that remains to be seen, many immediate consequences can be expected. At the least, it is certain that occupational stresses will come to a new height and on a more permanent basis. "At a paper, your only real stress point is in the evening when you're actually sitting there on deadline, trying to file," explained Jim VandeHei, the executive editor of Politico.com, in the New York Times. "Now at any point in the day starting at five in the morning, there can be that same level of intensity and pressure to get something out" (quoted in Peters, 2010a). Thus, young journalists who once dreamed of trotting the globe in pursuit of a story are instead shackled to their computers, where they try to eke out a fresh thought or be first to report even the smallest nugget of news — anything that will impress Google algorithms and draw readers their way (Peters, 2010a).

And whenever key indicators – especially page views, visits and visitors – do not fare well, the newsroom could be taken over by a worrying or even panicking atmosphere, as is exemplified in the following memo to staff at the Philadelphia Inquirer and its Philly.com news site in 2008:

> *"We're in a summer slump – and we aggressively need to find a way to end it. We will protect our growth in page views! Everybody here should be thinking of "what can I get to Philly.com now" in terms of content. And what can I add to the story that's good for the web. There should be an urgency around the idea of sending stuff to Philly.com"*
> (quoted in Anderson, 2010, p. 560).

Not all journalists would survive such stresses. Already, it has been reported that some journalists at metrics-driven newsrooms quit jobs or even change careers for being unable to stand the franticness and fatigue under the constant pressure of producing news to the chart. At Politico, for instance, roughly a dozen out of 70 reporters and editors left in the first half of 2010 while at Gawker Media, "it is not uncommon for editors to stay on the job for just a year" (Peters, 2010a).

Those who survive would have to live other kind of stresses and distresses, since the ubiquity of metrics is likely to create permanent tensions in news judgement. Research by Anderson (2011) in the US, Boczkowski (2010) in Latin America and MacGregor (2007) in the UK has produced some evidence to suggest that dilemmatic situations like the hypothetical case at the outset of this chapter – where journalists stand between serving people with the news they need and serving them with the news they want – might well become commonplace in a near future. In an ethnographic study at the Philadelphia Inquirer's Philly.com, for instance, one reporter, citing a thoroughly researched story about a local army firm that "just bombed ... and did terribly" on the site, lamented: You want to throw fear into the heart of journalism professionals? That's a way (quoted in Anderson, 2011, p. 559).

Beyond head counting: journalism professionalism as a panacea

So far, I have been quite negative about the potential impacts of web metrics on journalism and journalists, which is unfair for two reasons. First, it must be noted that web metrics per se are not a negative development. Although an uncritical use of them can be disruptive and might lead to professional and social disasters, a direct, real-time access to such data, by nature, adds an unprecedented, healthy element that can work to the advantage of journalism, both as a profession and as a business. These natural data provide a considerable amount of accurate and reliable information for journalists and news executives to understand certain important aspects of the audience and use that understanding to serve people in a more considered, more scientific manner.

Second, the problems that I have reviewed should be seen as indicators of what might – not will – happen on a large scale in the future. The newsroom is not a no-man land for an excessive reliance on web metrics to conquer without resistance. Research has found that editors and reporters still tend to be adamant and firm on established professional standards and are not that ready to accept and internalise the click-thinking mind-set as some of those mentioned in this chapter (Anderson, 2011, Boczkowski, 2010; MacGregor, 2008; Usher, 2010). For most journalists, their "gut feelings" in deciding what's news, and what ought to be news to the public, have always been essential in making and shaping journalism as an indispensable component of democratic life. That perception is a professional pride that will take to any excessive development of web metrics.

This leads to a broader issue: the crucial role of journalists' professional attitudes in preventing the negatives and promoting the positives of metrics. As you enter the newsroom in a near future, you might find many of your senior colleagues still seeing themselves as members of a trade, rather than a profession. In other words, they see themselves as doing a semi-skilled job for a living, rather than as administering a specialised, complicated service to humanities. This less serious attitude to the status of journalism is a – if not the – key reason for many of journalism's recent dismal behaviours, including the dumbing down of news discussed earlier. If journalists think of themselves as professionals, they would see themselves in the business of a public service, not a "market service". And it is only with this perception that journalism could function well to inform, educate and enlighten citizens, with the public interest as its overarching value. Without it, journalism would not take for granted that its utmost output is a citizenry that self-governs, not a massive audience that maximizes profits. And that would give amble space for the potential negatives of web metrics to come into play on a large scale.

So, the best panacea for fixing the potential problems of web metrics – and many others in contemporary journalism – is a professional culture that breeds, fosters and protects journalists' autonomy in exercising their specialist knowledge, skills, values and standards. It is a culture in which journalists are encouraged to take confidence and pride in – among other things – their own news judgment and, if necessary, are able to stand up for it against market and management forces.

This is not simply an idealistic professional principle: it is a very practical business issue indeed. It is about a news publication's brand, for editorial judgment is what makes, or does not make, it unique to an audience. People come back and forth a certain news site in part because they trust – or at least expect – that the content on the surface is the outcome of a sound, reliable judgement of what is important and relevant to them. [Here, it should be noted that the audience is not a homogenous set of mere consumers that can then be turned into a soulless commodity to sell to advertisers. The audience that journalists often envision as a monolithic set indeed consists of many audiences, each with a peculiar set of needs, demands, uses and gratifications, which is why we need different types of news outlets.]

Of course, it would be deplorable if journalists continue to apply their traditional dismissal of audience data to web metrics since, as said above, they are helpful for journalism to a certain extent. But we must get the metrics to serve us and not let us "serve" them. Here, it might be worth repeating the words of the former BBC correspondent and politician, Martin Bell, to conclude this chapter:

> *"It does no harm ... to ask ourselves a simple question: What do we believe in? If it is only making money, then we are clearly in the wrong business because money can deflect, if not corrupt, us. But if we have standards and values and principles, then we should stand by them because they are what we believe in and what sustain us. There is actually a word for it. The word is integrity."*
> (quoted in Barnett, 1998, p. 89).

Challenging Questions

- In journalism, there is an inherent conflict between serving the public and serving the market (McManus, 1992). Discuss the nature of this conflict, using the various journalistic challenges of web metrics as a case in point.
- Review the typologies of web metrics in this chapter and discuss how they might be used to improve the quality of journalism.
- To what extent do you think journalism professionalism can help prevent the potential harms and promote the potential benefits of web metrics?

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10 'The Camera as Witness': The Changing Nature of Photojournalism

Caitlin Patrick and Stuart Allan

"Photographs excel, more than any other form of either art or journalism, in offering an immediate, viscerally emotional connection to the world."

Susie Linfield, photography critic (2011)

"A citizen journalist – or, more precisely, a citizen photojournalist – is really a fancy way of describing someone with a camera who happens to be in the right place at the right time. [...] Not only are we not surprised by photos taken inside an airplane that has crashed or a subway car that has been bombed, we have come to expect them. It is the undocumented disaster that we now find somehow strange."

Eric Weiner, NPR reporter (2005)

Identifying the factors that make certain photographs recognisably newsworthy over and above alternative ones is notoriously difficult, let alone explaining why a select few will attain near-iconic status with the passage of time. Much debate has ensued over the defining images of the Arab Spring uprisings, for example, but it seems fair to suggest that one may well be a photograph of a young man or woman using a mobile telephone to document a tumultuous scene. As Guardian correspondent Peter Beaumont (2011) suggests:

> *"She's in the Medina in Tunis with a BlackBerry held aloft, taking a picture of a demonstration outside the prime minister's house. He is an angry Egyptian doctor in an aid station stooping to capture the image of a man with a head injury from*

> *missiles thrown by Mubarak's supporters. Or it is a Libyan in Benghazi running with his phone switched to a jerky video mode, surprised when the youth in front of him is shot through the head. All of them are images that have found their way on to the internet through social media sites. [...] The barricades today do not bristle with bayonets and rifles, but with phones."* (Beaumont, 2011)

Professional news organisations have frequently acknowledged the vital role played by camera-equipped 'amateurs' prepared to risk their own personal safety to engage in spontaneous, spur-of-the-moment efforts to record what they see, hear and feel. 'When protests first began in Libya', Al Jazeera (2011) reported, 'the media presence there was scarce so the story filtered out via social media thanks to courageous citizen journalists.' Diverse forms of photo-reportage, often circulated via social networking services such as Twitter, Facebook and Flickr, proved invaluable in focusing Western attention on the plight of ordinary civilians. 'The citizen journalists provide an alternative to the official media in their portrayal of the protests and the turmoil across the country', BBC Monitoring (2011) observed. 'While state media showed only pro-Gaddafi protests, pictures and video from mobile phones told a different story' (see also Allan, 2013a).

In setting out to explore the changing nature of photojournalism today, this brief example helps to illustrate a number of themes warranting closer scrutiny in this chapter. Here at the outset, however, we need to be aware that the very term 'photojournalism' is in a state of flux, its meaning open to a myriad of competing definitions. At a time when anyone with a camera-equipped mobile or smartphone can lay claim to practising the craft, some professionals are wondering aloud whether they will be presiding over the 'death of photojournalism' in the years ahead. Many of them maintain that the ready availability of images provided by ordinary citizens is undermining their role, forcing them to adapt to uncomfortable changes simply to protect their livelihoods. When set in relation to the larger political-economy of the crises confronting news organisations struggling to re-profile their news provision in order to survive, let alone prosper in a multimedia environment, this climate of uncertainty becomes all the more acute.

This chapter shall endeavour to provide an assessment of the changing forms and practices of photojournalism in a manner alert to wider implications for reassessing its role within our modern news cultures. We begin by identifying several of the guiding tenets informing professional conceptions of photojournalism as they have emerged since the early days of photography. Next, we turn to discuss the rise of digital photojournalism, and with it the changing economic factors shaping its professional ethos. Against this backdrop, the chapter turns to address one of the key challenges confronting photojournalism today, namely the advent of alternative, impromptu forms of firsthand 'citizen witnessing' (Allan, 2013a). Especially worthy of examination in this context, we shall argue, is the ongoing redefinition of photojournalism, particularly where professionals and amateurs are forging new, collaborative relationships in the pursuit of important news stories.

Defining Photojournalism

Divergent opinions regarding what counts as photojournalism have always attracted lively debate, and never more so than today, when its very future is being called into question in the brave new world of the internet. Varied uses of the term encompass an array of different forms of visual storytelling, including a newspaper's on-the-spot breaking news photography, a news magazine's documentary photo-essay, a news site's multimedia slideshow, or a photo-blog's collection of digital snapshots, amongst others.

At stake, regardless of its inflection, is the implicit promise to provide an impartial record of a chosen moment in time, and in a manner consistent with journalism's wider investment in ethical codes and standards. Philip Gefter (2009), former picture editor at the New York Times, believes photojournalism is 'a breed of photographic imagery assigned or conceived to capture newsworthy events or to document conditions in the world expressly for publication in a news-based journal' (2009: 122). Underpinning this definition 'lies an unwavering adherence to fact,' a core principle for many journalists and their editors when countering criticisms of deliberate bias, slanting or manipulation. 'The photojournalist will shoot an event as it transpires without altering its anatomy with his or her presence,' Gefter maintains, before making his key point that the 'camera as witness' may well be 'the profession's essential rule of thumb.'

This notion of the 'camera as witness' may be regarded as a helpful way to highlight a number of guiding tenets that have given shape to photojournalism since its early days.[1] The fledgling concept of 'journalism' itself was slowly securing its purchase, at least in the terms we recognise today, around the time photography as a technology was emerging in the 1830s. Long before it was possible to print photographs in newspapers, wood engravings of them were used to provide readers with a visual rendering of events (and thereby reaffirm the press's commitment to the dispassionate relay of accurate facts). Photo-reportage would not come into its own until the last decades of the nineteenth century, however, when improvements in printing processes enabled newspapers to begin adopting a more visually-centred conception of news values and priorities. In 1880, New York's The Daily Graphic was the first daily newspaper to publish a halftone reproduction of a news photograph. By 1904, London's Daily Mirror had been transformed into a pictorial newspaper, effectively becoming a showcase for photojournalism with considerable success. Some historians align the 'birth of modern photojournalism' with the arrival of the first 35mm camera, the German-made Ur-Leica, in 1925. Less technology-centred accounts privilege other considerations, of course, but by then it was readily apparent that telling news stories with pictures was here to stay.

In the mid-1930s, photojournalism entered what would be called its 'golden age' in retrospect, largely due to the growing recognition of the valuable role performed by photographers in news reportage. Important stories were documented in compelling terms, making the most of marked improvements in hand-held camera portability, wider lens apertures and image quality. In the United States, Life magazine was re-launched by Henry Luce as a weekly prioritising photojournalism in 1936, followed by Britain's Picture Post two years later. Both publications pioneered 'candid' photography, devoting their pages to images that captivated readers. Staff photographers for these publications, including Margaret Bourke-White, Walker Evans, W. Eugene Smith and Robert Capa, were responsible for bringing the human consequences of crises, such as the Depression and later the Second World War, to public attention with visually gripping poignancy. Their photos, along with those of photographers working for Magnum Photos (founded in 1947), the premier independent photo agency, form a crucial record of this portion of history. Post-war weekly news titles such as Stern (Germany in 1948) and Paris Match (France in 1949) similarly constituted important commissioners of photojournalistic work. Meanwhile ‘spot‘ news photographs supplied to newspapers by news agencies, such as Associated Press, Agence France Presse and Reuters, competed for pre-eminence in the field. These organisations developed worldwide networks of photographers to cover local events on a daily basis for their newspaper clients. When a major story broke, their images could be transmitted internationally over telephone lines - hence the term ‘wire service’ – with great speed.

The onset of television newscasts from the mid-1950s signalled a formidable challenge to photojournalism’s privileged status. Traditional customers for photojournalism, such as the popular weekly news magazines, would one by one close their doors. The final edition of the Picture Post appeared in 1957, while American favourites Life and Look struggled onward with dwindling sales, finally ceasing weekly publication in the early 1970s. The advent of colour news photography around the same time was one response, yet questions were being asked about its ability to compete with the near-instant immediacy of television coverage of breaking news. Such tensions came to fore with respect to photojournalism’s crucial role in documenting and, equally significantly, memorialising conflicts, such as the Vietnam War (ending in 1975). Vietnam remains widely understood as a war that was ‘lost’ for the United States by negative, anti-war media coverage, despite evidence to the contrary complicating such assertions (Hallin, 1992). Still photographs such as Nick Ut’s ‘napalm girl’ and Eddie Adams’ ‘summary execution of a Vietcong suspect’ depicting the chaotic brutality of the war were understood to have played a role in shifting public opinion. Post-Vietnam, the US military became acutely concerned with ‘managing‘ media access to the battlefield, leading to new controls over imagery, such as the ‘embedded‘ journalism seen in Afghanistan and Iraq during ‘the war on terror’.

The advent of digital technologies signalled a new age for photojournalism. ‘The computer is at the heart of a revolution in image making,' Fred Ritchin (1984), former photo editor of The New York Times had declared on its pages in 1984. His colleague, Edward Klein, editor of the Times's magazine, chimed in soon after: 'This new technology has the potential of undermining our faith in photography as a reflection of reality' (cited in Reaves 1987: 43). Proving particularly contentious was the apparent ease with which 'computer retouching' could be performed, signalling the prospect that recurrent concerns regarding photographic manipulation would be taken to new levels. 'The problem arises in the day-to-day detailed temptation to "improve" the images,' publisher Stewart Brand remarked. 'Digital retouching, though not yet a very public issue, is in the thick of how we think about communication and "truth" about communication – the very broadest fabric of civilization' (cited in Reaves, 1987). Photography critic Mark Power (1987), writing in the Washington Post in 1987, similarly sounded the alarm that 'electronic photography' was threatening 'to destroy our traditional faith that the camera never lies.' Pointing to the 'fierce debate' it had ignited 'among print-media professionals over the ethical consequences of electronic retouching and manipulation of pictures,' Power wondered aloud about the impact on photojournalism's future viability. 'Photojournalism, already moribund if not actually terminal since TV, is also likely to change,' he argued. 'In order for us to trust the veracity of an electronic image we'll have to believe what we see is being photographed in 'real-time' – that is, live' (see also Allan, 2013b).

Until the 1990s, the wire services and the independent photography agencies had largely served different constituencies, with the wires providing spot news photos for daily use and independents offering longer-form photo essays for the supplement and magazine markets. The growing significance of digital photography, especially on the internet, led to dramatic economic changes in the market, allowing the wires to transmit greater numbers of images at increased speed, maintain (and sell) from larger archives of photos displayed online, and move to greater production of photo essays as well as spot shots. Their global range of coverage, efficiency of distribution, and pricing all began to benefit them over smaller agencies, particularly with photo editors struggling to cope with much-reduced image budgets. 'We pay a monthly fee to AP, AFP and Reuters, so the bill is the same whether we run one of their photos that month, or a hundred,' the deputy director of photography at The Los Angeles Times explained' (Lemos, 2005). For newspapers pressured to cost-cut their own staffers in expensive overseas bureaus, these agencies were relied upon to fill the void left behind, particularly in international news sections. Smaller agencies were hit particularly harshly by this shift, as traditional clients proved less willing to pay separately for the longer, exclusively-distributed photo essays they traditionally distributed.

By the start of the twenty-first century, newspapers and magazines were openly struggling with the challenge of how to monetise these new online spaces effectively. Fears were being expressed that the day was not far off when readers would cease to pay for news, should it be possible to read selected items of interest for free online. Declining sales and circulation figures for newspapers, in particular, compounded the problems of a business model based primarily on advertising revenues. These worrying trends had a knock-on effect in relation to the consolidation of the photo agency industry as well. Several mid-size agencies with significant history and influence in the photojournalism market - including Sygma, Gamma Liaison and Saba - were bought by two large corporations, Corbis and Getty Images. Both Corbis and Getty took advantage of the digitising revolution in photography taking place to acquire historic photo collections, digitise select images, and sell usage rights for these online as 'one stop shops'. Their image products encompassed all forms of news photography, as well as sports, stock, fashion, entertainment and art imagery. Photojournalists' opinions of this consolidation within their industry were mixed. Many felt that Corbis and Getty were not sufficiently aware of how photojournalism worked as a profession. Criticisms included that they were too market-centred in their thinking, striving to push large volumes of images into vast online collections with little thought to the current priorities - and future needs - of photojournalists themselves (EPUK, 2000).

Small to mid-sized for-profit agencies, together with co-operatives like Magnum, historically provided important up-front funding and assistance for freelance photographers struggling to pay for long-term projects they wanted to undertake. They also played an important role in managing freelancers‘ archives and negotiating sales. Evidence suggests that Getty and Corbis have both begun to take these aspects of the photojournalism market more seriously, but questions remain over the extent to which they will preserve the large archives they purchased with these agencies, many of which cover key news events of the last sixty years.

Digital Quandaries

A further dimension of the 'digital revolution' unfolding during the 1990s revolved around safeguarding the integrity of the news photograph, not least because the computer hardware and software necessary for image manipulation was becoming increasingly affordable for professionals and amateurs alike. 'With taps on a keyboard, or the sweep of a mouse, the new breed of image-maker can take an object in a real photograph and clone it, move it, paint it a different color, rotate it, flip it, or switch it to another photo scene entirely,' the Washington Post's Kathy Sawyer (1994) observed. While 'phonied photographs' were not new, 'the latest technology makes deceptions much easier and faster to accomplish and much harder – if not impossible – to detect.'

Alarm bells had been ringing for some time amongst commentators concerned about photojournalism's commitments to truth-telling. Writing in the New York Times, Andy Grundberg (1990) alerted readers to how 'the veracity of photographic reality is being radically challenged' by the rise of digital photography. As he explained:

> *"The immediate menace - although by no means the only one - is known as computer imaging, an outgrowth of electronic technology that allows anyone to alter a photographic image at will. This much-touted technology makes it easy to recompose and combine photographic images, and to do so in a way that is virtually undetectable.*
>
> *In the future, it seems almost certain, photographs will appear less like facts and more like factoids - as a kind of unsettled and unsettling hybrid imagery based not so much on observable reality and actual events as on the imagination. This shift, which to a large extent has already occurred within*

the rarefied precincts of the art world, will fundamentally alter not only conventional ideas about the nature of photography but also many cherished conceptions about reality itself.” (Grundberg, 1990).

Although the principle of objectivity in news photography remains deeply-held by many photojournalists, particularly those employed by newspapers and the wire services, there are clear indications that they are beginning to think of their craft differently. As opportunities for publishing in traditional media have declined, photojournalists are presenting their work in contexts where critiques of objectivity and impartiality have longer standing, including galleries, exhibitions and commercial spaces. Photojournalism’s familiar styles and conventions have continued to evolve to make the most of digital technologies, sparking debates about its relative openness to outside influences – not only its close relation, documentary photography, but also by various forms of art and commercial photography.

Despite such changes, most photojournalists and documentarians working in these spheres hold to the principle that their work fulfils, as Derrick Price argues, ‘a minimal condition of documentary [is] an account of events that have their own existence outside the frame of the photograph or the confines of the studio walls’ (cited in Wells, 2009: 115). In recent years, collaborations with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have also allowed photojournalists to pursue long-term projects they might otherwise be unable to finance. Such projects often give photographers an opportunity to cover global socio-political issues consistently under-covered in mainstream media in ways that are ‘authentic‘ but not necessarily ‘objective’. In such projects, photojournalists may act as educators and take a position on such issues in ways not always accepted within mainstream media. Ed Kashi’s work on the ecological and social consequences of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta and Marcus Bleasdale’s long-term investigation of mining’s impact on protracted conflict in eastern Congo are two examples of this phenomenon. Both Kashi and Bleasdale are members of VII, a relatively-new photojournalistic agency whose approach to the broader industry will be discussed further below.

Despite ongoing concerns regarding monetization and financing, the internet has also offered new, ostensibly ever-expanding platforms for distributing photographic work. Emergent online models are securing 'crowd-source' funds for longer-term photographic projects, illustrating that pessimistic claims about the looming 'death of photojournalism' may be overstated. Online multimedia formats are one area in which significant development involving photojournalism has occurred. This is evident on many photo agency websites; for example, Magnum has created its Magnum in Motion section, and VII has VII Multimedia as well as the more recently launched VII Magazine, which includes multimedia features. This format is diverse: variations include mixes of still or moving images presented with voice-over, written text, music or accompanying dialogue. Within this hybrid genre, distinctions have arisen between the production of short items - both in length and in preparation/production time- on breaking or daily news items, on the one hand, and long-term, in-depth and expanded documentary-style productions, sometimes 10-20 minutes in duration, on the other. The shorter style has been used widely online, including by traditional news websites, thereby reflecting the huge success of public video-sharing sites, such as YouTube. Some agencies specializing in multimedia production - such as MediaStorm – cater to clients as varied as Starbucks and The Council for Foreign Relations.

Brian Storm of MediaStorm has been an outspoken advocate of the 'return' to serious, long-form documentary journalism, which nevertheless uses some of the newest production and distribution technologies available. Storm argues that journalists should embrace new technologies while simultaneously refusing the current market approach to journalism, which he perceives to be damaging the quality of journalism. For Storm, new digital camera and web publishing technologies in the hands of citizens mean a positive, democratic enlargement of the public sphere for communication and debate. He feels that 'the crowd' is less likely to pursue long-form journalism themselves, however, thereby allowing professional journalists to reclaim one of their most important roles. 'For me, the larger question is why we are wasting our time and skills covering stories that the crowd is all over. Why are we, as professional journalists, allocating our resources for such daily, perishable stories?' (Ludtke, 2009). Storm follows his own rules, producing stories of long-term relevance on a time-scale decided by the needs of the story rather than a 24-hour news-cycle.

At VII Photos, managing director Stephen Mayes has discussed a new approach that appears closely related to Brian Storm's focus on 'quality'. He describes VII as doing 'integrity,' rather than selling photographic 'products':

> *"When I look at an environment where there's absolutely too much information, information becomes valueless. What everyone is suffering from is that a photograph is just more information. It becomes very hard to put a price on it because there are too many pictures out there, but if you suddenly start rethinking it and saying, 'We're not selling photographs, what we're selling is believability,' then actually we have more value than we had before."*
> (Mayes cited in Risch, 2009).

Mayes' ideas for monetizing the value of VII photographers' reputation for excellence, particularly in telling visual human-interest stories in conflict zones, in part involve creating more frequent partnerships with organizations outside the media industry, such as non-governmental organizations. NGOs such as Medecins Sans Frontieres and Human Rights Watch have had symbiotic relationships with photographers for years, helping them to gain access to their story subjects and occasionally hiring photojournalists to document their relief programmes. This type of work can provide an alternative source of income for photographers outside the media sector. It can also go beyond straight photographic assignments undertaken by photographers for NGOs to joint bids for governmental and philanthropic funds, with NGOs and photographers working as teams on projects that have journalistic, campaigning, educational and/or fundraising components.

In a nutshell, then, agencies like VII, Magnum and MediaStorm have made significant steps towards becoming their own cross-platform content distributors and cultivating direct relationships with audiences for their work through new social networking platforms. These audiences are in many cases specifically targeted as opposed to the broader base still pursued by much of the mainstream media. While Mayes has spoken about moving away from the standard approach of selling units of visual content towards monetizing the value of particular photographers' reputations for integrity and quality (Risch, 2009), to a large extent the value of all photography circulating as 'news' on various platforms remains reliant on longstanding journalistic benchmarks of 'accuracy' and 'verifiability', whether these are made explicit or not. This point is made repeatedly by those who stress the continued importance of professional photojournalists and documentarians in the face of growing competition from 'citizen photojournalists,' particularly in online reporting of breaking news events.

The Citizen Photojournalist

The notion of the 'citizen photojournalism' is arguably as old as photojournalism is itself, yet it has claimed its placed in journalism's vocabulary much more recently. Specifically, it gained wide recognition as a vital strand of what was being called 'citizen journalism' in the immediate aftermath of the South Asian tsunami of December 2004. 'Digital cameras blew the lid off Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison and exposed a major scandal,' journalist Mike Barton (2005) observed, 'and now with the Asian tsunami disaster people with digital cameras and video recorders have delivered the first and most vivid accounts from the scene.' News organizations found themselves in the awkward position of being largely dependent on amateur reportage to tell the story of what was transpiring on the ground. 'Never before has there been a major international story where television news crews have been so emphatically trounced in their coverage by amateurs wielding their own cameras', observed one British newspaper; 'Producers and professional news cameramen often found themselves being sent not to the scenes of disaster to capture footage of its aftermath, but to the airports where holiday-makers were returning home with footage of the catastrophe as it happened' (The Independent, 2005; see also Allan, 2006; Allan and Thorsen, 2009; Liu et al., 2009).

Despite its ambiguities, the term 'citizen journalism' was widely perceived to capture something of the countervailing ethos of the ordinary person's capacity to bear witness, thereby providing commentators with a useful label to characterise an ostensibly new genre of reporting. The remarkable range of eyewitness imagery – much of it posted online through blogs and personal webpages – being generated by ordinary citizens on the scene (holidaymakers, in many instances) was widely prized for making a unique contribution to mainstream journalism's coverage. One newspaper headline after the next declared citizen journalism to be yet another startling upheaval, if not an outright revolution, being ushered in by internet technology.

The significance of bottom-up, inside-out contributions from ordinary individuals in relation to the top-down, outside-in imperatives of professional news reporting was being increasingly regarded as indicative of a broader 'citizen journalism movement' throughout 2005 (Schechter, 2005). The summer of that year saw a crisis unfold that appeared to consolidate its imperatives, effectively dispensing with claims that it was a passing 'fad' or 'gimmick' for all but its fiercest critics. The immediate aftermath of the bombs that exploded in London on 7 July destroying three underground trains and a bus, leaving 56 people dead and over 700 injured, was thoroughly recorded by citizens making use of digital technologies. In the face of official denials that anything was amiss, news organisations seized upon diverse forms of citizen witnessing to piece together the story. 'What you're doing is gathering material you never could have possibly got unless your reporter happened by chance to be caught up in this', BBC News's Vicky Taylor maintained on the day (cited in Jesdanun, 2005).

Mobile telephones captured the scene of fellow commuters trapped underground, with many of the resultant images resonating with what some aptly described as an eerie, even claustrophobic, quality. Video clips were judged to be all the more compelling because they were dim, grainy and shaky, and – even more important – because they were documenting an angle on an event as it was actually unfolding (see also Allan, 2006; Reading, 2009; Sambrook, 2009). The individuals in question were proffering a firsthand, personal vantage point, rather than the impersonal perspective of the dispassionate observer. 'The value of this is you'll know more about what's actually happening, why you should care, what it means,' online editor Will Tacy said at the time. 'You know about what's happening to individuals. That's always been the best of journalism' (cited in Parry, 2005). Remarking on this transition of news source to news gatherer, he added: 'We aren't even close to where this is going to end up in inviting the public into our world.'

In the days to follow, appraisals of the changing nature of the dynamics between professional journalism and its amateur, citizen-led alternatives frequently employed a discourse of partnership. 'We are in the earliest stages of a revolutionary relationship, and its current urgency is bound to be tempered by setbacks,' Emily Bell (2005) of the Guardian surmised. The rewards to be gained by 'opening doors and distribution platforms to everybody' were substantial, she believed, but not without risk. 'It might take only one faked film, one bogus report to weaken the bond of trust, and, conversely, one misedited report or misused image to make individuals wary once again of trusting their material to television or newspapers.' News organisations wasted little time fashioning new strategies to verify the authenticity of submitted imagery or 'user-generated content,' even when aware that checking veracity offered no absolute guarantees where safeguarding against duplicity, let alone hoaxes, was concerned.

Still, over a range of crisis events to follow, assessments of how the news-gathering process was being effectively democratised by 'digital snappers' tended to be upbeat. Commentators pointed to examples of how such imagery surpassed that offered by professionals, such as during the French riots in the autumn of 2005, the Buncefield oil terminal explosions in December that year, the execution of Saddam Hussein (a prison guard's mobile telephone recording, distributed anonymously over the web, being key) in December 2006, as well as students' camera witnessing during the shootings at Virginia Tech University in April 2007, amongst others.

For those welcoming this 'new army of citizen reporters', a paradigm shift appeared to be underway. Traditional photoreportage, with its adherence to longstanding principles of dispassionate rely, was open to the charge of being formulaic in its appeal to objectivity. Moreover, its polished aesthetic qualities risked being perceived as bland, even contrived, particularly when focused on the esoteric world of elites. Citizen photojournalism, in marked contrast, inspired a language of revolution in the view of advocates. Journalism by the people for the people was heralded for its alternative norms, values and priorities. It was immediate, independent and unapologetically subjective. ‘You can never know exactly where or when something compelling or newsworthy will happen,’ Dave Boyle, photo editor at the New York Post argued in 2007. ‘It’s important to be open to receiving images from new, non-traditional sources’ (cited in Business Wire, 2007).

Camera-equipped bystanders had long provided news organisations with this type of imagery (Abraham Zapruder’s home-movie of the Kennedy assassination or George Holliday’s videotaping of the LAPD beating of Rodney King, being two of the more noteworthy historical precedents), simply not at this volume nor with such speed. ‘New technology has made it easier to capture and distribute imagery, leading to citizen photojournalism that is increasingly relevant to the news cycle,’ Jonathan Klein of Getty Images similarly maintained at this time. ‘While this genre will never replace the award-winning photojournalism for which we’re known, it’s a highly complementary offering that enables us to meet the evolving imagery needs of a broad customer base’ (cited in PR Newswire, 2007; see also Allan, 2013a).

For critics, however, citizen journalism’s dangers outweighed whatever merits might temporarily catch the eye, with news organisations at serious risk of losing credibility in their rush to embrace forms of imagery they could not always independently confirm or verify as accurate. Citizen photojournalism may be cheap and popular, hence its not inconsiderable appeal for cash-strapped newsrooms. Still, in a world where facts matter, ethical codes warrant respect, and audience trust is paramount, it was sparking intense debates throughout many newsrooms.

Conclusions

If everyone equipped with a camera-phone can be a photojournalist, then who needs photojournalism? This rather flippant question goes to the heart of an interesting debate. Here it is possible to discern a continuum of sorts, with voices proclaiming photojournalism’s imminent demise on the one end, and those heralding its dramatic rebirth on the other end. One need not occupy a stance at either of these two endpoints, however, to recognise that traditional conceptions of photojournalism are looking increasingly outmoded in emergent digital contexts. Many newsrooms, under intense financial pressure to trim expenditure wherever possible, regard the resources vital for photojournalism to be a luxury increasingly difficult to justify. As a result, the very integrity of photojournalism as a craft risks being compromised, many fear, when its guiding principles threaten to collapse in a climate of managerial indifference.

Too many recent examples come to mind, but perhaps the most shocking of late was the decision taken by the Chicago Sun-Times to eliminate its entire award-winning photography staff on a single day in May 2013. The newspaper executive's public statement read in full:

> *"The Sun-Times business is changing rapidly and our audiences are consistently seeking more video content with their news. We have made great progress in meeting this demand and are focused on bolstering our reporting capabilities with video and other multimedia elements. The Chicago Sun-Times continues to evolve with our digitally savvy customers, and as a result, we have had to restructure the way we manage multimedia, including photography, across the network."*

Initial reactions from across the mediascape ranged from the incredulous to the appalled, soon giving way to the scathing. The Newspaper Guild expressed its outrage that the paper's 28 staff photographers (amongst them Pulitzer-Prize winner John H. White) and photo editors were being summarily dismissed without notice, but there seemed little hope this latest cost-cutting move would be reversed.

Within hours of the announcement, rumours were circulating on social media sites that Sun-Times reporters would be undergoing training in 'iPhone photography basics' in order to supplement the work of freelance photographers wherever possible. Commentators pointed out that there was much more to photojournalism than equipping journalists with cameras, a point underscored by Dan Mitchell (2013), writing in Fortune Tech:

> *"Reporters, it should be noted, are in general terrible at taking pictures. Photographs snapped on iPhones by photographically inept reporters who are also trying to gather information at an accident scene, for example, are not going to impress anyone, digitally sav-*

> *vy or not. [This is…] pushing the idea of 'multimedia journalism' – that is, having reporters take photos and shoot video […]. Most often, this results in nothing more than one person doing three jobs poorly rather than doing one job well. It also tends to sabotage the notion that all of these are professional endeavors and to strengthen the false notion that anybody could perform any of them equally well. This reveals a shocking level of disrespect for both journalists and readers."*

Photojournalism's 'death spiral' was gathering momentum, other commentators warned, with the very notion of it being a professional craft coming unravelled. 'Nobody is actually saying it,' blogger Samuel Smith (2013) maintained, 'but I'm also willing to bet that they'll be "crowdsourcing" more "content" from "citizen journalists" with camera phones.'

In the wake of these and related developments, it appears likely that the next few years will prove decisive in determining how the political economy of photojournalism – including newly forged citizen-professional relationships – will adapt to such pressures. Currently divergent approaches to distribution, funding models and content curation may well begin to converge into a basis for re-interpreting how best to secure the viability of 'visual journalism'. In this context, it is important to note how agencies such as VII and Magnum are continuing to develop niche markets for themselves, and in so doing 'monetising' the social and journalistic value associated with the track record of their professional photographers. At the same time Getty, Corbis and the wire agencies are using their economies of scale – and longstanding historic relationships – to cater to the needs of a market segment where members are constantly looking to cost-cut their own content production resources. At present, these mega-agencies are expanding their genres of image provision; Reuters, for example, is working to enhance its offering of longer-form photo essays and multimedia pieces (Interview, Hamish Crooks, June 2012). Such developments may well further erode the business position of smaller, independent image agencies.

In late 2012, Corbis acquired London-based Demotix, a small video and image agency specialising in the distribution of freelance and amateur-produced imagery founded in 2009 (Laurent, 2012). Demotix had become an important link between mainstream media image markets and as-yet-unknown citizen journalists and freelancers over recent years, particularly in non-Western European countries. The company's ethos was boldly signalled via its mission statement: 'to rescue journalism and promote free expression by connecting independent journalists with the traditional media.' Betting on the inevitability of a citizen-fuelled approach to collecting news content, Demotix's employee's fashioned new strategies to provide verification procedures to ensure the authenticity of its photos (which remains a highly important factor of value in commercial terms). In this way, it appeared to at least partially fit the role of crowd-powered journalism that Brian Storm suggested would comprise one sector of the new media market (as noted above) and that others have claimed will help to democratize visual news production and distribution. Demotix has grown rapidly, currently boasting over 30,000 users in 212 territories, with 4,750 active photo and video journalists (Demotix website, 2013). It promises users that it 'can broker your photos and videos to newspapers, magazines, TV channels and websites, multiple times and simultaneously.' Post-buyout, the Demotix website explains that 'Corbis will be taking a very small cut of all revenues they generate from sales of your photographs. We (Demotix and you) - will split the rest 50/50, as ever.' While incoming revenue may be comparatively small from this venture, Demotix arguably offers Corbis access to yet another image genre for marketing and sales, thereby expanding their image libraries to an even more impressive scale. From a media economics perspective, it will be interesting to watch how enduring this latest example of market consolidation will be in the years ahead.

To close, then, this chapter has aimed to briefly highlight several vantage points from which to assess the challenges confronting photojournalism as it continues to evolve in contested circumstances. Precisely what counts as 'photojournalism,' particularly in online contexts, will demand close attention in the years ahead. We need to be alert to the potential for new types of photojournalism to emerge while, at the same time, aware of how these opportunities will be shaped by negotiated compromises wrought by structural pressures and constraints. In seeking to move debates about how best to secure its future beyond the soaring rhetoric of advocates and critics alike, the importance of carefully appraising these conditions of possibility becomes all the more pressing.

Notes

1. In our view, this notion of the 'camera as witness' is a suggestive one, helping as it does to bring to the fore the importance of the photographer's role in bearing witness to events. Here we caution, however, that it must not be understood too literally. Care must be taken to recognise that human agency corresponds to the photographer's relationship to the camera enacted in practice, lest responsibility be mistakenly perceived to reside in the technology itself. See Allan (2013a) for further discussion of this critique.

Challenging Questions

- Do news photographs reflect reality or do they construct it?
- To what extent have digital technologies changed the norms, values and conventions of photojournalism?
- What distinguishes the professional photojournalist from the amateur or citizen news photographer?

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11 Truth and the Tabloids

Adam Lee Potter

When the facts change, I change my mind.
What do you do?"

John Maynard Keynes (Bright, 1940: 24)

The drive to honesty

I have been a national newspaper journalist for 20 years. I've worked for The Sun, the Daily Mail and the Sunday Mirror. I have written for the Independent, the Observer, and the Sunday Times. I've been a news reporter, a sub, a features editor, a columnist and even a farming editor. But, essentially, I'm a writer, a teller of (true) stories. In my career, I have walked to the North Pole, been hospitalised by a paedophile's dog and flown on a bombing raid over Kosovo. I have been shot at in the Middle East, mugged in Benin and beaten up in Northern Ireland. I've bribed my way into a Balinese jail and put a fake bomb on a plane at Heathrow. Perhaps not surprisingly, I've been arrested twice. I'm proud of my profession and the smart, brave, hard-working people who populate it. Journalists are only ever as good as their last piece of copy. And that constant – though this claim will amuse some and infuriate others – tends to keep you honest.

Leveson: the beginning of the end or the end of the beginning?

So, the telephone-hacking debacle and consequent scrutiny have rocked us. Our reputation and, more importantly, our credibility, stand at an all-time low. Our very survival remains in question. That is a challenge that must urgently be met and one, which this chapter will seek to address. A free and unfettered press is the lynchpin of a civilised society. With circulation figures continuing to plummet, newspapers' failure to embrace the "last chance saloon" heralded by the Press Complaints Commission 21 years ago could prove the death knell for a seemingly moribund industry. We may have the best press in the world but it is also the worst. A decent newspaper is, however, still life's cheapest luxury and, as such, worth fighting for. What else costs pennies yet can entertain, educate and involve?

The Leveson Inquiry has, rightly, highlighted concerns. The so-called dark arts of investigative journalism, the murky relationship between journalists, police officers and politicians and the well-thumbed public interest defence , have all cringed beneath the judicial spotlight. If a News of the World investigator jeopardised the Milly Dowler murder investigation by deleting key ansaphone messages – though the Metropolitan Police dispute this claim - that is, of course, abhorrent. No one in their right mind would try – or wish – to defend such practice. Nor would they support the hacking of any phone – celebrity or otherwise - for the mere pursuit of prurient tittle-tattle. The only person who has attempted to do so is Paul McMullan, the defunct newspaper's former features editor. Now a publican, McMullan has sought to recast himself as Fleet Street's anti-hero, a gonzo mouthpiece. He not only admits hacking phones, he revels in the admission. His perverse justification, voiced on BBC2's Newsnight, shamed us all:

I've always said that I've just tried to write articles in a truthful way and what better source of getting the truth is (sic) to listen to someone's messages? (Newsnight, 2011)

The cogent response, on the same programme, from celebrity Steve Coogan – himself a victim of phone hacking – cut through such cant: "You're a walking PR disaster for the tabloids." (Newsnight, 2011). That is palpably true but McMullan no more speaks for tabloid journalists than Coogan speaks for the everyman. We should remember that even if every News of the World journalist had been guilty of phone hacking, that would still only have accounted for less than one per cent of journalists in this country. Compare that with the parliamentary expenses scandal in which 50 per cent of elected MPs defrauded the public purse. I am not advocating a whitewash; it has become rapidly clear that shabby and illegal behaviour was not confined to the News of the World.

Newsgathering is not always a transparent business

Rebekah Brooks – News International's former chief executive officer - is set to face trial at the Old Bailey, charged with conspiracy to access voicemails and seeking to pervert the course of justice. Andy Coulson –David Cameron's one-time Communications Director – five fellow former News of the World journalists, five former News International employees and a private investigator are also to appear in court facing related charges. In 2008, Kate and Gerry McCann accepted £550,000 in damages and a High Court apology over "utterly false and defamatory" stories published by Express Newspapers about the disappearance of their daughter, Madeleine. Broadsheets, too, have been called into question. The Times hacked into private emails to expose an anonymous blogger. The Sunday Times hired a conman to blag Gordon Brown's property details. Even Nick Davies, the Guardian reporter who first alleged that the News of the World deleted Milly Dowler's messages, was later forced to admit to having made a "very significant" error. Davies' mealy-mouthed apologia encapsulated the subjectivity of truth: "Everybody involved in that story accepted that that story was true and continued to accept until four months later evidence that was not available, to everybody's surprise, showed that one element of that story was now in doubt." (Newsnight, 2011)

Again, I am not attempting to shift blame. Tabloids have, if anything, a greater responsibility than broadsheets. Eight million people buy a tabloid every day in the UK, equating to more than twenty million readers – a third of the population. As such, we have an acute duty to deliver truth. Newsgathering is not always, of course, a transparent business. If the Daily Telegraph had – instead of buying, as they did, leaked documents – attempted to stand up its expenses' exclusive by merely contacting the House of Commons press office, there would have been, almost certainly, no story. That truism applies to any potentially damaging news story that might come a reporter's way. Investigative journalism demands a level of intrigue and the line one treads is fine indeed.

As a news reporter at The Sun, I was tasked with testing security at Heathrow on the tenth anniversary of the Lockerbie bombing. I secured a job as a cleaner to see how easy it would be to circumvent airside security and plant a bomb. It was, in fact, terrifyingly easy. I didn't lie on my job application: I gave my real name and contact details. I even said I worked for a company called Sun. I just didn't say I was an investigative journalist and that it was The Sun newspaper. In the aftermath of that story, the cleaning company had its contract revoked, 150 people lost their jobs and I received anonymous threats for six months but I would still argue that the means were justified by the end: a ruthless overhaul of airport security following a parliamentary inquiry.

But one of the unforeseen and unwelcome consequences of the Leveson era has been a troubling shift in focus, be it opportunistic or self-protective. Take the example of the 2012 Andrew Mitchell scandal. The Metropolitan Police is more concerned with identifying who leaked the story to The Sun than in investigating the ramifications of the Chief Whip abusing one of their officers.

The newspaper pointed out in an editorial: "We neither paid nor offered any money for this exclusive. It is the result of what is known as journalism. The public interest could not be more clear-cut. Britain has a right to know if a high-ranking Government member brands police 'morons' and 'plebs'." (The Sun, 2012.) Quite. The roguery of a few corrupt journalists must not be utilised to jeopardise the real interests of the many. Proper, investigative journalism is only ever an enemy to the guilty and, that being the case must be fiercely protected.

Who watches the watchmen?

Admittedly, we all make mistakes: politicians, police officers, bankers, even journalists. When journalists do get it wrong, we should confess and correct. Whatever body replaces the Press Complaints Commission – if it is, unlike its predecessor to survive and convince – it must champion that credo above all else. Ultimately, journalistic truth is – and should be - what you can prove, but there is one notable disclaimer: the Daily Mail's challenge to the men accused of the Stephen Lawrence murder. Above a photograph of the five men, the front - page headline ran: "Murderers. The Mail accuses these men of killing. If we are wrong, let them sue us." (Daily Mail, 1997) They never did, of course, and, 14 years after that story ran, two of those men were retried and found guilty. After the verdict, editor-in-chief Paul Dacre said, 'In many ways it was an unprecedented, outrageous step, but I'd like to think that as a result we did a huge amount of good and made history that day."

Dacre's subsequent plea to Lord Leveson was, therefore, all the more credible: "I'd also like to persuade you there are thousands of decent journalists in Britain who don't hack phones, who don't bribe policemen and who work long, anti-social hours for modest recompense ... because they passionately believe their papers give voice to the voiceless and expose the misdeeds of the rich, the powerful and the pompous."

It is a widely-held misconception that tabloid journalists – unlike those from broadsheets, television or radio – are feral ne'er-do-wells who would do and say anything to nail a salacious scoop; monsters who would never let the truth get in the way of a story. Most journalists are, in fact, like most people, decent, but the few that are not run the gamut.

In his memoir, foreign correspondent Edward Behr told the story of a respected BBC TV reporter who, covering the brutal civil war in the Congo, had but one question to ask cowering refugees: "Anyone here been raped and speaks English?" (Behr, 1982, p136)

There are, naturally, errant tabloid hacks, too. Peter Chippindale and Chris Horrie, in their biography of The Sun, Stick It Up Your Punter, summed up tabloid culture at its worst: "On The Sun – and in tabloids in general – it was as if you had caught someone messing around with your wife. You shouldn't stop to think about it. You just did what you thought was right and went round and punched them in the face." (Chippindale and Horrie, 1999)

The late Alan Clarke, in his essay, Why I Hold Journalists in Low Regard, memorably decried tabloids' "brutish culture, part base prejudice, part leering innuendo, which colours and informs the style in which these papers compete with one another". (Glover, 1999, p286)

Former Sun editor Kelvin Mackenzie, arguably of the above school, defended his 13-year reign – which included his decision to run what turned out to be a false story about Sir Elton John that cost the paper £1million in libel damages - by telling Leveson in 2012: "Basically my view was that if it sounded right it was probably right and therefore we should lob it in."

The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Mackenzie's style of editorship was itself proof that the notion of truth is far from straightforward. The Sun is still boycotted on Merseyside because of his notorious splash about the 1989 Hillsborough disaster in which 96 people died.

Beneath the headline The Truth, the paper – quoting a police source that we now know was part of a widespread cover-up launched by senior officers - claimed fans had pick-pocketed the dead and urinated on the bodies. The Sun was not the only newspaper to run the story but it was the only one to state, unequivocally, that it was the truth. That, notwithstanding the police conspiracy uncovered 23 years later, is what caused such enduring offence.

I learned that to my cost when I started shifting for The Sun in 1995. Fresh from a local paper, I was sent to cover the breaking story of two murdered schoolboys in the Wirral.

I was flattered to be sent on such a major story until I'd asked around in the local pub. "Hello, I'm from The Sun," I began. Two men carried me out while a third smashed my windscreen with a pool cue and told me to "hop it". I did. When I rang the news editor from a call box, I received anything but sympathy.

"Why do you think I sent you?" he demanded. "You don't work for The Sun. You're a freelance. You work for the Newcastle Journal."

Leveson, the legacy and lessons

When it comes to personal ethics, you've got to be true to yourself. There is pressure to perform and that pressure is never greater than when you start out. You will be asked to do things that make you feel uncomfortable. They may not be unethical per se but they may be wrong for you.

That is for the individual to decide. As a journalist, you are employed for your nous as much as for your courage or obedience and that is why, ultimately, good will come from the hacking scandal and ongoing inquiry. Scrutiny and knowledge are always instructive.

There are those who have called for a boycott of certain newspapers. Hugh Grant claims, absurdly, that there is no journalism to be found within tabloids. Tell that to the family of Stephen Lawrence.

The world would be a poorer, and more dangerous, place without journalists. When Britain is closing hospitals, cutting benefits and charging students £9,000 a year to attend university, journalism is - if anything - more vital than ever. And in my experience, our stories come - not from electronic trickery - but from a combination of graft and luck.

In 2008, I was on a flight to Inverness. As I sat down with my Telegraph crossword, I recognised a voice in the seat behind me. Nick Clegg.

Blithely unaware, the Liberal Democrat leader spent the next hour and a half going through his supposedly secret shadow cabinet reshuffle.

Instead of filling in the crossword, I took down shorthand notes in the squares. Steve Webb was – among others – robustly critiqued. One across read: "My environment spokesman is a ******* ****".

Clegg's quasi-rebuttal of my subsequent Sunday Mirror article was a masterclass in obfuscation: "We don't comment on reports of fragments of private conversations."

The story was picked up by pretty much every other national newspaper, bar the Daily Star. Commentator Peter Preston wrote in the Observer: "No ethical rules were broken, no sacred trusts ruptured. And the message for Nick, or anyone else in his garrulous predicament, is clear: next time, whisper."

Indeed.

But for all the harrumphing of embarrassed politicians and exposed celebrities, it is the media's treatment of the Dowlers, the McCanns and their like that is the most harrowing and the most important to redress.

Journalists must never focus so keenly on the story that they negate the human beings who populate it.

It is not only unethical, it is bad practice. If you no longer care about people, you have no business being a journalist. You need empathy and heart as much as honesty and pluck.

We will always need journalism and, that said, we will always need journalists. But let us not fool ourselves: newspapers are under real threat. The medium, still largely flummoxed by the online challenge, is changing fast and malfeasance – both real and perceived – has hastened the decline.

Whether newspapers become freesheets, funded by advertising alone, publish solely online or morph into magazines, radio stations or satellite channels, journalists, both new and old, need to learn some key lessons.

Yes, we have a commercial imperative to give readers what they want. But we also have an absolute responsibility to give them what they need. We should add to society, not detract from it.

Journalism is, after all, the first draft of history: George Orwell's "historical impulse", a "desire to see things as they are, to find out true facts and store them up for the use of posterity". (Orwell, 1946, p5)

If we adhere to that mantra, we will not just survive, we will flourish.

Challenging Questions

- From hacking to paying for stolen information, is it ever justifiable for a journalist to break the law?
- First and false, or late and legitimate? Which is the better media model?
- What are the key lessons to be learned from Leveson?
- Regulation: self or state? Can either ever work? Is there a third way?
- Who defines public interest? How - and why - should newspapers adhere to an inherently subjective code?

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12 Irreverent and Independent?

The press post-Leveson

Sandra Laville

"Government in this country is as clean of financial corruption as anywhere in the world. That is largely thanks to a free and inquisitive media. To rinse the gutters of public life you need a gutter press"

Boris Johnson, Mayor of London (2012)

To begin, allow me to quote a short passage from the journalist James Cameron's memoir, published in 1967:

I am no great propagandist of the virtues or values of the Press; nevertheless I hold its functions in the most jealous of consideration. It is certainly the case that most politicians and even more officials forget that in a democratic society the theoretical master of events is the people. This is indeed a great illusion, nevertheless it is possible to argue that the reporter engaged in serious affairs must be the people's eyes and ears; he must be the instrument associating people's government with people's opinion (Cameron, 1967: 70).

These words, I would suggest, remain a succinct and accurate description of the job of a reporter today. In an age of citizen journalism, when experienced reporters are often outpaced by members of the public who "report" from the scene of an incident, his words are even more pertinent. It is the trust built between the reader and a journalist who checks the facts, considers the law and weighs up any ethical implications before rushing to print, that marks the professional out from the citizen.

Still, what happens to that equation when the journalist is no longer trusted to be the people's eyes and ears? What happens when the public - because of an act or acts which display contempt for them - no longer has faith in what a journalist writes or how the information was attained? In looking for answers to these and related questions, this chapter assesses how the press can once again reside on a relationship of trust with its readers and considers how the responsible 'many' have paid a high price for the irresponsible 'few'. It is written from a personal perspective, although informed by my work as crime correspondent for The Guardian.

It all started with the hackers

When it was revealed in 2011 that the messages on the mobile phone of the murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler had been hacked into by the News of the World, the story of a tabloid newspaper's phone hacking exploits was propelled into public consciousness. Until then phone hacking was largely a story of newspaper intrusion into the lives of the rich and famous. While the public might have been interested it was not something which impacted on their own lives. But the idea that even the life of a missing, later murdered child, was seen as fair game to unscrupulous reporters on a tabloid newspaper drove the criminality of a small group of journalists up the political and public agenda.

It was from this that the Leveson Inquiry was born and the whole of the press, not just one tabloid newspaper, was put under an intense judicial and public scrutiny:

> *"It was sparked by public revulsion about a single action - the hacking of the mobile phone of a murdered teenager. From that beginning, the scope of the inquiry was expanded to cover the culture, practices and ethics of the press in relations with the public, with the police, with politicians and, as to the police and politicians, the conduct of each."*
> (Leveson Report 2012)

Ordered by Government, the public inquiry ran in tandem with one of the biggest criminal investigations ever mounted by the Metropolitan Police. The linked operations Weeting, Elveden and Tuleta have seen up to 200 officers engaged in investigating alleged illegal activities by journalists. As of May 2013 some 121 individuals had been arrested by detectives, the largest group by far has been journalists. The investigations have uncovered alleged payments to public officials, including police officers, prison officers and Ministry of Defence staff by journalists on The Sun newspaper; alleged criminality which has led to several charges being laid against individuals, both reporters and officials.

Aside from alleged criminality being investigated by the police, hundreds of individuals complained to the inquiry of press intrusion into their lives, including celebrities like the actor Hugh Grant, comedian Steve Coogan and actress Sienna Millar. But there were others - members of the public who had been hit by tragedy - who also described the impact that harassment, intrusion and in some cases allegedly illegal acts by journalists had made on them at the most vulnerable points in their lives. These included Gerry and Kate McCann, the parents of the missing three year old Madeleine, who disappeared on a family holiday in Portugal in 2007 and Bob and Sally Dowler, parents of Milly, who was abducted on her way home from school and murdered by Levi Bellfield in 2002. Gerry McCann told the inquiry many of the stories about his family were untruthful, sinister or, he believed, made up. His wife, Kate McCann said seeing her private diary published in the News of the World made her feel "totally violated."

After sitting for eight months, and hearing in person or via written evidence from 650 witnesses, Leveson issued his report in November 2012 concluding that the press had treated the rights of ordinary members of the public with "disdain" and "wreaked havoc" with innocent people's lives for many decades. He dedicated 12 pages of his 2000 page report to the McCanns, saying some of the reporting when Madeleine went missing in 2007 from the resort of Praia de Luz in Portugal, was "outrageous." Some newspapers, he said, were "guilty of gross libels", and he picked out the Daily Star for its headline claiming the McCanns had sold their child: "Maddie sold by hard up McCanns."

The impact of the Leveson Inquiry

There is no denying it was a chastened press which woke the day after the publication of the Leveson Report in November 2012. But over the months which followed, any sincere feelings of regret about the behaviour of some journalists seemed to be lost in the politically charged debate which continues over Leveson's main recommendation - that there should be a new independent press regulator underpinned by Statute.

Six months on from the report there is a hiatus with two opposing proposals on the table: the David Cameron Royal Charter, as modified by cross party support, and that of Hacked Off – the group set up in support of many of the victims of 'phone hacking - and the Royal Charter plan put forward as a rival by the Newspaper Society, which rejects what it calls "state sponsored" regulation.

In the background there is the threat, contained within the Leveson Report, that if his recommendation is not acted upon the state should step in and enforce it anyway – this is the key conclusion regarding statutory regulation:

> *"With some measure of regret, therefore, I am driven to conclude that the Government should be ready to consider the need for a statutory backstop regulator being established, to ensure, at the least, that the press are subject to regulation that would require the fullest compliance with the criminal and civil law, if not also to ensure consequences equivalent to those that would flow from an independent self-regulatory system."*
> (Leveson Report: Chapter 7: Par 3:34)

In the vacuum that now exists, responsible working journalists who have never hacked a phone or paid for information are trying to get on with their jobs in something akin to a McCarthyite climate in which their everyday activities and working practices are viewed with suspicion. The authorities - meanwhile - from the police to Whitehall departments like the Ministry of Defence, are all clamping down on relationships with journalists, in a post Leveson attempt to restrict the flow of information to authorized, strictly controlled press office communications.

Kirsty Walker (2012), former political correspondent of the Daily Mail, wrote of her fears that the Leveson Inquiry would serve to enhance the power of the already powerful, in The Spectator shortly before the report was published:

> *"How do we know that Lord Leveson's report will encourage the rich, the powerful the venal and the pompous to intimidate journalists and frighten papers into not covering stories? Because the prospect of it has done so already. How do we know that an elite will attempt to decide what it is appropriate for the rest of us to read over our cornflakes? Because Leveson is already doing exactly that. This is a judge who read a 200 word article in the Times about how The Thick of It was plan-*

> *ning to satirise him in one episode - and promptly asked the editor of that paper whether it was "appropriate" for him to run the piece. It is all too easy to guess what a judge with such an attitude to newspapers will do for press freedom."*
> (Walker, 2012)

While the focus remains on the proposals for a new press regulator, it is other recommendations within the Leveson Report, some of which have already been adopted by organizations like the police, that present far greater challenges to the working practices of reporters and the free flow of information in a democracy now and in the future. These include:

- recommendations that off the record conversations between police and journalists must be banned;
- a requirement that police whistleblowers should not turn to the media with their concerns about corruption, or malpractice;
- changes to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 which would force journalists to sign a contract with their sources to ensure that their information remained privileged; and
- the recommendation that new restrictions should be placed on the media's exemptions in gathering personal confidential data under the 1998 Data Protection Act and the introduction of tougher custodial sentences for breaching it.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) is also concerned, saying that:

> *"There are parts of the Leveson report that the NUJ will strongly resist. This includes changes to Pace (the Police and Criminal Evidence Act) and the Data Protection Act - changes that would restrict the ability of journalists to properly carry out their work, to carry out investigative work, and to truly protect their sources. Journalism needs more of this work, not less, and the NUJ will robustly challenge any attempts to introduce these changes."*
> (NUJ spokesperson cited in Travis and Bowcott, 2012)

Already journalists working in the UK have no rights to information, they have no First Amendment to wave as they negotiate their way around the myriad laws that already exist - libel, privacy injunctions, the data protection laws, the bribery act, contempt of court or conspiracy to commit misconduct in public office, to name but a few. Those in power have swiftly taken on what Leveson recommended and been emboldened in their attempts to control information. As a result the inquiry and responses to it have served to erect another set of obstacles in the path of the journalist seeking legitimate information in the public interest in a democracy. For example the Metropolitan Police, and other forces in its wake, has ended off the record briefings, forced officers to take a note of their meetings with journalists, backed the call for whistleblowers to be discouraged from talking openly to the media and is refusing to provide context or guidance during major operations and incidents; most recently the murder of an off duty soldier in Woolwich, south east London (see also O'Neill, 2013).

Thus while clearing the police of wrongdoing, and giving politicians a mild rebuke for their closeness to the press, it is ordinary law abiding journalists whose activities are most affected by the Leveson recommendations, and if the words of James Cameron still stand true, it is the public who will ultimately suffer. Some members of the police have voiced their concerns about transparency in the future and the free flow of information to the public. John Yates (2012), former assistant commissioner Metroplitan Police, observed in the Daily Telegraph:

> *"Gone is the practice of helpful and informed background briefings - and in has come the default position of concealing rather than sharing information. The result? The public knows less about what is going on. And important public institutions, such as the police, are becoming less accountable."*
> (Yates, 2012)

The challenges ahead

There are many who say the press has brought this on themselves; the guardians cannot be exempt from scrutiny and the press has had many years in which to clean up its act. That is undoubtedly true. But if the desire to act against the illegal excesses of a minority, leads to a neutering of the press as a whole, it could be a high price to pay. There are already plentiful laws in our society to curtail the excesses of the media -

many of which are being used against journalists in the current police investigations - and it is legitimate to ask who will step in to take their place if the more irreverent, loud, raucous voices in the press are muted in a post phone hacking moral panic?

It is something that Mark Thompson (2011), former director general of the BBC, has considered. He acknowledges that the corporation would not have taken on the MPs' expenses story, published by the Daily Telegraph after the purchase of stolen information - a crime the Director of Public Prosecutions declined to prosecute because it was not in the public interest to do so.

Carl Bernstein - one of the Washington Post reporters who broke the Watergate scandal that toppled US President Richard Nixon in 1974 - has added his voice to those warning against the neutering of the British press in response to the revelations about Milly Dowler and within Leveson:

> *"The answer is find the proper way to put them in jail for the horrible offences that they are guilty of, not to try and restrain free speech, freedom of the press - that is going to come back and bite British democracy in the ass because that is what this is about. It's an easy answer to a tough problem."* (Bernstein, Channel 4 News, 29 November, 2012)

With all this stacked against the reporter, it might seem a depressing and difficult world for any young journalist to join. But there are nuggets of hope. While memories of the Leveson hearings will fade, there is no doubt that newspaper editors and publishers have been censured and upbraided and behaviour has been modified.

The tendency to reach for the easy, but illegal, way to source information, is no longer considered an option within newspaper organizations. In addition there are recommendations within Leveson which could become powerful tools in a reporter's armoury in future. Firstly the recommendation - which has made it into both Royal Charter proposals - that a whistleblowing hotline should be set up for journalists to complain if they are being forced to engage in illegal or unethical behaviour, and secondly the recommendation that companies write a conscience clause into contracts to protect those who refuse to carry out such acts from being sacked. In a small way these ideas could hand power back to the responsible journalist on the ground, something James Cameron would no doubt have welcomed.

Challenging Questions

- Where the press is concerned, the responsible 'many' are paying a high price for the actions of an irresponsible 'few'. Discuss in relation to the findings of the Leveson Inquiry.
- 'Leveson handed back power to the powerful.' Do you agree with this statement?
- If the news reporter is 'the eyes and ears of the public,' as James Cameron contends, would the Leveson reforms affect his/her ability to be so in the future?
- Consider the impact that Leveson has had on the relationship between the police and journalists.

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13 Editorial Leadership in the Newsroom

Karen Fowler-Watt and Andrew Wilson

"The task of leadership is not to put greatness into humanity, but to elicit it, for the greatness is there already."

John Buchan, journalist and historical novelist (1930:24)

BBC journalists have always referred to a comprehensive set of Editorial Guidelines when making decisions in the newsroom. They aim to help journalists come to informed judgements. In May 2003, these guidelines and the operational reality of editorial control was brought into focus by the events surrounding a 'live' two way on Radio 4's Today programme when reporter Andrew Gilligan claimed that the British Government 'probably knew' a dossier about the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq had been 'sexed up' or exaggerated to strengthen the case for going to war. The story was also reported on the BBC's 10 O' Clock News and on Newsnight. There was intense media speculation as to the source of Gilligan's story and on 9th July 2003 a government scientist, Dr David Kelly was named. Eight days later, Dr Kelly's body was found in a field close to his home. He had apparently taken his own life. Tony Blair's government set up an inquiry to investigate the circumstances surrounding his death, chaired by Lord Hutton. Its findings, published on January 28th, 2004 were critical of the BBC and found that Gilligan's claim that the government probably knew the report had been 'sexed up' was 'unfounded' and the editorial and management processes of the BBC were 'defective'. (Hutton, 2004.) The immediate result was three resignations in three days: The BBC's Chairman, Gavyn Davies left on the day the report was published, the Director General, Greg Dyke resigned two days later followed the next day by Andrew Gilligan.

In the wake of the Hutton report and its fallout, editorial and management processes at the Corporation were rapidly reviewed and former Director of BBC News, Ron Neil was asked to set out the lessons to be learned. The resulting Neil Report of 2004 established recommendations and 'guidelines to strengthen BBC journalism in the future' (BBC Press Office, 2004). It declared the training provision for BBC journalists to be patchy and called for the establishment of a College of Journalism, which would restate core editorial values at the heart of all its provision.

More recently, the BBC (and BBC Journalism in particular) has also been seriously affected by high profile editorial decisions at BBC Two's Newsnight, including the programme's failure to broadcast serious evidence about Jimmy Savile and its decisions to make unfounded and untrue allegations about the involvement of a Conservative Peer in paedophile activity at a children's home in Wales. The fall-out from these decisions led to the resignation of the Director – General, George Entwhistle and the removal of other senior managers in News. Two independent reports, which followed, Pollard (into the decisions at Newsnight and the culture at BBC News) and Respect at Work (into culture and behaviour at the BBC more widely) have raised important questions for leaders in the BBC and have brought into sharper focus the role of the BBC College of Journalism's Editorial Leadership course.

This chapter will outline how the BBC College of Journalism has developed an innovative approach to help new editorial leaders to respond to these challenges and to build editorial and personal confidence. It will draw on research from two of its mandatory courses: the Editorial Leadership Foundation for new editors and the Journalism Foundation for new journalists.

It will explain how new BBC editors can reach a deeper understanding of what's involved in 'great editorial leadership' by applying key journalistic principles, or what the College calls 'great journalism.'

No 'ivy clad quads'

The College of Journalism was launched in 2005, but there were no 'ivy clad quads' (BBC, 2005.) It is now part of the BBC Academy, which was created in 2009. The website states that the College 'oversees training for the BBC's entire editorial staff in journalism.' It aims to focus on 'best practice in core editorial skills,' as well as legal and ethical issues, which goes hand in hand with a restatement of the core journalism values: impartiality, truth and accuracy, journalism in the public interest, independence, and accountability:

- Impartiality -- The BBC's Charter and Agreement requires its coverage to be impartial. Impartiality is not the same as objectivity or balance or neutrality, nor is it the same as simply being fair. At its simplest it means 'not taking sides'.
- Truth and accuracy -- the facts and the story must be accurately and correctly reported, otherwise the trust of the audience could be lost.
- Journalism in the public interest -- the BBC carries out its journalism in the public interest. That includes reporting and providing information on matters of significance and relevance to a number of different audiences.
- Independence -- BBC journalists have to be able to show the independence of their decision-making.
- Accountability -- Being accountable to BBC audiences means being able to show that you had good reasons for making the decision you did. It also means that those reasons are consistent with the BBC's journalistic values and editorial guidelines.

(Source: BBC College of Journalism website.)

It was shortly after the College was established that it was decided to set up the two mandatory courses for new journalists and editorial leaders. Participants in each group come from right across the BBC's journalism divisions (News, Nations, English Regions, Global and Sport). As every new journalist and editor attends the courses, a common approach across the range of output areas has been developed. It became clear to the trainers at the outset that learning is most effective if a shared, deductive approach (as opposed to lecturing) is adopted. This encourages everyone - from the newest recruit to the most senior editor – constantly to question and to interrogate editorial issues to come to considered judgments. The courses are designed to build professional and personal confidence and to develop a first instinct to think about reasons to publish editorially justified content, rather than worry first about getting things wrong.

Key challenges for new BBC journalists and editors

In order to find out what both groups of journalists perceive to be the key challenges that they face, the College conducted a qualitative survey in 2011 as the 1,000th person passed through both courses. The fifth anniversary of the BBC College of Journalism website in January 2012 and its re-launch later that year has also provided opportunities to pause and reflect on what has been learnt so far. Jonathan Baker, the Director of the College states on its blog that:

> *"Many journalists have an instinctive suspicion of training in any form, believing that people only need it if there is something wrong with them. However, when you do get journalists into a training room and engage them with their craft, you can achieve memorable results. Particularly when they are encouraged to bring to their training the same qualities they are encouraged to demonstrate in their daily work."*
> (Baker, 2012)

This is backed up by anecdotal and written evidence from the BBC journalists who have taken part in the courses provided by the College, as well as feedback from course tutors. The feedback indicates that new editors across the organisation are often unsure what is required from them as leaders, but are much more confident when asked to describe what makes 'great journalism'. This lack of confidence in editorial leadership is particularly evident when it comes to communicating with their teams (in a number of contexts) and involving them in editorial decision-making. The BBC's College of Journalism sets out to tackle this lack of confidence in editorial leadership with one simple idea – 'apply the principles of great journalism to achieve great editorial leadership'.

The intensity of both learning programmes, the Foundation course for new journalists and the Editorial leadership course for editors, gives the trainers intimate, immersed and privileged access to individuals. They work together for a week during long days in scenario-based seminars, team exercises and discussion groups.

It is useful here to summarise the findings from the survey of both groups.

The top 5 frustrations of new BBC journalists:

- I'm often not clear what is expected of me
- I'd like to be involved more in decision-making
- I really want to be more original in my journalism
- Too often it seems that most tricky editorial conversations start with what we can't do rather than what we can
- Doing things to a formula frustrates me.

The top 5 challenges for BBC editorial leaders:

- I know intuitively what I want but I'm not always good at explaining it clear
- There seem to be lots of obstacles in the way of making original journalism happen
- Fear of getting things wrong stops me being bold
- I'm not as confident as I should be about managing poor performance or delivering difficult messages
- I feel more comfortable with the tried and tested than with taking what feel like unnecessary risks

There are clear 'matches' between these two groups: new journalists suggest that they need clearer direction, more space to be original and less constraining editorial approaches and systems. The editors admit that they find it hard to communicate their vision and that they lack the confidence to facilitate more original journalism in a culture which they perceive to be essentially risk averse. So, the new journalists are voicing concerns about leadership, which resonate with the frustrations of editors trying to lead and get the best out of their team.

When it comes to giving editors a clear technique to become more successful as leaders, the course tutors aim to demonstrate how the principles of 'great journalism' can provide an effective guide to dealing with management and leadership issues.

New journalists (to editors):

- Be clearer about what you expect
- Help me be original
- Involve me so I learn
- I want to be treated like an adult
- Let's do things differently

Editorial leaders (about their team):

- I find it hard to define my vision
- I need more ideas and resources
- Easier to direct, it avoids mistakes
- I'm not a confident communicator
- It's simpler to apply a formula

Definition: what do we mean by 'great journalism'?

It is important to say that the application of 'great journalism' on the Editorial Leadership course is not based on a diktat; it comes from discussion within each group to reach a shared agreement about its constituent parts. Although individual journalists may place a different emphasis on particular elements of 'great journalism', there is normally a consensus around these aspects:

1. The story matters - there is an editorial justification for it
2. There is a compelling 'hook' – something which draws me in to the story
3. It has a clear beginning, middle and end
4. There is an explanation of why it is important, its relevant context and significance
5. The story is relevant to the audience
6. It is told with a tone of authority, but in a conversational, accessible way
7. It is clearly explained what we know and what is uncertain; we have 'shared our workings' with the audience
8. Questioning is used effectively to challenge assump tions
9. Audiences are able to offer their own thoughts as the story progresses – there are opportunities for interactivity and debate.

The course sets out to show how these criteria can be applied to the challenges faced by editors on a daily basis as they lead their teams, to identify the most effective approach in a given situation. Participants have the chance to practice this during various modules such as:

- Managing change: how to communicate effectively and manage a team's expectations
- Tackling an editorial dilemma: this might be an ethical issue around use of sources or identifying children, for example.
- Giving editorial feedback: e.g. developing effective methods for reviewing output or performance with teams and individuals.
- Chairing an editorial meeting: issues such as how to give clear direction, whilst generating original thinking.
- Editorial leaders are encouraged to consider for themselves how aspects of 'great journalism' can be used to bring out the best in an editorial team or an individual, leaving journalists clearer about their purpose (collectively and individually) and more involved in the whole editorial process.

For the course tutors it is about making the relationship between journalist and editor, a shared endeavour instead of a top-down instruction; one based on the principle of two intelligent adults having a deductive conversation, rather than a parent-child instruction.

Definition: what do we mean by great editorial leadership?

Put simply, for an editor, 'great editorial leadership' is the ability to lead your team to produce 'great journalism'. It enables members of that team to have clarity about what is needed from them. Put in journalism terms, it is about everyone knowing what the story is and why we're telling it. Editors are encouraged to involve the whole team in agreeing a clear editorial framework (rather than a straitjacket), which encourages everyone to come up with original ideas to meet that framework and to be part of the editorial process.

As one new BBC journalist put it "if my editor can help me understand clearly what the box is, I can be much freer to think outside it!"[1].

Feedback to the College from new BBC journalists, suggests that they want their editors to involve them more often in decisions, but say it often feels like they are simply responding to instructions.

Examples: Applying the principles of great journalism to achieved great editorial leadership

1. Coming to an editorial judgment:

Many editorial leaders adopt more of a rule-based, directional style because they think that is required from them. Some of the most powerful opportunities for learning happen when a tricky editorial decision needs to be made. By applying the notion of 'great journalism' to that conversation between journalist and editor, something like this would happen:

- **An explanation of the relevant context and a hook** (Why does this story matter? What we are trying to explain/uncover?)
- **A discussion about the questions we need to ask** (what are the assumptions we need to challenge? Our own assumptions and those of our audience.)
- **Sharing the uncertainties** (How can we 'share our workings' with the audience – what we don't know as well as what we know?).

This process should feel more like a conversation than a series of directions. The course gives editors the opportunities to role - play these kinds of editorial conversations with each other and with actors and to see for themselves the power of applying journalism principles to a range of one-to-one communications.

When it comes to making editorial judgements, the same approach can be applied to group situations.

Case Study: a BBC Local Radio Editor is helping a group of new journalists understand how the concept of journalism in the public interest (one of the five BBC journalism values, identified earlier in the chapter) applies to them and their work. He uses a planning row as an example:

A local council is planning to build a new housing estate on an area of outstanding natural beauty. Local campaigners claim that it will ruin the water meadows, but councillors say that it is the only way to provide much-needed low cost housing and generate new jobs.

- **What's the story?** (What do we mean by 'reporting in the public interest' in this case?) Reporting this story in an impartial way, calling decision-makers to account and making considered judgements about the evidence, will inform the local radio audience about an important issue, which potentially has an impact on their lives. i.e. it is a matter, which affects a significant number of people in a number of ways.
- **What's the relevant context here?** (How do the wider BBC Journalism values apply to this particular story and to what is expected from local radio journalism?) Local radio audiences expect to be informed about events in their area but they also look to the BBC to explain the significance of what's being proposed and challenge any assumptions that others may be making. This planning row is relevant in terms of the social, political, cultural and environmental concerns of the listeners to the station and others. The BBC local Radio journalist should understand and be able to make informed judgements about the wider as well as the immediate context.
- **How does the public interest relate to me and our output?** (What does 'public interest journalism' mean for me as a local radio journalist and for our audiences in this place?) A BBC local radio journalist has a duty to report the story impartially and in the public interest. S/he should demonstrate an awareness of the wider impact on the whole community and act as an ambassador for the audience – holding decision-makers to account and asking challenging questions which perhaps are not being asked by others.

The learning experience of new journalists is arguably much deeper if they can contribute their own thoughts, question throughout and can be encouraged to explore uncertainties. In much the same way that journalists seek to report stories in a way, which engages the audience, the conversation in the newsroom between editor and journalist should be a shared intellectual process. Again, this is something that new journalists tell the course tutors they want from their editors.

The sort of editorial leadership and decision-making that would be applied to a story is required when leading a news team. Both require clarity of objective, consistency of approach, listening, questioning and judgement based on sound evidence. This approach to leadership encourages a collaborative relationship, in which the editor and journalist can share uncertainties and learn from each other.

2. Holding a team briefing:

The journalism principles can perhaps be applied by editors most powerfully when it comes to leading team meetings and in particular when communicating a strategic message, for example the requirement for news teams to work more collaboratively across departments in the New Broadcasting House in London, where the BBC News and Current Affairs operations have come together, or the need to do more at a local level to call decision-makers to account. Anecdotal evidence from participants in the leadership courses suggests that many editors lack confidence when helping their team understand how strategic issues apply to them – including changes in editorial priorities or working practices. They may not understand or believe in the message themselves or they may be concerned about how it is going to be received. The result has been what has become known on the course as a 'FYI (for your information) culture' where editors simply pass down messages verbatim without interpretation or context. To use the example of collaborative working in the newsrooms of the New Broadcasting House, an instruction that 'the bosses have decided this will happen' without exploring how this relates to me, my output and the wider BBC will not have the impact required to change behaviour and help individuals understand their place in the story.

The course encourages editors to consider approaching the delivery of this kind of important strategic message by treating it as if it were a news story and referring to the journalistic principles that we have already outlined. So the editor may approach the team with these considerations

- **What is the hook?** (how are you going to make the team sit up and listen?)
- **Present the strategic message like a news story, with a beginning, middle and end** (how will you structure your narrative to make it easy to follow?)
- **What is the context?** (how does your team fit in to the bigger picture and why does this matter?)
- **How does this story relate directly to me?** (why is it important to my job and my future?)
- **Give the message conversational authority** (is this story told authentically, with the right tone?)
- **Share your workings** (how have you helped me understand uncertainty and been honest with me?)
- **Provide opportunities to contribute** (how can I take part and come up with more questions that may influence or challenge things?)

3. Generating original ideas at a team meeting

We talked earlier on about the need to establish a clear editorial framework (to really know what the story is). The course seeks to demonstrate to editors that, only if this clarity is achieved, will relevant original ideas be generated.

In other words, if a journalist in a given newsroom has a clear understanding of the 'kinds of things we're looking for here', they are much better able to come up with original journalism related to those stories. For example, journalists working on BBC Radio 4's Broadcasting House programme are given a very clear sense of what is required from the programme from its editorial framework. They are able to use this framework to review the programme's success or otherwise and to focus their own ideas for original journalism:

Overall, the remit of the programme is to provide listeners with 'a warm bath, not a cold shower' and the programme is conceived as a 'big beast with big ambition'. In this context, an individual edition of Broadcasting House is evaluated within this editorial framework:

- Has it surprised and delighted?
- Has the audience been given food for thought?
- Have we shown daring and imagination?

- Have we included an item worthy of being selected for BBC Radio 4's Pick of the Week?
- Were there funny, sound rich, 'oxygenating' moments?
- Was the top story relevant and current? (we are a news programme, after all.)
- Was the discussion lively and properly produced?
- Has the presenter been out and about?
- Was there space to breathe?
- Above all, is it something you would want to listen to on a Sunday morning?

It means that journalists stop looking where they don't need to and can focus their curiosity in the 'right' places to ask searching questions, to unlock original journalism and come up with creative treatments. They know where to look in order to be creative, because they understand the remit of the programme.

Participants on the Editorial Leadership course are encouraged to come up with a clear framework like this for their own output, applying what they have learnt. Their peers on the course, who are asked to assess them through the eyes of new journalists, then test these frameworks for clarity. Here is an example: It was written by the editor of BBC Channel Islands TV News and came out of a collaborative discussion with his team. It has two applications: to give editorial feedback to individuals and as a review template for the evening news magazine programme. Every aspect of the framework has a shorter 'blunt' question as well as a series of more in-depth questions:

BBC Channel Islands News Feedback Framework

Editorial: Did the audience learn something new? Did we put stories in context? Were we clear in our storytelling? Did we have fresh stories? Were we informative? Did we ask challenging questions?

Blunt: Was it a good watch?

Creative: Was the programme formulaic? Did it surprise? Were there great pictures and memorable script lines? Were the graphics clear and relevant? Did we do something different to others?

Blunt: Did we have sparkle?

Craft: Were all the pictures well exposed and in focus? Could we hear all of the sounds and were the levels okay? Did the editing flow? Was the programme smooth?

Blunt: Did we have any cock-ups?

Presentation: Did the presentation feel warm and welcoming? Was there space to breathe? Did the Pieces to Camera add something to the story? Did we sound interested and energetic? Did we look good? Did we sound real? Were we jargon free?

Blunt: Will viewers invite us back into their homes tomorrow?

Connected: Did the stories affect me? Did the programme feel current and 'live'? Did it have energy? Did it feel like a programme for my community? Did we interact with our audience? (use 'vox pops' user-generated content and/or emails). Were we part of the overall BBC brand?

Blunt: Will viewers think this is 'their' programme?

In short, this is about applying two of the journalism principles: first, deciding clearly what the story is and second, asking powerful questions to hold people to account and challenge assumptions.

This kind of approach is based on discussion, questioning and judgement and usually leads to well-considered and thought-through decision-making. It can also create a shared understanding between the journalist and editor, which is in stark contrast to the 'tick box' method of coming to decisions. In theory a clear editorial framework makes it possible for any member of the team, whatever their role, to lead the output review meeting. This is in contrast to many editorial meetings where only the editor is empowered to take charge of the review process. Everyone can be an editorial leader!

Creating the right tone and culture

The experience of both courses (for new editors and new journalists) has highlighted the value of creating the right tone and culture for editorial conversations and learning. Where an editor adopts a parent/child tone, the evidence from course feedback is that journalists lack confidence in making judgements and are far more likely to adopt a 'tick box' approach to decision-making or come running to the editor every time for guidance. But where an editor has established an open, questioning, collaborative culture, journalists appear much more willing to challenge, discuss and make their own judgements.

It is interesting to explore briefly what may be driving the tendency towards more hierarchical, or parent-child relationships in newsrooms at the BBC. Analysis of feedback from participants on the Editorial Leadership and Journalism Foundation courses suggest that two factors in particular are creating this situation. The first is the fear of getting things wrong (exacerbated by high profile editorial mistakes in the BBC and elsewhere, such as those highlighted by Hutton and Pollard.) The second factor is a misplaced notion that the role of an editor is to know things in advance and to direct, based on this wisdom. There is possibly also a third factor: the feedback indicates that editors often use 'infantilised' language when speaking about their new journalists and convey a sense of the journalists 'learning at their feet' rather than seeing them for what they are – highly intelligent and motivated people, eager to learn and be helped to think for themselves.

The BBC College of Journalism believes that creating a more collaborative culture is as important for editorial leadership as it is for good journalism. Again, new editors are encouraged to apply the same principles they would apply to their own journalistic output, such as:

- What questions do we need to ask of ourselves, the story and our audience?
- How can we challenge the assumptions of ourselves and others?
- What is your role in making this happen?
- How can we share – with each other and our audience – what we don't know as well as what we do?
-

By exploring this method through role-play and case studies, editorial leaders come to their own conclusions about the potential to transform relationships in the newsroom and build the confidence of everyone in the team to come to considered judgements.

When asked to reflect on what they have learnt from this course in particular, these responses are given regularly – 'truly confident leaders questions rather than direct;' 'leaders who lack in confidence think they are being judged on how much they know that others don't' and 'the most confident leaders are happy to say when they don't know things and to involve their journalists in coming to decisions.'

Being a leader all the time

Another interesting insight to emerge from the Editorial Leadership Programme is the assumption among many editors that they are only able to act as a leader on the days they are occupying a leadership role on the newsroom rota. The BBC expects many of its more junior editorial leaders to spend some days in more hands-on operational roles and other days 'off rota' to deal with management issues. The course has introduced what, for some, is a counter-intuitive idea: that you may have more opportunities to demonstrate the qualities of great editorial leadership on the days when you are not formally occupying a leadership role on the rota.

For the College of Journalism trainers, editorial leadership is a mindset and a set of behaviours, rather than a slot on the rota. It's about who you are rather than what you do on a given day. Leadership is a continuum.This is best illustrated as a case study:

BBC Sport Online

This is a typical rota for an editor in online sports news. (Although it has been represented here as a pattern over three days, the different roles are more likely to be spread over two weeks).

Day 1: Output editor leading a team of journalists on the Sport News Online desk
Day 2: Working as one of several day producers in the same team
Day 3: Working out of the office as a video journalist (VJ) providing content to enhance breaking news and news features.

The course demonstrates how you may have the best opportunity to lead on the days you are not called the leader (days 2 and 3). These are the days when you can lead by example in the way you do your job as a journalist. Doing is often much more powerful than telling and days 2 and 3 enable the leader to demonstrate that.

Looking forwards

The post-Hutton years at the BBC have seen rapid and challenging change – new buildings, new ways of working and new editorial issues - such as those outlined in the Pollard Report - and there is significantly less money. Audiences have a wealth of information and news available 24/7 which can be accessed through social media platforms and aggregators. This information can often lack context, is produced in sound bite size and digested at speed. In order to secure the BBC's future as a leading provider of journalism at a local, national and global level, the new generation of editorial leaders and journalists will need to play a key part in restating and redefining the organisation's role in the digital environment.

These are challenges which are faced by all news organisations, and the Leveson Inquiry into the 'phone hacking scandal at The News of the World has prompted questions about the quality of editorial leadership in general and the relationship between journalists and audiences. Alan Rusbridger, editor of The Guardian champions the idea of openness and transparency, to enable readers to be more aware of and to take part in the editorial process. In March 2012, thousands of its readers were invited to an 'Open Weekend' to engage in activities, aimed at helping them to 'better understand how we create and curate our editorial coverage' (Rusbridger, 2012.) If the audience understands the process, then a relationship of trust is more likely to be established.

At the BBC College of Journalism the team of course tutors believes that building greater professional and personal editorial confidence using the approaches discussed in this chapter, gives editors effective tools to face the challenges of the digital environment and, in particular, to provide accurate and thorough journalism, which is trusted by its audiences. Journalists are rightly judged on their ability to sift through information, ask challenging questions and make judgements after weighing up the evidence to tell their stories.

If this 'stock in trade' – or the principles of 'great journalism' as defined here – are applied to editorial decision-making, it would appear, from the evidence presented in this chapter, that every individual in a news team becomes more involved in the process and has a greater investment in the outcome: the integrity and quality of the journalism. This level of engagement in the decision making processes in newsrooms better enables editors to embrace the challenges presented by the digital, 24/7 news environment It strengthens the relationship between editors and journalists and builds a mutual confidence to produce the kind of journalism which is worthy of the audience's trust.

Notes

1. Quote in the qualitative section of the survey of course participants on the Journalism Foundation course for new journalists carried out by the BBC College of Journalism

Challenging Questions

- Imagine you are advising an editor on the ways in which they might get the best out of new journalists in their newsroom? What methods might you employ? Consider what the new journalist may need from their editor.

- Define 'great journalism' and 'great leadership' in your own words and provide an example to illustrate each of the definitions in practice.

- What are the key characteristics of great editorial leadership? Consider why the BBC College of Journalism believes that tone is so important when defining 'great journalism' and 'great leadership'?

- Discuss what the advantages of applying the principles of 'great journalism' to 'great editorial leadership' might be for the daily lives of journalists working on a news team. Use hypothetical examples to illustrate your argument.

Recommended reading

The Hutton Report www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/report/

The Neil Report and the BBC Response http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/howwework/reports/neil_report.html

Blastland, M. and Dilnot, A., 2007, *The Tiger That Isn't: Seeing Through a World of Numbers*, Profile Books

Peacock, Alan, (2004) *Public Service Broadcasting without the BBC*? Institute of Economic Affairs

If you are interested to explore editorial leadership, consider reading:

Evans, H., 2009, My Paper Chase: *True Stories of Vanished Times*, New York: Little Brown

Marr, A., 2004, *My Trade*, London: Macmillan

Project Oxygen: Google's report on the 8 key qualities of leadership reported by the New York Times: http://www.scribd.com/doc/68658169/Google-Project-Oxygen-NY-Times-Article

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Baker, J., 2012, blog post from January 2012 http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/aboutthebbc/jonathan_baker/

Neil, R., 2004, BBC Press Office press release: http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/06_june/23/neil.shtmldeclared

BBC College of Journalism website: http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/collegeofjournalism

BBC Journalism Values: http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/collegeofjournalism/standards

The BBC Academy editorial courses: http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/collegeofjournalism/courses

BBC Editorial Guidelines www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines

Rusbridger, A., A Year at the Forefront of Change, *The Guardian*, Thursday October 11th, 2012. http://www.guardian.co.uk/sustainability/sustainability-report-2012-editorial-introduction

14 Investigative Journalism:
Secrets, Salience and Storytelling

Kevin Smith

> "There has never been more space for making noise, for digging, for examining and exploring those issues that are critical to a working democracy."
>
> **Macintyre (2012)**

The last generation of investigative journalism?

Ours might be the last generation in which 'traditional' investigative journalism plays a major role in our public sphere, scrutinising power, exposing wrongdoing, redressing miscarriages of justice, and bringing the guilty and hypocritical to account.

It might be the last generation that believed it needed this highly specialised form of journalism, a specialisation that even some of its most skilled practitioners now fail to distinguish adequately from other types of journalism.

It might be the generation that allows it to die. Only to wonder too late where it's gone and why we let it happen.

Some, disillusioned by traditional journalism and excited by the development of the web and social media, question the need for journalists other than as facilitators in the process of discovery, disclosure and the public discourse. And they elide the distinction between investigative journalism and private inquiry and revelation.

We need to be clear about the very particular and specialised nature of investigative journalism and its unique contribution to our public discourse – what we say to each other – and our public sphere – the place we make up our collective minds about the big questions of our time.

This chapter will consider how investigative journalism is both investigation and journalism. It's not merely discovery and disclosure, though those are essential. Nor is it merely forcing power to reveal secrets, though that too is – usually – essential. It's an 'end to end' process from curiosity through assessment, verification, digging deeper all the way to the headline and the compelling narrative.

The essential triangle of secrets revealed, salience and storytelling.

There are many pressures on it, many challenges that are undermining its present and jeopardizing its future. We hear much about the 'chilling' effects of the libel laws, 'judge-made privacy laws', injunctions, super injunctions and – possibly – new regulatory frameworks in the wake of the phone-hacking scandal and corporate dysfunctions at the News of the World and within News International. These are challenges of a kind and very real. But they are as nothing compared to the much more fundamental challenges deriving, ultimately, from the digital revolution of the past two decades.

Take the financial and market pressures, for example, generated by that revolution. Some have had obvious effects on investigative journalism, others more subtle. Together, they've tended to squeeze real investigative journalism and its precursors out of the system and create cheaper, hollowed out forms. They've also worked to raise the status of investigation's tools to appear as journalistic ends in themselves; undercover filming and recording, entrapment, confrontation, impersonation, 'blagging'. At the same time, indiscriminate and largely unethical use of those tools divorced from any public interest has further corroded the public's trust in the press – it was already pretty rusty – and in public institutions. None of that has helped reverse the general drift away from media that demands concentrated attention, disillusion in general with mass media and preference for private networks over interacting with strangers.

But the greatest pressure by far, the greatest threat, is the illusion that we live in a more transparent age and that, by extrapolation, we don't need journalism and untrustworthy journalists to do for us what we can now do for ourselves.

It's a paradox. Plainly, we now have the potential of more access to data and information than ever before. Yet, thanks to some of the same technologies that enable that potential, we're contriving to receive our information from a narrower range of sources and share what we know within private, self-constructed networks, avoiding the strangers out there who constitute the public sphere.

This matters.

For all its many faults, journalism has evolved into a relatively successful means of nourishing effective public discourse – helping us find out about things we didn't know we needed to know and making sure we talk about them ... or, at least, watch others doing so. That's been even more true of investigative journalism, though it's also had the duty and responsibility of bringing those things we didn't know we needed to know into the light in the first place, verifying them, assessing them and spotting the salience in them.

Investigative journalism sits solidly on an essential triangle: Secrets, salience and storytelling. Remove any side of that triangle – or increase the size of any one side at the expense of the others – and our pubic discourse becomes poorer.

What do we mean by 'investigative journalism'?

It's worth getting terms clear. The term 'investigative journalism' is an elusive one. It's used to mean anything from reporting a gaffe made in a private conversation – especially if it's recorded on You Tube – to a single confidential conversation with a single whistleblower making a single allegation or concession. If we're going to think about its continued existence, we need to understand what we mean.

In 2012, some two dozen investigative and former investigative journalists turned academics contributed to a collection of essays called Investigative Journalism: Dead or Alive? (Mair and Keeble, 2012). Most answered that question with an enthusiastic 'Alive'.

Donal MacIntyre, for example, best known for his secret filming exposing the lives of Chelsea football hooligans (Macintyre Undercover, 1999) condemns what he calls the "fashionable sentiments to the contrary" and declares "investigative journalism has never been stronger.'

> *"There has never been more space for making noise, for digging, for examining and exploring those issues that are critical to a working democracy."* (Macintyre, 2012, p6)

And he calls in evidence the MPs' expenses scandal, Andrew Jennings' "relentless FIFA investigations", The Guardian's phone hacking investigation and the creation of the Centre for Investigative Journalism (CIJ) at London City University – though, of course, as the CIJ says of itself:

> *"The centre for investigative journalism came into being in 2003 to address a deepening crisis in investigative reporting."* (CIJ, 2012)

Macintyre doesn't recognise that "deepening crisis" but is able to reject it only by extending his notion of investigative journalism to include advocacy journalism, satire, social networking and acts of journalism that, a generation ago, we would have thought were normal, everyday journalistic functions; verification, story spotting, unearthing a new 'fact' or angle in a running story.

It's an analysis that offers false comfort.

Investigative journalism, along with war reporting, has traditionally been at the pinnacle of our trade. The first, exposing wrongdoing and holding power to account; the second, bearing witness. And the image of the investigative journalist has been a powerful and sustaining one; revealing truths, fighting for justice, "telling the truth to power". An image realised by Bradlee, Woodward and Bernstein over Watergate; Evans, Page and Knightley over Thalidomide; Ware and Taylor over Omagh and torture. Many young men and women went into journalism in the 1970s, 1980s and even in the early 1990s inspired by and burning to copy the Sunday Times 'Insight' team, BBC's Panorama and Rough Justice or ITV's World in Action.

Yet however fundamental, powerful or sustaining the idea is, 'investigative journalism' is difficult to define. And like most things in journalism, it's often named after rather than before the event.

Perhaps one of the most comprehensive efforts to arrive at a definition – and certainly one of the very few academic efforts – was Hugo De Burgh's at the end of the last century (De Burgh, 1999). A rough and ready summary of his description – apologies to him for its crudeness – would include characteristics such as;

- it satisfies the general characteristics of journalism;
- it's seen as just, as having a right to exist and is competent;

- it aims to discover the 'truth' and lapses from it, to reveal a 'truth' that has been obscured;
- it aims to deal in and make clear the rights and wrongs, there is always a victim (though that could be 'all of us') and always a villain;
- it seeks an outcome, the righting of the wrong;
- it involves a subject not usually on the main news agenda that the journalist has to insist we should know about;
- it draws our attention to something that we're not aware of at all or care about something we don't care about at all; it selects its own information and prioritises it in a way that contrasts with daily journalism;
- it differs from other investigative roles in society (police, lawyers, auditors etc) in that its 'targets' are not limited, it has no legal foundation and achieves its effects through publicity and public opprobrium directed at the villain.

De Burgh (1999) was writing for an audience that was familiar with some of the great investigative reporting of the latter half of the 20th century and with the genre more broadly. After all, it had remained more or less constant for a century and a half, since William Russell combined both war and investigative reporting and opened the nation's eyes to the realities of the Crimean War in the 1850s and by so doing enabled the public to ask searching, evidence based questions of power.

Audiences were familiar, too, with the way investigative journalism demanded attention; the grounds on which it demanded that attention, always moral; and the way it got people talking – or to put it more academically, the way it fed pubic discourse and sustained the public sphere. They would recognise De Burgh's (1999) characterisation if they were asked to think about it in those terms. More obviously, though, those audiences would recognise investigative journalism's outputs. Lengthy narratives requiring their attention; a careful, argued exposition of a considerable weight of evidence, the majority of which was previously hidden, secret or difficult to find; a strong, continuous reference to the moral questions raised; a strong evocation of empathy with the victims and of outrage and condemnation of the guilty.

It was never a perfect way of getting the nation talking – or sustaining public discourse. There was nothing rational in the choice of 'targets' or their treatment and, inevitably, there were always many more injustices than either journalism could address or the public sphere properly absorb. It could be messy, brutal and obsessive. Nor did it always meet its implied ethical standards, which, for obvious reasons had to be higher than those of journalism more generally.

Broadly speaking, though, it was a form of journalism that was capable of calling to account those who misused political or corporate power or the criminal justice system. And as far as the 'guilty' were concerned, even if the investigative journalists' eyes weren't turned their way, there was always the threat that they might be.

Then, the world changed.

The financial challenge

Since the mid-1990s, the digital revolution has changed many of our perceptions about information, knowledge, attention, communication and our notion of self and public. The pace of change has accelerated each year and shows no sign of slowing.

The most fundamental effect of that revolution on journalism has been the way in which it first eroded then ripped apart the business model that's sustained newspapers for over two centuries. It's a financial crisis that's affected all journalism but has had an extraordinarily disproportionate effect on investigative journalism and not always in ways that are immediately obvious.

We know the story well. Between 1998 and 2012, newspaper revenues from display advertising fell by over a quarter from £2.4bn to £1.7bn, a fall that hasn't been compensated by newspapers' miserly take of web advertising at just £200m. Terrestrial broadcasters have been subject to similar pressures, too. Even at the publicly funded BBC, restrictions on the licence fee coupled with new financing obligations – paying for the BBC World Service out of the licence fee rather than a government grant – has effectively taken around 15% out of the amount it has to spend on journalism.

Taking these amounts of money out of any business has obvious effects. For journalism, it's resulted in fewer local and regional newspapers, consolidation, dailies turning into weeklies or going online. And that's meant, in turn, fewer journalists, more 'efficient' newsrooms and a retreat to core business, focusing on increasingly homogenous agendas. Any editor – or, in broadcasting, any commissioner or channel controller – now looks more closely than ever before at any money they spend and asks the obvious question: 'what am I going to get for my money?' That presents investigative journalism with its most obvious challenge.

Investigations take time and money. The toughest investigations often require a team and produce little for weeks or even months. Try to cut corners by publishing early or without that final fourth or fifth check on the facts and the legal risks increase. And while there is clearly a strong commercial or reputational premium attached to headline investigations, there are nevertheless strong financial reasons to be risk averse or calculate the potential commercial benefit of taking the risk.

Importantly, all genuine investigations, even those, which begin with apparently strong prima facie evidence, have to have the right to fail. One of the characteristics that distinguish investigative journalism from advocacy journalism is that the investigative journalist searches for evidence that undermines or disproves his or her original suspicion as well as the evidence that supports it.

John Ware is one of British TV's most skilled and dogged investigative journalists, spending a quarter of a century on BBC's Panorama. His painstaking and often dangerous inquiry into the 1998 IRA bombing of Omagh town centre was a model investigation, challenging not just the failures of the police investigation, but also the lethal mendacities of the terrorists. In 2011, I asked him whether he believed he could mount such an investigation again. He didn't rule it out completely, but:

> *"The financial risk taking which used to underpin a lot of the stuff that I was really privileged to do ... has fallen away ... Editors want an assurance that you are going to get home on this target."* (Ware, 2011)

That assurance, that need to 'get home' runs directly contrary to the demands of journalistic investigations.

As Paul Kenyon, one of Ware's Panorama colleagues, describes:

> *"They can take months and, sometimes, years to complete, with no guarantee there will be any programme at the end of it."* (Kenyon, 2012)

That much is, perhaps, obvious. What is less obvious is the way in which these financial pressures disrupt the chains that, traditionally, generate investigative journalism. And when it comes to investigative journalism on TV, this matters. Most of us get most of our news now via TV.

Most investigations begin with straightforward, routine journalistic inquiry. Whistleblowers and leaks are important, of course, but it's relatively rare that they're the starting point. Much more often, an investigation begins with an attempt to verify a story and it turns out that the 'verification' raises more questions than it answers. Or perhaps with a contradiction in the public account or a mismatch between that account and what a journalist establishes privately. Or, of course, it may begin with the human, moral judgment a journalist makes, asking of some event 'how can this be right or just?'

In the more 'efficient' newsrooms that the financial crisis has created, the pressure on journalists to produce is intense. What was once routine – taking nothing on trust, fact checking agency copy and quotes individually – is now much more rare. For many journalists, their job feels like an industrial one, processing increasingly homogenised raw materials. As Cardiff University researchers discovered in 2008:

> *"Most journalists are now required to do more with less time …while the number of journalists in the national press has remained fairly static, they now produce three times as much copy as they did twenty years ago."* (Lewis et al, 2008; page 3)

At least 60% of national press articles and 34% of broadcast stories, the researchers found, came wholly or mainly from either PR sources or from homogenised wire copy. As Megan Garber of the Nieman Journalism Lab put it : "Though we live in a time of abundant information, we also live in a time of homogenization. Repetition is everywhere. (Garber: 2011)

Garber (2011) was referencing Pablo Boczkowski's (2010) study of the way we tend to consume our journalism and how that tends to shape what we consume. Boczowski (2010) found that the increase in potential information available to us was matched by a decrease in the diversity of mainstream content producing "homogenised news"

This 'processing' is indeed 'efficient', but it squeezes out those once routine functions that were the seed corn of investigative journalism. It discourages, too, the dissident, curious mindset essential to raise the difficult questions in the first place.

Newspapers, of course, can't exist without disclosure – not for very long, at least. Editorial ingenuity, however, has filled the disclosure gap by devising hollowed-out forms of 'investigation', journalism that looks like investigation but is no such thing. Revelation for it's own sake, often with no public interest and, if celebrities are involved, the connivance of PR companies provides ways of "getting home" with more certainty and lower outlay.

Entrapment, for example, impersonation and secret filming are important but highly contentious tools of investigative journalism. They raise ethical questions that can only be answered by the public interest in and moral value of the eventual outcome. They are last resorts, which, in real investigative journalism, are generally used when substantial evidence of wrongdoing or hypocrisy has already been collected and all other methods of gathering that final, clinching proof have failed. In the hollowed out form, it's cheaper to go straight to entrapment to 'see what we can find' – so-called 'fishing trips'.

It was a favourite technique of the News of the World before it was summarily shut down in the wake of the phone-hacking scandal. It was highly profitable, ideal for catching out the witless or their unsuspecting but obscure relatives, was rarely used in the public interest and often placed the journalist in the position of apparent co-conspirator, raising the question on more than one occasion that the wrongdoing probably would not have taken place without the intervention of the journalists. It looked like 'investigation' but was no such thing and, inevitably, those fishing trips that caught nothing never saw the light of day.

For the broadcasters, secret filming has become a sine qua non of TV 'investigation', though it's much more closely controlled and regulated than in the press. Its power in Panorama's exposure of Winterbourne View (Panorama, 2011) or Mark Daly's Secret Policeman can't be denied. And self-evidently, secret filming that shows wrongdoing in plain view performs a valuable service to the public discourse and in righting wrongs.

However, an investigation without secret filming – no matter how strong the witness testimony or documentary evidence – has a reduced chance of being commissioned. Controllers and commissioning editors understand that the You Tube generation sets far greater store by seeing for themselves than any other form of revelation. An investigation that relies on documentary and witness evidence alone begins the commissioning process at a disadvantage. There may even be pressure to stage 'secret filming' to create the illusion of verity (Editorial Standards Committee of the BBC Trust: 2011).

Something similar is true of the other tools of investigation, tools that raise important ethical questions. In the first half of 2012, we learnt through the evidence at Lord Leveson's inquiry how the tabloid press had come to use as routine many of the more intrusive tools of genuine investigation; intrusion, blagging, phone and email hacking – not to clinch the final piece of evidence in a major investigation but to generate stories that had the appearance of revelation. The health records of celebrities, their families and public figures or their discreditable, though essentially private behaviour. Hundreds of these stories were wrapped up to appear as investigations but were very far from the real thing. Some even involved putting a kind of pressure on those whose private lives were invaded that was barely distinguishable from blackmail. They were hollowed out forms of investigation, devised to "get home" with minimal financial risk. And when those hollowed out forms failed, there was always the option of just making it up – as Daily Express and Daily Star journalists did over 100 times when they filed 'exclusive revelations' as a result of their 'investigations' into the disappearance of Madeleine McCann in Portugal.

The increasingly porous boundary between investigative and advocacy and journalism challenges from another direction. Campaigning and advocacy journalism are vital parts of our public sphere and have been since the pamphleteers of the 17th century. They are one of our media's greatest strengths. Increasingly, though, campaigning films, websites and magazines have the surface appearance of journalistic rather than partisan 'investigation'. They're revealing, certainly. And feed the public discourse. But by definition, they don't move outside of a fixed view of the world. And, once again, it's easier to "get home" if you know in advance what "home" looks like.

Michael Moore's films, for example, are extremely effective at advocating his favourite causes and views of the world. They're presented as an investigation and are often mistaken for the real thing. Yet Moore, like any other advocate, only includes – or seeks in the first place – the evidence that supports his thesis and frames it accordingly. So, for example, he says of Farenheit 9/11 that it 'exposes' the "true" story of the Bush administration's response to the 9/11 terror attacks.

The late Christopher Hitchens wrote of that claim that Moore sought only "easy applause, in front of credulous audiences" with a film that:

> *"... bases itself on a big lie and a big misrepresentation ... (it) can only sustain itself by a dizzying succession of smaller falsehoods, beefed up by wilder and (if possible) yet more-contradictory claims."* (Hitchens, 2004)

Hitchens was a trenchant critic of Moore and his words are sharp. However, he reminds us of that important difference between investigation that approaches discovery and revelation with an impartial mindset, valuing counter-evidence as highly as 'proof', and advocacy, which does not. A reminder, too, of the distinction between genuine investigation and the millions of fringe conspiracy websites, each with a title that contains some variant of the word "TRUTH", each of which promises 'the facts they don't want you to know'.

The illusion of transparency

All of these are considerable challenges for investigative journalism. But there's another challenge, which is even more powerful – and that's the illusion of transparency.

For a variety of reasons, we've come to believe that in the second decade of the 21st century we live in a culture that is more transparent than ever before. Partly, that's a result of the changing attitude of governments towards data and information. Mostly, though, it's because of the web.

In 2004, Google's CEO Eric Schmidt startled participants at the World Economic Forum in Davos with the prediction that within a decade, everyone would be able to carry around with them in a device no bigger than an iPod every piece of data or information in the world. Everything that was known, everything that had ever been known, everything that was knowable.

Three years later, when Apple launched the iPhone in 2007, it offered exactly the possibility that Schmidt predicted. Not only that, since at about the same time, the amount of discoverable data and information on the web has multiplied many times and continues to do so. Now, we all believe there's no theoretical limit to what we can 'know', if by 'know' we mean the ability to access a piece of information instantly, anywhere. If it can be known, we should 'know' it.

And, as far as the kind of information that used to be the domain of investigative journalists is concerned, vast tracts are now routinely placed into the open voluntarily. Those in power who are more ambivalent about openness have had their hand forced, to some extent, by the Freedom of Information Act – an Act that could be improved but is better than nothing. And leaking and whistleblowing have moved from a largely individual occupation onto an industrial scale, bringing huge amounts of what was previously secret into the open.

It might seem perverse to see such a massive increase in apparent transparency as a challenge to investigative journalism. No one with an interest in informed democracy can possibly argue against knowing more. One of the UK's most formidable 'transparency' journalists, Heather Brooke, puts it like this:

> *"Society has an interest in encouraging the efficient use and enforcement of freedom of information and making official information freely available to the public who paid for its creation and in whose name it is gathered."* (Brooke, 2011)

That's clearly true. Access to information and data is essential to efficient public discourse and scrutiny. And the default position has to be that we, the public, have the right to 'our' information. More has to be better. Quantity alone, however, doesn't necessarily lead to a public sphere that works well. Indeed, it risks flooding it.

It's a reality that the biggest game changer in the business of leaking – Wikileaks – acknowledges and understands, though some of its most vociferous supporters do not. In the summer of 2010, Wikileaks had to suspend its website, closing it down temporarily. Not because it was under any new or particular kind of threat from governments and their agencies – it always is – but because it was sinking under the weight of unprocessed leaked material.

Its spokesman, Kristinn Hrafnsson said the site "could not have done justice" to new material. What was being posted to the site during the deluge was as hidden from public view as it had been before it was leaked. It was only theoretically out in the public sphere. At the same time, Wikileaks acknowledges that without its collaborations with traditional journalism – determining salience and creating journalistic narratives – its voice would be directed into a very tiny, online echo chamber.

The same web technologies, that have enabled leaking on an industrial scale as well as offering a home for FOI requests, government and authorities' 'infodumps' have also tooled up every one of us to mine and analyse the data that might matter to us, assuming we're aware of it in the first place and can find it. They've also changed fundamentally how we share what we've found or learn what others have disclosed or discovered – and what we seem to mean by public discourse and the public sphere.

Under that more 'traditional' model of journalism, we had our attention grabbed by strangers – journalists – who had trawled through or discovered by their own enterprise new information, verified it, derived something salient from it and woven it into an engaging narrative.

Now, that still happens, of course, though far less frequently than before the world changed. Increasingly, we have our attention grabbed not by strangers – if they happen to be journalists, we hardly trust them anyway – but by friends and members of our networks. Or, as Eli Pariser argued, our private journeys through information web tend to close us in 'filter bubbles' (Pariser: 2011).

Nor are these 'filter bubbles' the kind of places where publicly significant discourse takes place as a matter of routine. When Brian Baresch and others looked in detail at the kind of 'news' we're tending to share (Baresch et al: 2011), they found it was rarely anything that could be termed 'investigative' or even revelatory except in the broadest possible sense that we share with our friends something they might not know. In other words, social media as a news source is positioned very firmly at the softer, lighter, intellectually and publicly undemanding end of the spectrum. It's far more likely to be 'hey, look at what **insert name of celeb/sports personality etc here** has just done/said' than 'look at what I've found in this data about this outrage'. And even where outrage at a perceived injustice is shared widely, via Twitter, for example, the outrage is visceral and reactive rather than evidential. It's tribal and rarely mind changing.

It's a further paradox. At the very time the quantity of 'knowable' information is multiplying unimaginably, the 'filter bubbles' we create tend to mean we share less of it with fewer people and what we do share is likely to be of lesser significance. A trajectory that is wholly opposite to Gerard Hauser's description of a working public sphere:

> *"(The) discursive space in which strangers discuss issues they perceive to be of consequence for them and their group. Its rhetorical exchanges are the bases for shared awareness of common issues, shared interests, tendencies of extent and strength of difference and agreement, and self-constitution as a public whose opinions bear on the organization of society."* (Hauser, 1999; page 86)

The agency we've traditionally relied on to feed this "discursive space" has been journalism, which, through mass-market newspapers, broadcast bulletins and websites, has convened the public in huge numbers and more or less simultaneously around the salience of its revelations. That's required what Amity Shlaes, a senior fellow in economic history at the US Council on Foreign Relations, described as

> *"A certain kind of person who is able to efficiently sift through a flood of information, pulling out nuggets that matter and presenting them in a compelling way."* (Shlaes, 2010)

A journalist, in other words. Her characterisation was a reaction to the deluge of information on the web and the, as she saw it, mistaken view that we could safely cut journalists out of the equation. Views like those of New York University's Jay Rosen who barks at journalists:

> *"You don't own the eyeballs. You don't own the press, which is now divided into pro and amateur zones … there's a new balance of power between you and us."* (Rosen, 2004)

Or of Dan Gilmor who wrote how 'the 'former audience' … has … turned its endless ideas into such unexpected, and in some cases superb, forms of journalism." (Gilmor, 2003; page 238)

Or Alf Hermida, an Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia and formerly a BBC News website editor:

> *"Today, the process of journalism is taking place in public on media platforms … information is published, disseminated, checked, confirmed or denied in public through a pro-am collaboration facilitated by social networks."*
> (Hermida, 2011)

Or CUNY's Jeff Jarvis, who talks about,

> *"opening up the information and the actions of government at every level by default in a way that enables any citizen to take, analyze, and use that data, extracting or adding value to it and overseeing the actions of those who act in our name, with our money."* (Jarvis, 2010)

Here in the UK, Paul Bradshaw's excellent 'Help Me Investigate' website – "A network helping people investigate questions in the public interest" (HMI, 2012) genuinely taps into the expertise of members of the public to assist in holding power to account, offering the opportunity for disclosure and revelation that was once the monopoly of journalism.

The risk, here, is that we forget that central purpose of journalism – sustaining and nourishing the public sphere and significant public discourse. We rejoice at the possibilities of finding secrets, deliberately hidden or simply buried in a mass of data, and allow ourselves to be deluded by superficially persuasive piece of false logic. To many, especially those with a well-founded journophobia, the answer is obvious – at the very least, the need for 'traditional' journalism is much reduced if not eradicated altogether. But there is a danger that in reaching for this obvious conclusion. And that is that sitting comfortably within our filter bubbles, we harm the public sphere more than any increase in theoretical transparency sustains it.

For all the failures and inadequacies of modern journalism, it's important not to lose sight of what good investigative or analytical journalists enable when they apply the skills, time, reasoning and intuition that most people neither have nor want to apply outside our own bubbles.

Conclusions

In the spring of 2011, I interviewed one of Britain's most celebrated investigative journalists for the BBC College of Journalism, Philip Knightley.

Knightley was an early and one of the most industrious and productive members of the Sunday Times 'Insight' team in the 1960s and 1970s. Under the editorship of Harold Evans, 'Insight' was the most consistently successful investigative unit in the history of British journalism. But its impact didn't derive from disclosure alone nor from its doggedness and expertise in shining light into darkness. Nor, incidentally, did it make the mistake of believing that what was previously secret was by virtue of that former state more 'true' than any other information.

Knightley understood that imposing forced transparency on secret worlds, was central to his work – but that alone could never have projected his disclosures into the public sphere with anything like the impact necessary to generate the scale of discourse that might achieve any kind of resolution. Particularly the moral resolution inherent in all of Insight's investigations. Wrong had been done and it had to be righted.

It required a sober assessment at each stage of investigation; it required him to make a call on each individual piece of evidence's significance; to make connections and determine the next step to go deeper into the 'truth'. The investigation itself was a form of narrative that became the basis for the eventual written narrative, a timely, salient, engaging narrative. A story told with skill around which he could convene millions of Sunday Times readers and by so doing, place his disclosures into the public sphere with an impact that engaged even those who never knew they had any interest in it.

This is what is at risk.

Without doubt, we now have the potential to be better-informed citizens and our public discourses – what we say to each other, especially those who are strangers – better founded on facts and insights that, previously, might not have been available to us.

We have the potential to uncover the secrets that matter most personally to us and the potential to feed the public domain. Those are some of the unarguable benefits the web and its tools have brought to the lives we live in common.

But those same tools offer us better opportunities to retreat to our 'filter bubbles', avoiding that discourse with strangers over strangeness that constitutes a working public sphere.

Pair that with the financial crisis in journalism that is squeezing out the time, skills and motivation to invest in investigative journalism and you have a perfect storm for one of journalism's most specialised crafts.

One of America's most revered journalists James Fallows wrote in 2012 about the problem of reconciling new media with older, traditional media, concluding that we were still at an early stage "in the collective drive and willingness to devise new means of explaining the world and in the individual ability to investigate, weigh, and interpret the ever richer supply of information available to us". He may be right – perhaps were yet to see what can emerge from this perfect storm and perhaps it will be better not worse than what has gone before.

But Fallows (2012) offers a warning, too:

> *"Perhaps we have finally exhausted the viable possibilities for a journalism that offers a useful and accurate perspective. If so, then America's problems of public life can only grow worse, since we will lack the means to understand and discuss them."* (Fallows, 2012)

That has alarming consequences for our freedom and self-government. For our sense of who we are. And it would seem that if we were to lose the skills and mindsets of 'traditional' investigative reporting, as well as the public appetite for it, that essential triangle of secrets, salience and storytelling would fail.

Then, you can be sure it will be that warning rather than optimism that will be realised.

Challenging Questions

- Investigative journalism is about shining light on secrets – nothing else. Is that true?
- "People shouldn't expect the mass media to do investigative stories. That job belongs to the 'fringe' media". (Ted Koppel). Discuss.
- "An investigative journalist is one who can think up plausible scandals". (Lambert Jeffries) To what extent do investigative journalists define right and wrong before investigating wrongdoing.
- Either: "The methods of investigative journalism are justified only by the ends". Discuss.
- Or: "The public interest is always defined after the event". Is that true?
- Is information that was previously secret more reliable or more "true" than information already in the public domain?

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15 Journalists and their sources:

The twin challenges of diversity and verification

Jamie Matthews

"Journalists are becoming more passive, often merely passing on information to the public that they have been given."

O' Neill and O'Connor (2008: 497-498)

"The development of social networks for real-time news and information, and the integration of social media content in the news media, creates tensions for a profession based on a discipline of verification"

Hermida (2012:1)

Interrelating financial, organisational and technological factors have spurred considerable changes in the professional practices of journalism. They include declining sales and advertising revenues, the emergence of new multi-media and digital technologies and a blurring of the boundaries between promotional communication and genuine news reporting (Blumler, 2010; Deuze, 2008; Franklin, 2011). Responding to a compressed news cycle, journalists often find themselves spread across a range of stories, producing material for multiple platforms, and frequently denied the space to specialise or to work a particular beat. In short, they can face severe restrictions on the amount of time they have to identify, select and investigate the stories they believe are worthy of their attention (Davis, 2003). Understandably, this has led to a restructuring of the relationship between journalists and their sources.

What we may regard as the traditional view held that interaction between journalists and their sources resembled a dance, a symbiotic relationship, where sources were in the ascendency during the story selection stage but where – and this is crucial - journalists took the lead to develop and shape a story (Gans, 1979). More often than not these days, however, this relationship is out of kilter. With the professionalization of communication, particularly where public relations or PR strategies for media management are concerned, sources have become more pro-active. At stake is not only access to news as a voice worthy of inclusion, but also a desire to influence the way a given issue is presented in the ensuing story. Journalists with limited time and resources may appear to be rather too passive as a result, some critics suggest. Increasingly reliant on a narrow range of proactive sources, they are accused of simply passing information on to the public with little by way of checking for accuracy's sake (O'Neil & O'Connor, 2008).

Due to practical considerations, journalists have routinely drawn on a small pool of sources for information (Gans, 1979), allowing them to act as the 'primary definers' (Hall et al., 1978), which shape the character of a particular news story (this can have even more to do with ideological fit than expediency, Hall et al suggest). As pressures have intensified, there has been a growing dependency on those types of sources that can be counted upon to provide information in a convenient, accessible form. Recent studies indicate this means that pre-packaged news copy derived from PR sources or wire agencies will be more likely to feature prominently in news reports (Lewis, Williams & Franklin, 2008). Research has also shown that some journalists tend to use other news outlets as sources, feeling pressured into rewriting copy published elsewhere in order to keep up with the competition – and not always giving due attribution to the original article (Philips, 2010). These and related practices reflect what some have described as 'churnalism', where source material is effectively churned into 'news' stories in an uncritical fashion as quickly as possible (Davis, 2009).

Journalists forced to be more reactive to their sources will seldom have the opportunity to look beyond this ready-made material. Some suggest that this practice is impacting on the diversity and range of sources represented in news, thereby undermining journalism's democratic function as an independent monitor of the privileged and powerful. As the balance of power tips away from journalists toward those who supply story information, the plurality of opinion represented in news discourse is reduced. A well-resourced PR department, for example, may prove rather formidable in its efforts to present (or 'spin') a news story sympathetic to the organisation they represent. To the extent the news media are unable to seek out alternative voices, whether they corroborate or challenge a source's position, journalism's status as a producer of authoritative knowledge is weakened (Hermida, 2012). The diversity of perspectives represented in the news is central to questions of balance, accuracy and impartiality. By relying on a small number of sources, journalists risk relaying misleading information as news while, at the same time, permitting these sources to shape the boundaries of interpretation around an issue or event. As some argue, this may ultimately reduce the quality of reporting, even diminishing journalism's capacity to act in the public interest (O'Neil & O'Connor, 2008).

Alongside these factors impacting on journalist-source relations, emerging media technologies and platforms are enhancing the opportunities for journalists – at least in principle – to identify a more diverse array of sources, and to interact with them in more effective ways. Such technological developments have facilitated the blurring of boundaries between journalists and their audiences, with the latter increasingly inclined to engage in newsmaking themselves. That is to say, ordinary members of the public may now be inclined to perform the work of 'citizen journalists,' either by sharing material with journalists or by actively reporting what they see or hear, such as through blogs, Facebook or Twitter. Examples abound, such as when the 'official' account of the events leading up to the death of Ian Tomlinson during the G20 demonstrations in 2008 came unravelled when challenged by cameraphone footage filmed by a passer-by. It showed a police office striking and pushing Ian Tomlinson to the ground. Some assert that new media technologies are 'restructuring the conditions of access' by both increasing the opportunity for 'ordinary voices' to challenge elite discourse and precipitating the development of alternative journalistic forms (Atton and Hamilton, 2008, p90).

This chapter will consider two challenges that arise from these shifting dynamics of journalist-source interaction. First, it will examine the conditions underpinning journalists' reliance on news sources, particularly with respect to the relative diversity of views or perspectives being represented. It will discuss the extent to which pre-packaged or syndicated news copy from a single source has become normalised, as well as its possible impact on the types of sources able to access the news agenda. Pertinent here is whether new media technologies, including the development of social software, will serve to enhance source differentiation. Second, the chapter will also explore how the discipline of verification is evolving in response to the changing nature of interaction between journalists and their sources. Social networks will be shown to have considerable potential in this regard, possibly providing the basis for a participatory model for substantiating source material with the capacity to improve news reporting (Kovach, 2006; Hermida, 2012).

A wealth of news sources: PR, news agencies and news cannibalisation

An important starting point, then, is to consider the development of public relations and its influence on news.

It is clear that PR as an industry has expanded considerably in recent years. Some fear that this alongside dwindling resources in newsrooms is tipping the balance of power over information in favour of PR departments (Davis, 2002), with journalism becoming increasingly dependent on external sources and pre-packaged information subsidies (Davis, 2008; Gandy, 1982). While ‘journalistic reliance on public relations is not necessarily a negative outcome of changing newsgathering routines’ (Franklin, 2008, p18), where others perceive benefits with the expansion of PR for enhancing opportunities for groups without significant financial resources to challenge the views or opinions of well-established sources. Some suggest, as we noted above, that it has reduced the diversity of perspectives represented in news (O’Neil and O’Connor, 2008). Research examining the extent to which pre-packaged material was used to create news copy, for instance, found that 60% of newspaper articles in the UK were derived ‘wholly or mainly’ from PR sources, with material sometimes cut and pasted directly from a press release (Lewis et al., 2008, p14).

Relying on a single source has obvious dangers. PR sources by their very nature have a desire to control the flow of information or to present a favourable public image of the organisation that they represent. So, even if a statement seems credible and arises from an authoritative source, it may not provide all the relevant facts. Part of the professional ideology of journalism, one that lies at the heart of its public service role as a provider of credible and accurate news, is that journalists take steps to confirm the veracity of information. This is usually through corroborating information with another independent source. Using a single source, one that seeks to present a positive image of an organisation, obscures the boundaries between promotion and truth-seeking and may weaken journalism's authority to provide objective and balanced accounts of issues and events. As Davis (2008, p255-6) acknowledges, the concern is that PR is only part of the picture. Strategic communication and covert communication are also prominent within the mix of promotional communications. Therefore, if journalists are unable to take the time to independently verify information with a second or third source, journalism risks becoming open to manipulation and misinformation.

It is not only journalism's close relationship with PR that poses a challenge for source diversity and verification. News agencies provide a great deal of the syndicated content that journalists use as primary source material. Studies have shown that news agency copy featured in 65% of Australian news content (Johnston & Forde, 2009), 70% of UK news items (Davies 2008, p74) and up to 80% of news material in Germany (Baerns, 1991 cited in Quandt, 2008). When it comes to breaking news on online newspaper websites, content is now almost exclusively reproduced from wire copy, with 80-90% of stories taken directly and without revision from a news wire. Some argue that it would now be more accurate if this section on news sites was described as 'Breaking News from the Wires' (Johnston & Forde, 2009, p9).

It is important to recognise, however, that agency copy has featured prominently in news content for decades. Agencies such as Thomson Reuters and cooperative associations, which include Associated Press and the UK Press Association, were set up to reduce the costs associated with news gathering by providing syndicated copy to news organisations (Silberstein-Loeb 2009 cited in Phillips, 2010). The challenge, then, when information is presented in such a convenient and accessible form, is for journalists to be able to seek additional sources to interrogate and confirm the accuracy of this material. Agencies are well resourced, staffed by experienced journalists and have established reputations of delivering high-quality news. As a source, they maintain a great deal of credibility. The issue then is not over the trustworthiness of material that is offered by news wires but the extent to which journalists are able to further investigate or challenge this information, or whether it is simply reproduced verbatim and without alteration.

The concern is that without drawing on other sources, journalists risk reporting claims which are imprecise, if not entirely false. The pressures of a 24-hour news cycle mean that there is a need to get to the story first, with inaccuracies corrected during the process of news discovery. When, for example, news of the London bombings in 2005 broke, a number of media outlets initially reported the incident as a power surge on the underground, attributing this information to agency or Transport for London sources. This was soon corrected when raw information started coming in from the public and it became clear that a number of explosions had in fact occurred across London's transport infrastructure. Although it would be unreasonable to claim that accuracy is now secondary to immediacy, there is always the danger that unsubstantiated information may turn out to be inaccurate. Despite the pressures of a compressed news cycle, not all news organisations are adopting an 'information first verify later model.' The BBC's approach during the London bombings, for example, was to wait for official confirmation of what they were seeing in the grisly images and video footage shared by members of the public, thereby reflecting what it perceives to be wider public service role when reporting crises. Its relationship with its public revolves around its credibility, that is, its status as a trustworthy, reliable source of news – a relationship that can come unravelled should it rely upon unverified evidence that turns out to be wide of the mark.

Two further issues arise from journalists' increasing reliance on agency copy. First, some argue that it is creating uniformity in news content, due to this dependency on the 'bland and predictable news product' provided by agencies (Paterson, 2006, p6). This reduces the plurality of sources represented in the news, with reporting characterised by topics or issues that reflect the interests of economic, political and cultural elites (whether they be corporate leaders, politicians, celebrities, and the like). In a global context this manifests itself in news that shows a bias towards western interests (Manning, 2008). At a local level, where news organisations have had to make efficiency savings, the in-house journalists with the knowledge to seek alternative sources or to explore local angles may well be replaced by copy provided by news wire services. As a consequence, critics maintain, news tends to centre on official accounts, thereby reflecting too narrow a range of perspectives.

The second issue is that an increasing dependency on wire copy has begun to normalise the practice of rewriting or re-angling second-hand material without attribution to the original source. While some journalists have regularly used material from the established agencies without acknowledgement, recent studies indicate that there is now a tendency to use wire copy without providing attribution to this external content (Johnston & Forde, 2011). This is particularly evident in the online environment where the pressures for immediate release leads news organisations to publish stories without recognising that the copy was picked up from an agency source. The effect of this practice is that it reduces transparency, thereby risking compromises in the value of news. Source attribution empowers the reader or viewer by allowing them to weigh up the veracity of information and the authority of the source to provide this information (Friendly, 1958). Even if the material is rewritten to a certain extent, the relationship between journalists and their audience is undermined without acknowledging the original source for a story.

According to Philips (2010, p375) another worrying trend that arises from the changing practices of journalism and the pressures on journalists' output is a tendency to 'use material from other news outlets without follow up or attribution.' She describes this process as 'news cannibalisation' and, in part, ascribes it to the relatively open nature of information available across the Internet and the difficulties this creates in attempting to maintain any degree of exclusivity over content. This, she argues, makes it easy for journalists to pick up stories from other news outlets almost immediately as they are published, which can then be rewritten or reworked and filed as copy. Interviews with journalists from national newspapers in the UK revealed that this practice is becoming more common as the volume of articles that journalists have to write increases, with stories, particularly those in specialist areas, routinely rewritten without crediting the original sources (Philips, 2009). Not all news organisations, however, accept this practice. The Guardian's editorial code, for example, is clear when it states that 'sources of published material obtained from another organisation should be acknowledged, including quotes taken from other newspaper articles' (Guardian Editorial Code, 2011, p2). Overall, through, the picture is of a trend toward recycling content obtained from competitors but without providing adequate attribution. In the online environment a comparative study of European and US online journalism found that 'copy and paste' is so widespread that it may unfortunately become the 'basic principle' (Quandt, 2008).

The Internet and new media technologies

It is understandable that with the ease of access and wealth of material available online that the Internet has now become an important tool for gathering information and for interacting with sources. It could be argued, however, that this excess of information may encourage passivity in source selection and verification. Journalists can research background to a story, develop alternative story angles or substantiate information at the click of a mouse. While much of the information to be found over the Internet is trustworthy and accurate, there is equally a vast amount of material that is merely opinion or rumour. The challenge for journalists, and for anyone else for that matter, using this vast online library, is to be able to confirm the authenticity and validity of material sourced online. Routine fact checking and corroboration of documents, comment or audio-visual material, whether from a blog, social network or from participatory knowledge resources such as Wikipedia, should not be bypassed simply because it is published in the public domain.

While most journalists recognise the perils of sourcing from the Internet, there are a number of recent cases where news acquired from or substantiated by information gathered from online sources has subsequently proved to be inaccurate or false. The use of Wikipedia by journalists, in particular, when used to research the backgrounds of public figures or celebrities has led to a number of reporting errors. The death of French composer, Maurice Jarre, for example, was widely reported using a quote taken from the composer's Wikipedia page which said that 'when I die there will be a final waltz playing in my head that only I can hear.' It later transpired that this quote had been created by an Internet hoaxer who had updated Jarre's Wikipedia entry following his death (Timmer, 2009).

Journalists now also routinely use weblogs as a source. In the US, the influence of the blogosphere has increased to such an extent that blogs are becoming an important source for print journalists. On the flip side, bloggers are acknowledging the traditional media as sources, providing links to their online news sites (Messner & Distaso, 2008). This process has been described by Messner and Distaso (2008, p459) as a continuous source cycle, where traditional media first report an issue, which is then commented on by bloggers who cite the traditional media as sources. When it comes to journalists' use of independent media as a source, this indicates the potential for sourcing to become a more transparent, collaborative enterprise. This is particularly so when professional news organisations link to amateur blogs or user-generated content (UGC) providers, such as Demotix (Atton, 2011). This commitment is in sharp contrast with those instances where agency copy or material from news organisations is regurgitated without acknowledgement. Importantly, as journalists embrace these emerging forms of attribution, it suggests that there may be greater opportunities to identify sources that reflect alternative opinions and perspectives around particular issues. The devastating tsunami that struck the north east coast of Japan on 11 March 2011 was captured by those caught up in the destruction. Before correspondents could get to the area, international news organisations were reporting the disaster using amateur footage and photos sent in by the Japanese public--a remarkable response considering the sheer scale of destruction and its huge impact on the telecommunication infrastructure of the affected regions.

This process of involving and engaging with audiences has been described as both citizen (Allan & Thorsen, 2009) and participatory (Singer et al., 2011) journalism. Both perspectives conceptualise this practice as the way ordinary members of the public contribute to the production of news content. Significantly though, the proliferation of citizen material is now impacting on journalists and the editorial processes of major news organisations as they develop new verification processes to deal with this type of source material. The BBC, for example, which invites its audience to contribute pictures or comment through its 'Have your Say' section of BBC News Online, updated its editorial guidelines in 2010 to include specific advice to its journalists on how to deal with user-generated content (McAthy, 2010). These guidelines outline the steps journalists should take to verify the provenance of audience submissions and confirms the BBC's editorial commitment to ensure the accuracy of UGC. To support this process the BBC now has a team of journalists working through its User Generated Content Hub who are responsible for filtering and validating UGC. Hub journalists identify and authenticate pictures and videos that can be used to contribute to a story, but they also put journalists in touch with people who have submitted material (Stray, 2010).

In spite of the initial warmth towards UGC and the claim that it would lead to a new model of public journalism - characterised by engagement and cooperation between journalists and their audience – it remains the case that much citizen content is unverifiable, and often has little value as source material (Harrison 2009; Massey and Haas, 2002; Domingo et al. 2008). Several studies that have examined journalists' use of UGC have found that, despite the considerable growth in this type of source material and enhanced opportunities for audience contribution, journalists still act as gatekeepers (Harrison, 2009). News organisations tend to translate the traditional way of doing things to the web, repurposing not only their content, but also their journalistic culture' (Deuze 2003, p219). As a consequence, they retain a traditional gate-keeping role when adapting to new methods of newsgathering and verification afforded by the Internet (Hermida & Thurman, 2008). So, while journalists now see their audience as potential sources of information, forging a collaborative relationship is proving challenging. News producers and audiences still tend to remain as distinct, separate entities, with audience participation often merely a 'euphemism' for subsidised newsgathering (Williams, Wardle & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011).

Social media as a source

Social media play an important role in news discovery (Reich, 2009). These extended collaborative networks are a place where rumours can circulate quickly and where public individuals often make their view, experiences and feelings open to all through a tweet or status update. Social media are often the places where news breaks first before being picked up by mainstream media, as with the deaths of celebrities (Michael Jackson and Amy Winehouse being two recent examples). Social media may also be valuable resources when access to information is limited, with news and source material originating from individuals who may be caught up or close by an incident. Twitter, for example, played an important role in breaking news of the Mumbai attacks in 2008 (Hermida, 2012) and the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 (Pew: Project for Excellence in Journalism 2011), with both initially reported citing unconfirmed tweets as sources.

As Twitter and Facebook have emerged as important tools to deliver timely information for individual opinion-leaders, companies, public institutions, and celebrities, they are being used more and more by journalists to source news. Social media have also enhanced the opportunities for journalists to interact with a broader range of sources. This may be indirectly through engaging in discussion about a particular issue via Twitter, as well as by facilitating consultation with sources to validate, challenge or clarify information. Alternatively, simply following organisations or public individuals, particularly those in the political arena, can provide journalists with a convenient quote without ever having to get the source 'in front of a microphone or camera' (Broersma & Graham, 2012, p408).

On the other hand, the sheer volume of information, and speed at which it arrives across social networks, poses challenges for journalists when they seek to verify its authenticity. James (2009), commenting on journalists' search for information from inside Iran, notes that much of material posted across Twitter and Facebook is unsubstantiated, and therefore risky to use. Others have expressed concern that journalists are embracing a platform that 'appears to be at odds with journalism as a professional discipline of verification' (Project for Excellence in Journalism, cited in Hermida, 2010). With information often fragmented or contradictory, it can be difficult for journalists to piece together details and identify their wider significance. When the amount of potentially valuable source material is staggering, particularly during fast-moving and evolving news events, journalists need to be able to filter and identify information that is verifiable on the fly. But this is nothing new. Journalists have always had to balance the often-conflicting occupational demands of immediacy and accuracy (Kovach, 2006). It may be argued, then, that we need a new approach to the discipline of source verification.

The way forward: changing practice and greater transparency

The challenges posed by the proliferation of source material and the changing nature of journalist-source interaction have led some to consider how journalistic practices may evolve in response to these developments. Herimda (2012) suggests that the process of source verification should be reframed to reflect the nature of communication across social networks. He argues that the collaborative, interactive nature of platforms, such as Twitter, may eventually lead to the adoption of an iterative approach to checking and verifying source material, as information is discussed, confirmed, refuted or challenged through social media. Kovach (2006), similarly, calls for a 'journalism of verification' to deal with the proliferation of source material and the speed with which it can be distributed through new digital technologies, arguing for a more 'citizen-orientated' approach to the method of verification. This type of conversation, which can involve journalists and their sources, perhaps to some extent already exists within the social media space, as information or news is discussed, retweeted and shared amongst users. Information disputed or challenged by other participants across a social network is likely to be deemed unreliable. New technologies that news organisations are integrating into their distribution of multimedia news content, such as the live blog format used by the BBC for breaking news stories, are also beginning to allow this form of interaction and verification to develop (Bruno, 2011, p43).

Others suggest that greater transparency in the process of sourcing and the journalistic practice of source attribution will allow journalists to respond to these challenges (Phillips, 2010). As it becomes common practice for participants in social networks to seek to authenticate their posts or tweets by providing links to additional external sources, then journalists should allow news consumers to recognise when PR or agency material has been used through appropriate referencing. In the online environment, news organisations should accelerate the implementation of the emerging practice of linking to other news sites or blogs to allow their audiences to identify and navigate to external sources. As Philips (2010, p379) argues, by advancing a 'new ethic of transparency,' though appropriate attribution, journalists increase accountability by allowing their audiences to trace a story back to its original source and investigate this information. Should this practice become more widely accepted, she contends, it would increase the 'value of original investigation' and give journalists more time to develop other stories. Ultimately, this would enhance differentiation in news product and broaden the range of perspectives and interests represented in the news.

This chapter has considered how changes in the professional practices of journalism are altering the relationship between journalists and their sources. With journalists under pressure sources are becoming more actively engaged in newsmaking. This is reflected in the narrow range of sources that are able to access the news and journalism's increasing dependence on ready-made news content. Some contend that this has reduced the relative diversity of opinion and perspectives represented in the news. At the same time, however, the emergence of new media technologies and platforms are, to some degree, creating new opportunities for journalists to identify and interact with a greater breadth of sources. Smartphones, media-sharing websites and social media have made it easier for ordinary members of the public to become engaged in the process of news making. While these platforms may ultimately enhance source differentiation by giving space to alternative voices and opinion in the news. They also pose a challenge for the journalistic value and discipline of verification due to the amount and speed at which information now arrives. This chapter, therefore, has also considered how the practice of source verification is evolving, as new methods of capturing and engaging with sources become routinised.

Challenging Questions

- What factors are narrowing the range of sources that appear in the news?
- Discuss the view that the Internet is empowering ordinary members of the public to act as sources.
- What are some of the challenges that journalists face when sourcing from across social networks such as Twitter?

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16 News journalism and public relations:
a dangerous relationship

Kevin Moloney, Daniel Jackson and David McQueen

"A lot of people think that British journalism is corrupted. I agree with them. Our job as journalists is to tell the truth, but repeatedly we fail. From the great global falsehoods on weapons of mass destruction and millennium bugs to the daily dribble of routine disinformation and distortion, we serve up stories which are no better than the idea that the Earth is flat."

Nick Davies (2008)

"Getting PR material into the news is easy. You just need to know what buttons to press."

Bournemouth University
BA Public Relations graduate (2012)

When news journalism and public relations (PR) meet in the newsroom, there is tension. These two communication types want incompatible outcomes: independent reporting against favourable reporting. At a time when PR is on the rise, the challenge for contemporary journalism is to produce news that retains a critical distance from its sources, no matter how strong the tide of PR.

That tide has strengthened in the UK because of the phone hacking-scandals of 2008 to 2011 caused by widespread but often-denied illegal and unethical practices when journalists listened in to private conservations. The British press had to wash its dirty linen before global audiences at the televised Leveson Inquiry into Press Standards (2012) which exposed the interconnected world of politics, lobbying and media power. Weeks of testimony revealed a near continuous exchange of ideas, emails, dinners and favours between Downing Street and News International. These wrongdoings, subsequent cover-ups, denials and public hearings are the nearest the British media has come to its own Watergate, with the closure of Britain's best-selling newspaper, the News of the World. In the endemic tension between journalism and PR, these events have put journalists on the back foot. Old, new and aspiring journalists need to be on extra guard to right the balance.

In this chapter, we offer a critical overview of emerging trends in the relationship between PR and journalism. We ask questions such as:

- The news industry is in flux, the PR industry is growing: how is this changing power relations between the two professions?
- Is unfiltered PR getting into the news more easily, and what are the consequences for independent journalism and democracy?
- How can journalists stem the tide of unfiltered PR and keep news PR-lite?

In gathering answers, we argue that structural and commercial developments in the media industry have led to changes in journalism practice, which are eroding the crucial practices of fact-checking and independent investigation. Meanwhile, the PR industry continues to grow, and is in a good position to exploit hard-pressed journalists by offering them 'news' stories. In this chapter we document how this process of 'PR-isation' occurs. We end by demystifying some of the methods PR professionals use, and offer a number of practical guidelines for independent, monitoring journalists to follow so that they can keep the news PR-lite.

News and the threat of colonisation by PR

In a watchful, modern democracy, a permanent question is: can we trust the news we see, read and hear via newspapers, radio, television, news magazines and online? The traditional answer has been that UK news organisations are staffed by journalists and editors following a professional practice that produces factually accurate reporting after sources are scrutinized, verified, and if necessary, balanced with alternative viewpoints. We can trust the news this journalism presents to us. Moreover, this journalism has a larger role in democracy: the scrutiny of government and powerful interests so that public opinion can make up its mind about which policies best suit its needs. When honest copy and fair scrutiny are delivered, this is the news media as the fourth estate. It is worthy of citizens' trust and respect.

Since the 1960s in the UK, however, there has been a well-documented loss of trust, with trust in British newspapers, for instance, falling to just 19% according to the Edelman global trust barometer, (cited Greenslade, 2009). The reasons are various and include the rise of 'infotainment', tabloid media and high-profile ethical indiscretions such as phone hacking; the presence of partisan media owners; the 'de-professionalisation' of journalism through the impact of new media (Picard, 2009); deregulation and the retreat of public service media; and the arrival of hundreds of openly-biased commentators on the radio, cable and satellite news and in the blogosphere (Allan, 2010; Thussu, 2007). Whatever the mix of reasons for less trust and respect, research shows the public have low opinions of many sections of the news media (see Cushion, 2009).

We suggest that much of this mistrust is well founded, but our focus in this chapter is different. We are concerned with a more invisible and difficult-to-trace factor threatening modern news journalism. We believe that this is another powerful cause for mistrust, and we turn to academic and professional literature (and to a lesser degree personal experience) to build our case. Our general concern is that the growth of the public relations industry represents a serious threat to the quality and independence of much contemporary journalism in the UK. But in particular, we focus on the PR-isation thesis, which Moloney defines (2010, p. 152) as "the professional state where PR attitudes are incorporated into journalism's mind-set, and where PR-biased material is published without sourcing". We believe that PR-isation is colonisation of the news media by stealth.

The second key concept we concern ourselves with is 'churnalism' (see Davies, 2008). Churnalism is where press releases, agency stories and other forms of pre-packaged material are 'churned out' by journalists "who are no longer gathering news but are reduced instead to passive processors of whatever material comes their way, churning out stories, whether real events or PR artifice, important or trivial, true or false" (Davies, 2008, p. 59). We should see this manufacturing of news from pre-assembled parts as a production process that delivers the sought outcome of PR-isation. For Stefan Stern, Director of Strategy, Edelman, "[Churnalism] is a symptom of a media market where PR has become too powerful relative to news organisations that are too weak" (The Journalist, 2011, p. 15.).

The great Niagara of PR material now descending on newsrooms, and the changes in the working practices of journalists have led to PR material appearing in a disturbingly high proportion of important news stories. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, given the pressures and time constraints news gatherers must contend with, resistance amongst journalists to this increasing colonisation of news by a well-resourced public relations industry is difficult. Through their interviews with practicing journalists, Lewis et al (2008, p.4) suggest a mood of helplessness. We fear a similar lack of concern among much of the seeing, hearing and reading public. PR-isation is well established in the entertainment, celebrity, travel, fashion and consumer news sectors (Moloney, 2006). More disturbingly, PR-isation is also established in the financial, business, healthcare, military and intelligence news sectors (Brown, 2003; Davis, 2002; Miller, 2004). While the practice of political public relations is "probably as old as politics and society itself" (Strömbäck and Kiousis, 2011, p.1), PR's penetration of political news is less straightforward. Political journalists have learned to build a degree of 'metacoverage' of the publicity process into their reporting, with the subsequent demonization and demystification of spin a result (see McNair, 2006; Esser and Spanier, 2005). There is also no shortage of negative news of politicians, despite their best PR efforts to shape coverage in their favour (Barnett and Gaber, 2001). Nevertheless, political journalists are not immune from PR-isation, as was shown in their uneasy, mixed relationship with Alastair Campbell, the most powerful PR person in the UK during his tenure of office as Director of Communications (1997-2003) to Prime Minister Tony Blair.

We view this power shift away from independent journalism to PR-isation as an unwelcome challenge to modern democracy. PR always has consequences for democracy because it is a powerful set of persuasive techniques available to all interests in the political economy and civil society. This wide access, however, has been more theoretical than actual, and it has not brought communicative equality to all interests, pressure and cause groups. Access to PR has been and still is more available to the powerful as a service industry for advancing and defending their positions (Beder 2006a). The imbalance of source access has been documented in various business and government campaigns in Britain and the US from 1914 to the 1950s (Ewen, 1996; Moloney, 2006); in the 1990s in the City of London (Davis, 2002; Miller and Dinan, 2007); and in the current financial troubles in the UK (Mair, 2009; Jones, 2009).

Since the 1960s, the use of PR has widened out to less powerful interests such as small and medium sized businesses, trades unions, charities and protest groups. We see this slow, if uneven, widening access to PR as a positive development because it advances communicative equality in the political economy and civil society. But we do not believe that there is always a clear distinction between 'bad' PR done by the most powerful interests and 'good' PR produced by the worthy or least powerful. All PR, we argue, is "weak propaganda" (Moloney 2006, p.8) and although its messages are sometimes, even often, socially and individually benign, it is still selected information passed on to advance the interests of its producers and often published without scrutiny or its source declared. When scrutiny by journalism is absent; when facts and opinions are not checked, and sources are not revealed, PR-isation of the media occurs.

View from the front line

Here is an anonymous journalist (in Slattery, 2009), a sub-editor on a regional daily newspaper, reporting on journalistic dependence on local authorities for news copy and the worrying merger with PR:

> *"There used to be a pride that if something came from a PR you did your best to find opposing voices and new angles to*

> *'make it ours'. That attitude has now gone. There is a lack of journalistic nous. There's no awareness that a local authority might have something to hide. It is just a matter of filling a hole on a page.*
>
> *Local papers should not be ringing up local authorities asking 'have you got a story?' It is servile. But some papers want to be part of a 'good news' agenda promoting their town. They are hand-in-glove with the local establishment. The sense of distance has totally gone."*

News rooms as easy targets for PR entry

How do we explain the steady power shift away from journalism and in favour of PR? A number of factors are making it easier for PR to push the newsroom door open. The first factor we will briefly examine is employment patterns in the two professions, as boots on the ground matter when it comes to rigorous, independent journalism. Lewis et al (2008, pp. 6-8) searched the annual accounts of national newspaper companies filed at Companies House, London, between 1985 and 2004 and compiled a table of average employment of journalists per title. This shows a total of 786 in 1985 and 741 in 2004. They conclude that there is ". . . an overall pattern of relative stability and gradual increases since 2000". When local news media and the BBC are taken into account, however, a more uneven picture emerges. Nel (2010), for example, calculates that 'the UK's mainstream journalism corps' has dropped between 2001 and 2010 by between 25% and 33% to around 40,000, close to the NUJ's membership of 37,000 members (The Journalist, 2011, p.12).

Another way to look at numbers is to compare with PR employment. The best estimate of PR people in the UK based on 2005 figures is 48,000 (CIPR, 2012), but given the continued growth of the profession at around 6-7% per year (Moore, 2007), we expect that number to have risen to the point where it matches or exceeds that of journalists. Britain is home to the second largest PR industry in the world (Moore, 2007): it has some way to go to match the proportions in the US where PR professionals outnumber journalists by up to five-to-one (McChesney and Nichols, 2010), but the trend is in this direction.

Whilst the employment statistics for journalism might not be an immediate and pressing cause for concern regarding PR-isation, the changes in working practices are. The backdrop to this has been the radical changes in the news media environment in the last 20-30 years. There have been technological drivers: satellite, cable and latterly digital signals have opened the door for new television channels to be launched without great cost. The regular bulletins on terrestrial television channels have been supplemented with those on new channels. These have been joined by three UK-based channels devoted entirely to news: Sky News, BBC News 24, and for a time, ITN News. Likewise in the newspaper sector, falling printing costs have been one reason for greater pagination and for the launch of free sheets. As a result, newspaper pagination has increased on average by two and a half times compared to 20 years ago (Lewis et al., 2008). The internet has provided further space for an almost unlimited amount of news, and has provided fresh challenges for existing media organisations and opportunities for new entrants. Governments have also played their part in change: they have deregulated media markets, thus ending spectrum scarcity and enabling a more commercially-based media system. Together these influences have transformed the media environment, bringing on an explosion in the number of news outlets, a subsequent fragmentation of news audiences, and more news outlets operating 24/7 across multiple platforms (Jackson, 2008; Gowing, 2009; Thussu, 2003).

The consequences for journalists are inevitably multifaceted and by no means all negative, but one important change is the increased pressure to produce more copy. According to the NUJ (Oliver, 2008), journalists ". . . are spread even more thinly across more media" reflecting dramatically increased pagination and the new demands of online services". Lewis et al (2008, pp. 6-7) report that "While the number of journalists in the national press has remained fairly static, they now produce three times as much copy as they did twenty years ago'". An outcome of this pressure on workloads is that journalists are increasingly deskbound. This means less time to develop contacts, less original investigation, and more reactive journalism by way of writing up agency copy or PR material. Consequently, many journalists are now processors of news rather than generators. Time pressures also mean that 'good' journalistic practices of fact checking and balancing; criticising and interrogating sources have been compromised (ibid., p. 6-7).

Whist the structural and economic dynamics of change account for increased PR-isation, there are also arguably cultural changes that are eroding some of the professional and ethical distance between PR and journalism. Ex-journalist 'poacher-turned-gamekeepers' have always populated the PR industry, but this process has accelerated in recent years, as the PR industry has taken advantage of increasingly uncertain journalism careers. Furthermore, the seniority of individuals flowing from journalism to PR is noteworthy: former national newspaper editors David Yelland, Stuart Higgins, Sir Nicholas Lloyd and, most notably, Andy Coulson have all made the switch, as have Stephen Carter (OfCOM to Brunswick) and Michael Cole (BBC to Harrods). Journalism's loss is PR's gain: former senior journalists with up-to-the minute expertise in constructing the news agenda and who personally know the news makers is an important part of the package offered to wealthy corporate clients. Witness Phil Hall Associates, led by this former editor of The News of the World, who boast on their website: "No Public Relations Company knows the media industry better than we do and no one has better access. We take your business right to the top of the news agenda" (cited in Moore, 2007). It is notable that many senior figures in the PR industry, including the aforementioned, have job titles that might not obviously align them with that industry (see Davis, 2002). This role ambiguity only further muddies the waters between the two professions.

PR professionals are also inventive and companies such as Editorial Intelligence have emerged, offering a 'bridge' between corporate PR and journalism through members-only networking. This has drawn controversy for its open attempts to remove some of the ethical distance between the corporate world and journalism (see Barnes, 2006). As well as this, journalism students are being encouraged to embrace PR and consider 'hybrid' careers spanning the two (e.g. Evans, 2010). Together these developments represent a cultural shift that threatens the professional identities of two roles that should be essentially antagonistic. This is not a problem for PR professionals, as a large part of their job is to cultivate close relationships with journalists in order to secure the most favourable media coverage as possible for their clients. The problem belongs to journalism, and ultimately society, as public interest journalism struggles with a rising tide of promotional PR.

The investigative journalist Nick Davies in Flat Earth News (2008, p. 28) provides a trenchant critique of his own profession. Whilst acknowledging the structural effects of change over time, he argues that the ignorance of journalists is at the root of media failure to meet higher professional standards and to fulfill their informal constitutional scrutiny of powerful institutions in a democracy. Journalism has brought trouble upon itself. He writes that "... modern media failure is complicated and subtle. It involves all kinds of manipulation, occasional conspiracy, lying, cheating, stupidity, cupidity, gullibility, a collapse of skill and a new wave of deliberate propaganda". PR-isation has taken advantage of a sorry mess.

Personal witness

One of the authors of this chapter worked as a news journalist and PR professional before teaching and writing about public relations. Kevin Moloney reports:

> *"I spent five years on the regional and national daily papers (Yorkshire Evening Press, Bradford Telegraph and Argus and Daily Mail) in the 1960s. There was a pally relationship with the few PRs we were in contact with because they were useful for basic facts and as door openers into companies, police and hospitals, and because they bought us lunches and evening drinks. But we were privately critical of their role because they offered tainted goods (selectively biased facts and waffly quotes). Their higher salaries made us even more sniffy. When one of the newsroom reporters left for a PR job we were split between condemnation and jealousy. I enjoyed my reporting and front-page bylines went straight to my head!*
>
> *But the time came for me to change sides and the reason was financial. Newsroom pay was not good (and like MPs until recently, we saw expenses as substitute pay). I needed a mortgage for a growing family and doubled my pay in corporate PR. On that side of the fence, journalists on nationals and trade press were important contacts: well worth dining, wining and winning over. They reached important audiences*

company bosses wanted to influence. We were not contemptuous of the reporter's role but deeply suspicious of their need to focus on one negative and make it the lead. Their frequent inability to get basic facts right certainly did get up our nose. And as to their writing ability . . . This combination of positives and negatives led to our standard treatment of them: play them long and patiently to get the least negative version of our important stories into top media so that our powerful stakeholders got the message we wanted them to get."

Colonisation at work

These organisational, technological, professional, cultural and market changes in the news and PR industries have tilted the balance of power in favour of the latter (see Davis, 2002). Since 2000, there has been an "increasingly influential role for public relations professionals and news agencies in the newsgathering and reporting processes of UK media" (Lewis, Williams and Franklin, 2008, pp. 27-8). How does this manifest itself?

Firstly, we should point out that PR is invasive of journalism in many ways, which are often difficult or impossible to identify (see Davis, 2002). PR people operate under non-obvious work titles, and they distribute their material through third party sources (e.g. press agencies). Identification is further complicated by two imponderables. The first is that much PR work is about keeping negative stories out of the media, and thus if identification of PR work depends on counting, it is impossible to enumerate the invisible. Secondly, journalism and PR have become "inextricably linked in a relationship that is largely invisible" (ibid, p. 28). Davis notes that both parties are shy about admitting a demand and supply relationship; and that some PR tactics (e.g. press conferences, photo-ops, surveys) are so embedded into news production that their PR purposes have been mostly forgotten.

In light of these imponderables, we will focus on two PR techniques that can be traced from source with reasonable transparency: media/ press releases and the increasingly used pre-packaged news items. These make their way into newsprint and broadcasts in direct and indirect ways. The direct route is where journalists pick up PR material that is posted on the web as a press release, or sent direct to them via a PR professional or networking service. Churnalism occurs when these (usually) press releases are published as news with little corroboration. In a typical example, in January 2012 The Daily Mail and The Daily Telegraph both lifted substantial parts from a Waitrose press release about how home cooks are increasingly making their own marmalade. 80% of the Telegraph article was directly copied from the press release (see http://churnalism.com/ttg5s/). Similarly, at least eight national news outlets reproduced substantial sections of a press release by the University of St Andrews in 2011 about a scholarship launched in honour of Prince William and Kate Middleton (now his wife, the Duchess of Cambridge), with The Daily Mirror and The Daily Express articles being over 83% lifted copy which was pasted directly into news items.

The indirect route PR copy takes is through newsgathering agencies such as the Press Association (PA) or Reuters. PA is a London-based clearing house of news, matching on an industrial scale, incoming PR sources with outgoing agency reports. The PR material is incorporated, with various degrees of checking and identification, into outgoing stories for journalist subscribers. Often, other news outlets will publish agency stories with minimal scrutiny on the assumption that the agency journalists have already done the fact-checking and verification. The problem is that there are inconsistencies here: some stories are crosschecked more assiduously than others. A number of fake news stories have exemplified this, where spoofs have successfully made their way through the whole range of news outlets because journalists assumed that the news agency had done their fact-checking (see Lewis, 2011).

Another source of inconsistency for the beleaguered journalist is in the credibility of the news agency itself. Take South West News Service (SWNS), who operate a 'news wire' service for journalists. Much of their 'news' emanates from surveys commissioned by companies through OnePoll, whom SWNS own. These surveys are not written up as press releases but as 'news copy' by professionally trained 'news agency journalists' (Moore, 2011). Consequently, according to SWNS, they are "factually accurate, rigorously checked news copy which needs little or no subbing" (ibid). Hence, some mainstream news organisations are publishing many survey-based stories with little or no verification or scrutiny.

These include the story that BMW drivers were found to be Britain's angriest motorists according to a poll commissioned by Go Compare (who offer car insurance), or money worries being the main reason for lack of sleep according to a survey by Premier Inn. Both stories gained widespread national media coverage, with a Telegraph article over 95% copied and pasted from the wire 'news copy' of the BMW story (http://churnalism.com/duyd9/). OnePoll news items are not just occasional, but approximately one per day according to Moore (2011), and they are only one of a number of similar survey services. What we are looking at here, we argue, is PR substance with a journalistic layer on top: the OnePoll survey stories are commissioned by companies to help promote a product or service. The appeal for these companies is firstly that they get promotion of their brand without paying for advertising, and secondly, their product or service benefits from the third party endorsement that the process of journalism (at least theoretically) offers. According to a testimonial on their website, "The team at OnePoll knows precisely what editors want, how to present the material and how, at the same time, to get a key message across to a mass or targeted audience". The reading public is encouraged to view this as independent journalism, when it is at the very least "branded news" (in SWNS's own words) (Moore, 2011).

The research of Lewis et al (2008a) estimates that 80% of published news stories in 'top end' news outlets (national newspapers and broadcast news) come from the direct (press releases) and indirect (news agency) routes we have described above. In more detail, Lewis et al. found that 41% of press articles and 52% of broadcast news items contain PR materials that play an agenda-setting role or make up the bulk of the story (with broadcast news items much more likely to involve agenda setting). Given the methodological challenges of finding PR content in news, the figures suggest this is a conservative estimate of PR-isation. A further 13% (press) and 6% (broadcasting) could be added to the above figures where the involvement of PR seems likely but could not be verified.

It would be a mistake to claim that because around 80% of stories emanate from PR/ agency copy that this number of news stories are not news. PR represents a multitude of journalistic sources that often have inherent newsworthiness. Often, as with a senior politician's statement or a company in the eye of a media storm, journalists will need to use chunks of a press release verbatim. Whilst this is entirely justifiable, good journalism practice includes adding additional material – commentary, supplementary information or opposing perspectives. This process is under threat in hard-pressed newsrooms but without it, the public receives a partial view of the issue at stake.

In their defence, journalists could also argue that churnalism is mostly accounted for by harmless stories such as the quirky surveys commissioned by OnePoll's clients. Nobody is hurt in these stories, and their role is largely to draw audiences in with an entertaining or attention-grabbing headline (see Sabbagh, 2011). The evidence does not appear to support such a sanguine view. Aside from the question of how far such 'infotainment' drives out hard news, churnalism stretches beyond light newsfillers to issues of public policy and regulation. Moore (2007) gives the example of a "major medical breakthrough" in hip replacements that was covered by eight national newspapers and many local and regional papers in 2003. These stories were all based closely around a press release issued by Barnet and Chase Farm Hospital Trust, though further investigation found that the press release emanated from a campaign by Kaizo PR on behalf of healthcare manufacturers, Zimmer. The aim of the campaign was to raise awareness of the product and stimulate demand through the NHS. There had been little clinical trialling of the product and after this had been conducted, it was found that the 'breakthrough' product offered no long-term benefit for the patient.

Lewis et al.'s (2008a) study offers further reason for concern about the democratic implications of churnalism: they found that the corporate/ business world is three times more successful than NGOs, charities and civic groups at getting PR material into the news. Furthermore, government was the single most successful source at getting its PR material transformed into broadcast news (39% of all received PR materials), a figure which dwarfed NGOs, charities, professional associations and citizens combined (15%). Perhaps we should not be surprised at government dominance in PR material supply, given that it has over 3000 press officers and it communicates public safety information such as crime, traffic and weather warnings. But remembering that civil society groups (e,g. trades unions, churches, charities, protesters) are often in conflict with government and are much less well resourced, the imbalance suggests that the public do not receive a balanced account of all public policy issues.

Keep your distance

Whilst we accept that the symbiotic relationship between PR and journalism implies regular contact, journalists, especially news reporters, should keep their distance from PR people because of role incompatibility. This conclusion is fundamental to our argument. While we note the vehement dislike by some journalists of PR (Brants et al., 2011; Jempson 2004), we are not anti-PR in a blanket way. In pluralist democracies with free markets, we accept that ideas, goods and services and people will be promoted. PR is probably today the most frequent and maybe most effective device for self-promotion, measured by volume of messages (Moloney, 2006). In these democracies, PR is inevitable and the scrutinising role of journalism is essential. Our concern is whether the contemporary news media in the UK are up to the job of effective scrutiny. Our worry intensifies because PR-isation, we argue, begins as a material transfer of words, briefings, data, and then turns into an ideological transmission of PR attitudes into newsrooms. Despite similarities of form and language, PR and news journalism are chalk and cheese. The former is advocacy, and is always a partial case; the latter is reportage, done with cross-checking and scepticism. They are two communication systems that should remain separate in a healthy democracy.

Keeping news journalism PR-lite

How can the newsroom prevent colonisation by PR? How can journalists see through the agenda of their sources? Here is a list of signs for the aspiring and practicing news journalist to watch out for, and ideas they can adopt to face this challenge head-on.

Be sceptical when PR professionals present themselves (mostly) as helpers. Most reporters develop an innate suspicion of this stance, without being rude or aggressive. This caution is right. The easiest material identifier of PR help is detailed briefings of the background to a story, especially in technical areas. These briefings are usually written in a journalistic style and are easy to embed into news copy. PR people also offer access to internal experts and senior managers whose quotes make the story more likely to lead the news. Many stories are inherently complex (financial takeovers; technical calculations; fraud investigations) and need time and competing explanations for the reporter to understand. For example, in Spring 2010 first reported estimates about the volume of oil being spilled from BP's destroyed rig into the Gulf of Mexico were later revised by 'independent scientists' upwards 'as much as 10 times' (BBC, 2010). Lower estimates initially provided by oil industry 'experts' suited the purposes of BP who were keen to downplay the likely effect of the giant oil spill. These initial, misleading estimates remained largely unchallenged by reporters who appeared to accept industry estimates at face value.

Similarly, media reporting of the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station disaster largely relied on nuclear industry experts and Japanese government spokespersons for their assessment of the likely impact of the radiation leaks, despite a long history of secrecy and cover up by these same authorities (Wareham, 2009). The risk of meltdown which occurred at three reactors was dismissed as highly unlikely by industry 'experts' invited onto news broadcasts. Later reports showed there was a systematic cover up of the extent of the damage, the plant's potential vulnerabilities and the radiation exposure levels workers endured in the clean-up operation (BBC News Online, 2012a; 2012b) The lesson of Fukushima is check data with multiple sources. No wonder journalists get stories wrong first time round – even specialists!

Oscar Gandy's (1982) notion of an 'information subsidy' offers an academic account of these helping hand tactics. It offers an explanation of how PRs do their colonisation. He observed the behaviour of Californian big business dealing with the rise of environmental and consumer pressure groups and of politicians more critical of business operations. He wrote of the "modern public relations firm" supplying information to the media "on behalf of those with economic power" (p.64). The media accept material because it reduces their costs. PR "plays the central role in the design and implementation of information subsidy efforts by major policy actors" (ibid). He notes that “the source and source’s self-interest is skilfully hidden” (ibid). Looked at from the viewpoint of news media managers, journalism that has been subsidised is a cost saving to their newsrooms; looked at from the PR subsidiser’s position, the story is invariably more favourable than if the reporter was left to his/her own resources.

Other forms of PR help are photo-opportunities whereby the famous are shown to the camera at one location and time to all photographers. TV and web news broadcasts are led by pictures, and their editors are often desperate to lead their verbal stories with visual images. To newsrooms, pictures allow a thousand words to be written or read out, and so fill pages and airtime. Press conferences and time embargoes on publication of stories are other PR devices. These mean that a story is released at one time and this is usually to the advantage of PR sources. By not giving a story to one source, this increases the chances of more coverage by obliging journalists to line up at the same place and time for its release. Getting news is a competitive business and a newsroom does not want to miss out on what could be a good story. At the same time, most journalists will want an exclusive and will test PRs to give them the story earlier or with a different angle. Embargo Watch (2010) reports on how accurate reporting of science fares under this sort of popular journalism.

Journalists should be wary of ideas and suggestions from PR sources. They should remember that the PR professional’s role is always to advance the interests of their client or of the causes they believe in. Getting their news into the media is just one means to achieve that advance. Conversely, journalists should always remember that their use of PR will invariably mean tensions with their role as guardians of the public interest: a central pillar of their professional identity.

As we have shown above, not all news agency copy has been rigorously and independently written by agency journalists, and is therefore not always page-ready news copy, despite its appearance. Journalists should check facts and seek their own sources. The journalistic integrity of some news agencies is questionable at best, so journalists should make sure they know when commercial agendas are present and treat the information from these sources with appropriate caution.

Surveys about health care, consumer behaviour, holidays habits, tastes in food and drink are to be treated with great suspicion if they are not funded by scientific, academic and officially neutral sources such as the Office of National Statistics. When these come into the newsroom, checking who is paying and who is doing the fieldwork is essential. Surveys are a traditional way of getting selective data and self-interested conclusions into the news under the guise of apparent scientific/official impartiality. They often come from 'front' organisations, bodies with claims to be independent but which, on investigation, are funded by business directly; or indirectly by their PR companies (Beder, 2006a; 2006b; Dinan and Miller, 2007). Civic groups such as the Centre for Media and Democracy's PRWatch (http://www.prwatch.org/), Spinwatch (http://www.spinwatch.org/), Alter-Eu (www.alter-eu.org), and the Foodspin project of Powerbase (http://powerbase.info/index.php/Foodspin_Portal) have emerged in recent years with the aim of exposing corporate spin on behalf of the public. They are useful resources for the monitoring journalist.

Greater transparency in sourcing news stories is a thorny issue for journalists, as it could infringe confidentiality of the journalist-source relationship. There are times when sources must be protected. However, as online news continues to erode the concept of journalistic impartiality, more voices are calling for transparency to be the new objectivity (see The Economist, 2011). David Weinberger, a technology commentator, has argued that transparency prospers in a linked medium: "Objectivity is a trust mechanism you rely on when your medium can't do links. Now our medium can" (cited in The Economist, 2011, p. 13). Transparency means linking to sources and data, something the web makes easy, and has been applied by bloggers for years. Many mainstream news organisations – even national newspapers which now have large online operations – have been slow to embrace greater transparency. But today in the context of PR-isation, publicly linking sources to news copy lets the reader judge story credibility and partiality for themselves.

In the face of greater attempts on the part of political elites to control the news agenda, political journalists have shown that it is possible to distance themselves from PR within their copy, by including commentary on the publicity process. This metacoverage can be reflective, edifying or cynical depending on the circumstances. Stories about spin in politics erect "crucial, and commercially valuable ethical distance between two mutually dependent professional groups, in the interest of preserving journalistic legitimacy in the wider public sphere" (McNair, 2000, p. 137). In the political context, spin has arguably been 'de-mystified' by such reporting, representing a progressive evolution in our political culture towards one of greater transparency and scrutiny (McNair, 2006). Journalists in other spheres could assert their independence in a similar manner. For example, if they publish survey stories they should make it clear to the public that these are 'sponsored news' stories by labelling them as such.

Finally, newsrooms should always remember that PR people often do not have job titles with these letters. 'Information officer', 'public affairs manager' or 'head of communications' are alternatives. This job description variety reminds us of what is more important in spotting churnalism at work: the human source or the content coming from that source? It is the content embedded in the news that the PR literate reporter should be tracing and avoiding. Titles are here today and gone tomorrow: your skills in spotting embedded PR are the professional prize to go for.

But being PR literate does not deny that some content coming from PR people is important and is news. Use PR material where it is news and is checked against other sources. What the Prime Minister says through their spokespeople is often of national importance. What companies or trades unions say about a workplace dispute is often factually true (numbers involved) and explains consequences (job and revenue losses; inconvenience to the public). What Oxfam say about disaster relief is often accurate but may not be the complete picture. The aware journalist uses these basic 'facts'; quotes sources and notes where they differ. Their news sense, however, is always focused on what data and explanations are not offered; how the data and explanations differ, and the reasons for what is said and not said in public. The wary and independently minded journalist is the best guarantor for PR-lite, if not for PR-free, news.

Challenging Questions

- One of the traditional roles of the media is considered to be the ability to hold authority to account. Does the advent of social media make this task easier or more difficult?
- Governments and corporations are often accused of using "spin" to manipulate public opinion through the media. Have the changes in today's media landscape made this easier or more difficult for those wishing to "manage" a message?
- Should we see the rise of "citizen journalism" as a threat to journalism and traditional news values of objectivity, impartiality and freedom from bias?

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17 Reporting politics:
enlightening citizens or undermining democracy?

Darren Lilleker and Mick Temple

"The press and politicians. A delicate relationship. Too close, and danger ensues. Too far apart and democracy itself cannot function without the essential exchange of information"

Howard Brenton and David Hare, Pravda, Act I, Scene 3

"Journalism is to politician as dog is to lamp-post."

H.L. Mencken, The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Quotations

In recent years there have been many criticisms that political reporting has 'dumbed down'. For some observers, political journalists increasingly concentrate on 'personality politics' rather than serious issues and policies (for debate, see Langer, 2011). In addition, the growth of aggressive public relations tactics by political parties attempting to control or 'spin' the news agenda has led to concerns that political journalists have become over-dependent on spin doctors, especially powerful governmental actors who often bully journalists into following their preferred line. Combined with concerns of overly partisan reporting, especially from print journalists, this has led to accusations that political journalism is failing in its duty to inform the public (Hargreaves & Thomas, 2002: 9). In an age when public contact with political elites is almost totally through the media, political journalists play a crucial role in liberal democracies. In order that the electorate can make rational choices, journalists must deliver accurate and relatively impartial information.

This chapter assesses these concerns. It begins with the recognition that a key challenge for political journalists is how to avoid becoming a megaphone for party and government propaganda machines – and avoid acting merely as a conduit for the ideological preferences of their employers - while still providing up to date commentary on key political events of the day in a way that engages and serves their wider audience. In order to draw out these issues in concrete terms, we next turn to consider the 2010 general election. According to some commentators, it signalled a fundamental shift in the role of the political journalist. The first televised leaders' debates in British political history had a far greater impact on both the public and the media's election coverage than was expected, as well as adding a new layer of personalisation to UK politics. Newspaper political reporters, in particular, used to interpreting and analysing the day-to-day events of election campaigns, found themselves reacting to events rather than setting the agenda. Allegations of bias against political broadcasters from all channels placed editorialising under the spotlight. There was also criticism of the role played by increasingly high-profile and opinionated television commentators, whose emergence as 'personalities' rather than straight reporters has raised concerns about both their impartiality and their role as a 'fourth estate'. The cumulative challenges to political journalism's authority, as we shall see, are clearly considerable.

The challenge to the democratic role of political journalism

There is little doubt about the importance of informed political journalism in a democracy. Indeed, most journalism histories have traditionally mythologised the role of journalism as a 'fourth estate', acting as a 'watchdog' on behalf of the public by holding the powerful to account for their actions (see Cole & Harcup, 2010). Generations of newspaper proprietors have cited this role as a rationale against any curbs on 'the freedom of the press'. For well over a century, despite economic and ideological ties to key groups within society, the press (and later the broadcast news media) have managed to represent themselves as being above the fray, independent observers of events they merely report upon.

There is disagreement about the originator of the phrase 'the fourth estate', but the term achieved popular recognition in 1828, when the great historian and Whig politician Thomas Babington Macaulay pointed towards the reporters in the press gallery of the House of Commons and called them 'the fourth estate of the realm'. There has been considerable disagreement about what the other three estates were, but in a British context the church, judiciary and commons are usually cited (see Allan, 2010). The key point is that the press, anxious for both respectability and for recognition of their claims to represent public opinion, were quick to adopt and popularise the title.

It provided an intoxicating vision of a free press working for the greater public good. To a large extent, the 'fourth estate' ideal has survived into the 21st century, even when the power of owners and multi-media corporations has been clear to see. No serious observer of their history and current activities would represent our news media as neutral observers. The self-perpetuating power of the 'fourth estate' myth has been quite staggering. As the journalism historian Martin Conboy notes, the idealistic claim that the press has operated as a watchdog for the public is 'high on emotive value but low on concrete evidence' (2004: 109-110). That said, our news media may be imperfect watchdogs, but without them our knowledge of the activities of the powerful would be much less.

Barnett & Gaber (2001: 12-13) propose three contributions that 'good' political journalism can make to democracy. First – and they admit this is perhaps the most complex and problematic function – is by acting as 'tribunes of the people', representing the views of the 'multitude' to political representatives. Second, the media can convey 'accurate, intelligible and comprehensive knowledge' to allow citizens to formulate their own responses to political events and thereby participate in the political process. Third, they can contribute to that process of public opinion formation by providing a forum in which citizens can share their views and allow 'a collective view to evolve'. How far journalists and news media perform these functions is much disputed. Barnett & Gaber, in concluding their analysis, argued that the future was bleak for the 'fourth estate' and its democratic role.

A decade on from this prediction, the 2010 election provided some evidence that both the influence and interpretative role of political journalists, especially in newspapers, was being challenged by the first-ever British televised leaders' debates and the rapid public response via relatively instant opinion polling. However, in an age when face-to-face communication with our rulers is so rare as to be effectively non-existent, the media delivering information in a 'comprehensible and accessible' way (Franklin, 2004, p.11), is likely to be the only means by which the masses are able to judge their governments and those aspiring to govern. Equally, the public will often regard this information as unbiased and impartial, especially when it comes from the mainstream broadcasters.

It is important that the public have access to relatively impartial political information, and not party political propaganda and 'spin', passed on by lazy or partisan political journalists. The misleading information about Iraq's non-existent 'weapons of mass destruction', used to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003, was peddled to the public by journalists who failed to interrogate New Labour's spin machine. Such failures have damaged the reputation of political journalism in Britain, as have claims about the over simplification and personalisation of political coverage.

Has political coverage 'dumbed down'?

The belief that commercial pressures have led to a dumbed down media 'failing to explain, inform and analyse' is widespread (Moore, 2007: 38). Some argue for a more complex diagnosis (McNair, 2003) but, if the doomsayers are right, the repercussions for the health of 'democracy' are huge. At the centre of liberal democratic theory – how democracies should work – is the necessity for an informed and engaged public. The performance of governments has to be judged every few years in the voting booth. If we are not informed enough to make such a decision, the argument goes, governments will not necessarily be held accountable for their mistakes or indeed rewarded for their successes. And if we are not engaged enough, then democracy itself is called into question (Puttnam, 2000). The media's supposed dumbing down has frequently been cited as a major contributor to declining voter turn-out in Britain, with a consequently apathetic public disengaging from the political system (see Temple, 2006). In general elections, barely three-fifths of the electorate bother to make the short trip to the polling booth.

It is argued that when there are limited alternative ways of receiving information on a given subject, audiences are dependent on the media (Ball-Rokeach, 1998). The public rely mainly on news media to deliver the information they need to make informed judgements about key social and political issues (Robinson & Levy, 1986) and studies by the Pew Center in the USA highlight this remains true despite the various means of gathering political information within online environments. Indeed, it has been argued that the public have a basic right to receive reliable information and, if the media fail to provide it, government regulation will be required to secure this (Kelley & Downey, 1995). If the news media are performing the roles Barnett & Gaber (2001) believe are necessary to maintain the health of democracy, they need to be supplying citizens with comprehensive information to allow them to participate fully in the political process.

Many observers have doubts about the ability of our modern news media to 'foster rational-critical debate among citizens' (Harrison, 2006: 100). On the other hand, there is an argument that 'rational-critical' discourse is merely only one way in which people absorb political information. And given the importance of participation in a democracy, it is necessary to engage a public who may be relatively uninterested in the intricate details of politics, so telling stories in 'entertaining ways' is an important part of any journalist's job (Harcup, 2009: 121). Indeed , the simplification and 'sensationalism' of serious political news can be seen as an essential part of the process of engaging people about the distribution of resources in modern democratic societies. Brian McNair believes that so-called dumbing down has produced political reporting which is 'more penetrating, more critical, more revealing' and , importantly, 'more demystificatory of power than the polite, status–conscious journalisms of the past' (McNair, 2000: 60).

However, the concentration on 'personalities'and and the lengths some journalists will go to dig out more sensational information, has raised questions about the ethical standards of journalists. The fact that journalists were found to be illegally hacking into voicemail and emails, as well as allegations about the nature of their relationships with both police and senior politicians, brings into question many of the practices of investigative journalism. Although the phone hacking scandal centred on News International, particularly The Sun and the now defunct News of the World, there is evidence that unethical practice is not the sole preserve of Rupert Murdoch's newspapers. The revelations uncovered by Lord Leveson's inquiry into such behaviour and the fact that journalists have faced criminal charges, threatens both the independence of the media and public trust in journalists. The problems are much wider than the reporting of politics – the majority of illegal activity concerned celebrities - but one aspect of modern day political journalism, the focus on the private lives of politicians, is an area where the scandal is relevant. The allegation that details about Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott's extramarital affair were learned through intercepting telephone calls and emails raises issues of security as well as questions about how far journalists can and should go to uncover such revelations. While politicians' private and sexual liaisons may be of interest to the public, whether such journalism is in the public or national interest is a moot point. The result of Leveson may be that journalists have to be more transparent about their sources, which will not only have implications on their operation as investigator; it could also reveal any overt bias in their approach to reporting politics.

Is political journalism tainted by bias?

The scandal is a corollary of the media search for audiences and readers that has led to an evolution in the production of news. The problems with political journalism, however, go much deeper than a search for salacious details of the goings on in the bedrooms of politicians. It is argued that much political journalism is no longer news but views. While journalists may claim they play the role of interpreter by explaining the implications of events to a largely disengaged public, this noble activity, when scrutinised, can be suggested to be as corrosive upon public engagement as it is empowering.

All political reporters present events from their own perspectives, whether they are tabloid journalists such as the Sun's Trevor Kavanagh, or broadcasters like the BBC's Nick Robinson, ITV's Tom Bradby or Sky News' Adam Boulton. These views permeate public perceptions and present not only potentially biased accounts of events but also equally skewed perspectives of the motivations of key decision makers, often focusing on the potential implications of their actions on public support or party unity rather than the broader good of the nation. While it is often less than clear how these heavyweights form their opinions (for example, how much of it has been spun by the party spin doctors?) they become the authority figures whom the wider public rely upon for their political information. Nick Robinson, once chairman of the Young Conservatives, is frequently accused of bias by all sides (e.g., http://liberalconspiracy.org/2010/05/14/backlash-against-nick-robinson-for-pro-tory-bias/) but so are Tom Bradby and Adam Boulton. Accusations of partiality intensified during the 2010 election campaign, illustrated by the live on-air spat just days after the election when former Labour spin-doctor Alastair Campbell told Sky's Adam Boulton that both he and Sky News had been guilty of anti-Labour bias

The online public sphere

Yet any newspaper and broadcasting bias may not be crucial to public understanding. The public no longer need to rely on television, radio or newspaper journalists for their political information. This can be obtained directly from the websites of politicians and political parties, increasingly a range of other broadcasting tools they employ such as Twitter, as well as both independent and politically aligned sources of political information. The blogosphere, a collective term used to describe the network of weblogs (online diaries), is full of political information containing a range of ideological biases, insider revelations and interpretations of news stories. For example, Paul Staines, aka Guido Fawkes, focuses a highly sceptical eye over our elected representatives: ConservativeHome casts an independent gaze over the Tory party. Not only are such sites available as alternative, and importantly free, sources of political information for public access; they are equally sources of news for journalists. With pressures of time constraining a journalist's ability to investigate, stories that begin life on one weblog or as a politician's tweet can become viral through the online communicative ecosystem and lead the news agenda.

But how reliable are such sources? For example, leading Conservative blogger Iain Dale admits that his and other Conservative supporting sites (along with those of Labour and the Liberal Democrats), 'effectively neutered [themselves] for the duration of the [2010 election] campaign' because no one wanted to be blamed for 'jeopardising his party's victory' (Dale, 2010). Those voters seeking accurate information from such sites would be sorely disappointed.

In fact, it is argued that rather than representing a new public sphere, as Papacharissi (2002) argued, the online environment is often used more to reinforce pre-existing ideas and prejudices than to seek new information (see Hindman, 2009). Many politics weblogs and forums serve as ideological cyberghettoes where contributors chant 'me too' rather than challenging ideas. Users receive a highly filtered version of the news, receiving their 'Daily Me' by RSS feeds or news aggregators (Sunstein, 2007) rather than independent, critical analyses that allow for informed evaluation and decision making.

The much vaunted 'citizen journalist' (see Hudson & Temple, 2010, for a critique of the concept) has yet to unravel the hegemony of the mainstream news providers. While examples such as the safe landing of US Airways flight 1549 on the Hudson River are often cited as demonstrating the power of Twitter to undermine the capacity of journalists as repositories of news, there are few examples of citizen journalists breaking news stories on a regular basis. However, Davis (2008) argues that there is a symbiotic relationship between journalists and bloggers where both inform, amplify and develop the work of the other, arguably enhancing the public sphere and pluralism. Chadwick (2011) describes this as the political news information cycle where journalists and a range of contributors all feed into an evolving news agenda. This positive perspective has a number of detractors who suggest the majority of online content creators are an elite minority working with their own agenda (see Hindman, 2009). While it is clear that such sources can lead the news agenda, in actuality such moments are rare in Western democracies and it is largely the mainstream media who shed light on events in the political life of a nation.

The late Elizabeth Edwards, wife of Senator John Edwards (a United States Democratic vice-presidential nominee in 2004) argued that the 'vigorous press that was deemed an essential part of democracy at our country's inception is now consigned to smaller venues, to the Internet and, in the mainstream media, to occasional articles' (Edwards, 2008). Mrs Edwards acknowledged that serious newspapers and magazines still carried analytical articles and public television broadcasts carried in-depth reports. But her concerns about dumbing down resonated with many observers of American (and increasingly, British) politics. She believed that:

> *"every analysis that is shortened, every corner that is cut, moves us further away from the truth until what is left is . . . what I call strobe-light journalism, in which the outlines are accurate enough but we cannot really see the whole picture."* (Edwards, 2008)

Her argument is reminiscent of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato's 'allegory of the cave', used to substantiate Plato's claim that only those with the greatest knowledge should rule (Griffith, 2000).[1]

Shadows on the wall

Perhaps the cave allegory (or 'analogy') is worth applying more widely to the provision of political information. As events and arguments are increasingly filtered by journalists and bloggers and rumour and partial leak often treated as facts, there is no time allowed for investigation or considered analysis, as this would offer an edge to the competition. Partial and poorly-sourced information is increasingly all that is available. Like the chained inhabitants of Plato's cave - that is, the masses - who see only the shadows of events outside their direct experience, the casual reader of political news is shackled and prevented from seeing the true light. Instead the world is shown in shadow form, reflected by the light but shown in shadows and shapes which are open to interpretation.

This is not to say that journalists alone should be blamed for a failure to shed sufficient light onto political activities. Politicians themselves avoid the glare of scrutiny and attempt to restrict that which is seen in clear relief. Often, we can barely make out the machinations of political decision-makers and are restricted to guessing at what occurs in the shadows. This partly explains the universal condemnation by the political class – and some would say, state persecution - of the activities of Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks. Assange's online release of government cables and information makes it clear that politicians' public pronouncements are often radically different from their private beliefs.

This then is the crux of a problem at the heart of the political culture of democracies in late modernity. Journalists constrained by market demands lack the time to reflect but need to produce copy. Politicians seek favourable coverage and attempt to control and restrict access to information in order to get the copy they want. The public seek information that is easily digestible and helpful for decision making. These three factors appear to conflict with one another, creating a vicious cycle, as well as being incompatible with enhancing a civic democratic culture.

Spin and political journalism

A major obstacle to informed reporting is the tendency of all governments to attempt to manage or 'spin' the news. Governments have always sought to manage information. Samuel Pepys was paid 30 shillings a year by King Charles II for advice on how to manage his relationship with journalists, which given the fate of the King's father seems a small price to pay for a better press (Temple, 2008: 154). However, in a mass media age, the urge to control the political agenda has become increasingly important and the 'spin doctor' has become a ubiquitous figure in most organisations.

The creation of the 'welfare state' by the Labour government of 1945-51, and the subsequent need to inform the public of their entitlements, gave a central role to government management of information for the public good. This had led to a steadily increasing professionalization and marketization of political communication, with governments increasingly selling ideas and promoting their activities as opposed to simply delivering bland information (Franklin, 2004; Young, 2004).

While governments have always sought some measure of control, it was the election of Margaret Thatcher to the Conservative leadership in 1975 which really launched modern media manipulation by British political parties, importing many ideas from the United States. Leading figures from public relations were employed to remodel her voice and appearance. Her press secretary Bernard Ingham, a former journalist, was a key figure in managing Thatcher's media relations. His remit, like all those who have held the role of 'communications advisor' or similar ever since, was to liaise with various journalists to generate positive coverage in order to bolster the reputation of the prime minister and government.

From the start of John Major's premiership in 1990, an increasingly anti-government media highlighted the inconsistencies between the sleaze of his ministers and his stated aim to pull British society back to living by 'basic family values'. Minister's extra-marital affairs, their progeny from those affairs, private business dealings and much of their non-political lives came under a microscope, challenging the authority of Major as prime minister. Tony Blair's reaction to this, and to almost two decades of a partisan press's hostility to the Labour party, was to place communication and image at the heart of his strategy in both opposition and government. The newspaper coverage Labour leader Neil Kinnock received during the 1980s and 1990s was effectively character assassination (Greenslade, 2002). Peter Mandelson, Labour's Director of Communications for much of Kinnock's leadership, was determined it would not happen again when Tony Blair became leader – and political journalists who refused to play the game were excluded or marginalised. This unhealthy 'dance with the media' had negative consequences for the democratic ideal of an informed public. Arguably it is also a factor in the events that led to the Leveson Inquiry, which while focusing on the culture, practices and ethics of tabloid journalists has equally highlighted issues about the power of the media over politicians and the extraordinary political influence they wield in exchange for offering favourable coverage.

Tony Blair and his advisers took the relatively crude and essentially ideologically-driven tactics of pre-New Labour spin doctors to new heights. Indeed, the Blair government has been primarily characterised as obsessed with its media coverage. Blair's press secretary Alastair Campbell, formerly political editor of the Daily Mirror, was frequently characterised as second only to Blair in importance. Campbell became the story, and something of a celebrity, while spin became a corrosive element at the heart of Blair's government. The reputation of spin and its practitioners reached a new low in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the USA, when the Labour government's spin doctors sought to 'bury bad news' – that is, release potentially embarrassing information knowing that it would be lost in the wall-to-wall coverage of the 'attack on America'.

Spin can backfire and on occasion that can have serious consequences. In October 2007, new Prime Minister Gordon Brown had enjoyed a blissful 'honeymoon' period in office and his opinion poll ratings were high. Number Ten staff started to create an expectation of an early election. Key policy announcements were brought forward. Gordon Brown paid an unexpected and lightning visit to British troops in Iraq and then issued a surprise anouncement that there would be substantial troop withdrawals. Newspapers were full of election fever but when opinion polls indicated a revival of David Cameron's fortunes Labour hastily pulled back, announcing that there would be no election until at least May 2009. Government ministers tried to spin the decision as being all the media's fault for whipping up speculation, but Benedict Brogan, political editor of the Daily Mail, pointed out that Labour spin doctors had been actively briefing political correspondents that there would be an election – in effect, stoking up the flames (speaking on BBC Radio 4 Today, 8 October 2007). Newspapers universally carried this message. The backlash from Labour's efforts to spin the unspinnable was immediate and damaging: a negative press for 'dithering' Gordon Brown, who no longer appeared electorally unassailable, and the beginning of an impression that David Cameron was a potential prime minister. The consequence of the flawed spinning exercise was to create a new spin, one which gathered momentum and proved difficult to counter, of a 'bumbling and blundering' prime minister (Rawnsley 2007). As Liberal Democrat MP Vincent Cable cuttingly noted in Parliament, Gordon Brown moved in a few days 'from Stalin to Mr. Bean' (BBC News, 28 November 2007).

The decline of deference

Contiguous to the process of spin and professionalization has been a decline of deference towards authority figures in the last 50 years. The media has become a highly critical force, especially among newspapers unbound by legal requirements for neutrality. An increasingly more aggressive press – the arrival of Rupert Murdoch in 1968 is perhaps no coincidence - contributed to the problems. At its best, modern political coverage includes greater scrutiny of the activities of elected representatives and their staff:

however, there is also a greater willingness, if not outright relish, to carry negative and highly personal stories by the media. Political news gathering has shifted away from codes of practice where a testing question would be preceded by 'with all due respect' as was the case in the immediate post-war era. The BBC's Jeremy Paxman's approach to political interviewing is characteristic of a more hostile reporting environment where the media often sees itself as a force of opposition to elected representatives – the 'Rottweiler journalist' is a key figure in the 21st century political landscape (Barnett, 2002). Thus, a game of attack and counterattack has developed in which journalists and politicians circle one another seeking to win a battle that is increasingly high stakes.

What is at stake may be open to some degree of speculation and subjectivity, depending on the importance one places upon gaining the right type of coverage. Equally the nature of the relationship between politicians and journalists can be open to interpretation, with more sympathetic accounts placing them both as victims of their environment. Aeron Davis argues both find themselves living a life that is: 'fleeting, nomadic, flexible, multi-task oriented, and encourages weak social ties'; in turn this shapes a role that has evolved to 'the gathering of "pseudo" rather than substantive forms of expertise, many weak social ties and thin forms of communication and human exchange' (Davis, 2010: 65-6). Journalists and politicians alike find themselves squeezed by constituents or audiences, public opinion or advertisers, parties or editors and they both exist in a highly pressurised environment which is not of their making. Newspaper journalists are perhaps the most under pressure. While formerly they would be able to take the lead on presenting the implications of an event the following day, with television news being caught within the immediacy of the moment, technology is denying newspapers the luxury of their former role - producing more considered analysis. It is argued that this leaves little opportunities to give real insight to stories. Instead, it is the temperature that is increased, raising questions about the contribution of journalism to democracy.

The impact of the media on voters

All of this feverish activity, especially during an election campaign, suggests that the media are extraordinarily influential and yet there is much disagreement about the nature and extent of their influence (see Burton, 2005: 97-102). Many other influences (home, work, education) affect our political beliefs and the huge number of media outlets makes it difficult to ascribe impact to, for example, any one newspaper or television programme. The media clearly play a powerful role in transmitting messages to the electorate but all claims of direct influence on voting behaviour need to be treated with caution. The influence of political journalists is probably over-stated.

British newspapers tend to be fiercely partisan, yet there is no consensus about the impact of that partisanship on voting patterns (Gavin and Saunders, 2003: 576). That said, academic research tends to support the belief that, over time, newspapers appear to exert a 'significant influence on voting results'. This is especially the case when there is 'little to choose' between the parties and voters therefore 'need a cue' (Newton and Brynin, 2001: 282). The impact may be small, but it is sufficient to make a difference in close contests, and the 2010 election was among the tightest in British political history.

Election 2010: changing politics and political journalism for ever?

On the day of the first ever televised leaders' debate in British political history, the BBC's deputy political editor, James Landale (2010), presciently pointed out that the debates could be 'moments of genuinely democratic television' helping the nation to decide. Even more presciently, he noted that they offered the Liberal Democrats and their leader Nick Clegg a 'heaven-sent opportunity' to get their message 'direct to [the] electorate'. For Alastair Stewart, who chaired the first debate on ITV, they allowed a large television audience 'to judge the quality of the answers and the relative merits of the exchanges with no further mediation' (letter to Daily Telegraph, 28 April, 2010: our emphasis).

The three debates were accompanied by instantaneous audience reaction and the emergence of a 'winner'. Sophisticated tracking tools were used to assess how audiences reacted to the arguments presented by Brown, Cameron and Clegg. This analysis was accompanied by vox populi pieces from the captive audience and results from a YouGov poll which had to be completed by their online panel within the last minutes of the televised debate programme. The studio audience, the simultaneous 'worm' tracking viewer responses (involving just 12 people in a studio) and the instant nationwide poll, meant that voters largely bypassed the traditional interpretative role of, in particular, the press. Therefore, the newspaper verdicts next day were largely redundant - and both the public and the press seemed to realise this. While newspaper assessments were arguably more reflective (Gaber 2010) their responses tended towards overt and often farcical partisanship.

Clegg's unexpected success during the first debate resulted in the Sun, Telegraph, Mail and Express 'explod[ing] in unison' (Glover, 2010). The traditional Tory newspapers, in particular the Mail titles, were made to look ridiculous by the inanity of much of their response and by the instant spoofing from online sites and social media. The Daily Mail's response to the rise of Cleggmania demonstrated real fear of Nick Clegg's challenge. Its front page headline, disinterring an old newspaper article to allege 'Clegg in Nazi Slur on Britain' (22 April, 2010), must have been embarrassing for the paper's journalists, and negative stories on expenses, donations, and lobbying followed (23 April, 2010). In response, tweeters using the hashtag #nickcleggsfault parodied such articles by listing an increasingly unfeasible catalogue of events that Nick Clegg was responsible for: for instance, it was 'Clegg's fault' for the volcanic ash that had grounded Europe's jets. Perhaps the nadir was reached when the Mail on Sunday asked 'is there anything British about Nick Clegg?' (18 April, 2010, their emphasis) an undisguised and distasteful appeal to xenophobia against a British-born politician.

The Daily Mail's anti-Clegg campaign was risible, but did it and similar newspaper onslaughts affect support for the LibDems? While the efforts of Tory-supporting newspapers to convince their readers that 'it was Cameron wot won it' failed to prevent Clegg's immediate and unprecedented boost in polled opinion, they certainly believe they killed off 'Cleggmania'. The polling figures – 32 percent after the first debate, 23 percent for the LibDems in the real election – might appear to support that (Cathcart 2010). Raymond Snoddy (2010) agrees 'it is not inconceivable' that the 'relentless barrage against the LibDems' could have had a significant impact. On the other hand, polls suggest that much of Clegg's new support was relatively 'soft', and composed of many young and still unsure voters. If it was the case that a hostile press affected Clegg's support, it was arguably a rare illustration of their influence in 2010. What is more questionable, regardless of the level of influence enjoyed, is whether this is an appropriate role for political journalism to play within the context of an election and what this indicates about the media's relationship with the nation's democratic health.

Although both declining circulation and the public's engagement with the televised debates ensured the Tories' advantage in press support was significantly less important than in previous elections, their failure to win a majority further highlighted the press's inability to sell an agenda wholly supportive of their favourites. A variety of factors are influencing our opinions and our sources of news and information are increasingly eclectic, making it likely that newspapers, which have probably never been as powerful as they believed (Greenslade, 2010), have lost some of their agenda-setting power.

Newspapers often seemed sidetracked and irrelevant to the main political debate. Despite the often undeniable high quality of the analysis and commentary, especially in the 'qualities', the superficiality of much press (and television) coverage contributes to the belief that dumbing down best describes their 2010 election coverage. For example, the role of political spouse 'morphed' from an 'amusing sideshow' into a 'dominant feature of the British landscape' as their daily wardrobes were 'picked apart and priced for the next morning's newspapers' (Brogan 2010). The long-held assumption that the press set the daily political agenda during elections has been undermined by the televised debates and the 'resultant instantaneous polling' (Greenslade, 2010). Snoddy (2010) agrees it is true 'they have lost the power to set the political agenda' but believes that power was lost 'some time ago'.

However, it may be premature to write off the power of traditional political reporting and commentary. An examination of media coverage, political responses and public opinion changes during the 2010 campaign indicates overwhelming support for the belief that the traditional media retain considerable impact on the outcome of an election. Over half of voters polled in the final week said that media coverage of the campaign had influenced their voting intentions (Singleton, 2010) and it is likely that the press's influence was at its peak in the final week, once the TV debates were over (Snoddy, 2010). But the rise of new media outlets and the important role played by the televised leaders' debates indicate the rules of the game have changed forever. Britain's over-partisan political press needs to recognise that reporting only the positive about the party you support is like covering an England football match without acknowledging opposition goals: 'in a modern media era when consumers are never far from an alternative news source, that just won't cut it' (Burrell, 2010). If the press are to remain influential they will need to avoid the public mockery that accompanied much of their 2010 coverage.

Conclusions

Critics of political journalism argue that it is biased, dumbed down, most interested in the personalities and process of politics, over-reliant on official sources and increasingly offering subjective commentary rather than information. All of these are true, in part. One can find evidence to support or disprove any hypothesis in this field. In reality, the British media provide a daily coverage ranging from quality, objective analysis of policy to over-simplistic, partisan and personalised accounts of the process of politics. The avid seeker of political information has myriad spaces in which to not only locate fine-grained detail on policy but also to comment, expand upon and share it. The allegations of dumbing down also ignore the needs of those who receive limited amounts of political information. They may not be media-dependent, and may buy a single newspaper for the sport, for example, catching only occasional glimpses of political news on television. They may see only a few shadows of politics, caught in the strobe light of the news feeding frenzy over a gaffe, u-turn or personal indiscretion. If we believe that wide engagement is necessary for a healthy democracy, those who choose to be disengaged, and inhabit the furthest recesses of Plato's cave, present a challenge for the political journalist. The continuing legitimacy of Western political systems is dependent on the political media (in the broadest sense) successfully contributing to a nation's democratic health while also pleasing readers, advertisers and critics.

Political journalists currently tread a fine line between replicating party and government spin while also interrogating much of the information they receive. As the quote at the start of this chapter from Brenton and Hare's brilliant political satire Pravda indicates, the exchange of information between the political journalist and the politician is both necessary and inevitable. But they must both be careful to strike the right balance: 'too close, and danger ensues', as both journalists and past and present prime ministers acknowledged to the Leveson Inquiry. Political journalism must also strike a careful balance between exposing the failings and rewarding the triumphs of politicians; arguably, far too much modern coverage of politics is negative and overly aggressive. H. L. Mencken's famous analogy that the correct relationship between a journalist and politician is that of 'dog to lamp post' is amusing but unhelpful. If the electorate's perception of politics, glimpsed in the shadows from the corner of the cave, is a world largely populated by the devious, ill-informed, corrupt or incompetent, they are unlikely to have a desire to engage. These are the key challenges facing political journalists.

Notes

1. In ironic and probably unconscious support of Elizabeth Edwards's general argument, news of her husband's affair with another woman (and birth of a child) had been published just a few months before her comments by the 'smaller venue' of the National Enquirer, a down-market tabloid sold mostly in American supermarkets. The mainstream media had effectively sidelined a story that, when it broke, ended John Edwards' chance of becoming Barack Obama's running mate in the 2008 presidential election.

Challenging Questions

- Debate the argument that political journalists should be 'objective,' effectively concealing their personal attitudes or ideologies in their reporting.
- Critically assess the belief that news coverage is being 'dumbed down'.
- Are spin doctors 'Machiavellian manipulators' or 'essential party servants in a political environment dominated by the mass media'?

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18 Social Media and Sports Journalism:

How is the rise of Twitter affecting football journalism?

Louise Matthews and Daniel Anwar

"I can't think how I would live without it (Twitter) actually. There are people who resisted for a long time – colleagues of mine – but they all see the light."

Raphael Honigstein, football correspondent, The Guardian, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Stuttgarter Zeitung

"I don't think there is any turning back now. Twitter is here as an important tool reporting live in matches, events and also breaking stories. I think more and more journalists will use this immediate form of reporting."

Phil McNulty, chief football writer, BBC Sports

In the fast-moving world of social media developments, Twitter, like other tools before it, may decline and be replaced by something new. But many of the journalists in this chapter suggest it has already altered journalism practices in ways that will live on regardless of any individual tool. In a sense, the rise of social media in its various forms means the genie is out of the bottle and it is unlikely things will go back to the way they were. So sports journalism faces the challenge of changes presented by social media, which include being actively involved in it or simply dealing with its impact.

As this chapter was being written, sports journalists were still debating the extent to which something so relatively new had affected their daily work even those who chose not to use it. "There's already discord among the press corps because of Twitter," says Iain Macintosh (The New Paper, The Irish Examiner, Sports Illustrated), recalling one incident when journalists were travelling with Manchester United to European games:

> *"Rio Ferdinand was standing up throughout the entire flight because his back was giving him problems. As soon as he landed two or three of the younger journalists tweeted it immediately, which caused fury among some of the older journalists who weren't on Twitter. They were looking at Rio Ferdinand and thinking: "Boom! There's my story, write that and go for a drink", but because it was out on Twitter it was no longer a story."*

As we'll see in this chapter, Twitter has even more uses for sports journalists including audience interaction to inform and feed back on work, driving audiences to their work, increasing their audience by establishing a profile or 'brand' and, of course, finding news and stories.

Some side effects of Twitter are unexpected, occurring as they do because of basic human interactions and communication. Its original purpose was 'social networking' and it is really through its users' activities that it sometimes appears to take on a life of its own – but its speed and scope can certainly amplify some messages.

This chapter should be useful even if Twitter alters or is even long gone when you read it. Indeed, exciting research in it captures a fascinating moment of change for many top football writers. We'll look at some key challenges for sports journalism, specifically relating to Twitter and football reporting. Some key concepts surrounding this, such as gatekeeping and gate-watching, will be outlined and defined as will Twitter itself. We'll see what academic researchers have to say about these concepts, while journalism professionals give differing opinions, informed by their experience. These include Phil McNulty, the BBC's chief football writer who moved to online journalism after a traditional print background, and several leading national and international football print journalists.

So, this chapter will examine the effect of social media or social networking on sports reporting, by focusing on Twitter and football journalism. Specifically:

- Has Twitter affected the way in which football journalists report the news?
- To what extent is Twitter an essential tool for football journalists?
- How will Twitter affect football journalism in the long-term?

What is Twitter?

Twitter is a social network and micro-blogging site established in 2006 with its unique difference of all updates being public by default and restricted to 140 characters as status updates (Miller, 2010). Since its launch, its user base has grown exponentially (for example, from 1 million to 17 million visitors in one year, April 2008 – 2009) and is now at over half a billion (500 million) with new accounts signing up at a rate of nearly 1 million a day in a still-accelerating process - and it now has a multitude of purposes (Mediabistro.com, 2012; Johnson, 2009; Taylor, 2011; Shultz and Sheffer, 2010: 227). People use it to keep in touch with friends and promote their work or interests, companies promote their brand, and the news can be delivered and discovered through Twitter.

Twitter users post updates – or tweets –which appear on their followers' Twitter homepages in the form of a timeline. The content of each Twitter user's timeline is determined entirely by them by choosing to follow other users whose tweets will then appear in the timeline, usually in a steady stream of postings. Users add links to the their tweets to spread articles, photos and videos. Twitter is accessible from almost any device with an internet connection, including smartphones with all their advantages of putting the tweeter and receiver immediately in place and moment.

Retweeting is an important feature – if a user believes another user's tweet is particularly interesting they can "retweet" it, which places it in the news feed of all of their own followers – which "transforms it from a simple bit of information to word-of-mouth." (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011:107). Users can simply 'retweet' tweets as they are with one easy click or with their own added comments.

Another key feature of Twitter is the hashtag, which is central to organising the vast amount of information on Twitter (Small, 2011). Key words or phrases are marked with a # symbol - e.g. #MOTD for Match of the Day – which allows users to look at all the tweets on that particular subject in real time, giving an overview of current opinion.

Twitter's speed and brevity mean it is well suited to delivering breaking news as it happens. There are always new developments and stories in football – transfers, suspensions, injuries, and team line-ups and more – and Twitter is an ideal format to disseminate news quickly to the large audience for this information. As Spezia states:

> *"Sports give rise to icons and give people something to believe in, as following a team or player acts as a way of life. As a result, when a service such as Twitter allows fans to track the latest news, scores, or gossip in real time, it can shape the journalism industry in significant ways."* (Spezia, 2011:4-5)

In a previous breakdown of more than 200 million users, around 100 million are active users who log in once a month and 50 million log in once a day (Taylor, 2011). Of these 'active' users, 55% use Twitter on their mobile phones (Richardson, 2011) – largely due to the proliferation of internet-enabled, 3G phones such as the iPhone and Blackberry in recent years (Hutchins, 2011) - highlighting the platform's ability to deliver news to people wherever they are. As of March 2011 an average of 140 million tweets were sent every day (Twitter blog, 2011) though unofficial analysts now set this at 175 million (Mediabistro.com, 2012).

Twitter & Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping is a term for the process by which the media decide what information is and is not delivered to the public. McCombs states that citizens are presented with a 'second-hand reality' – people tend to only know what journalists tell them and little more (2004).

Bruns (2011) argues that while gatekeeping was necessary in the past because of a scarcity of news outlets, the wide array of media platforms and organisations in modern society is rendering the process irrelevant. While in the past there was little scope for direct audience participation in the "newshole" and editors and journalists maintained complete control over the agenda, this is no longer the case.

> *"News organisations may continue to control the news agenda in their own publications, but they are unlikely to drive public debate ever again throughout this complex, multifaceted media environment... journalism has become a mass participation activity."* (Bruns, 2011:132-3)

Richards (2011) claims that newspapers and broadcast journalism cannot compete with the immediacy of Twitter. She says Twitter has negated the need for a "lead-time to prepare and present news to the public" (2011:618). As news organisations have adapted to the use of Twitter, they now tweet breaking news along with a link to the story on their own website, which has the basic details and is updated as the story develops. Also, Twitter removes any entry barrier needed to express opinions publicly, so that:

> *"Twitter has a clear distinction from other websites by doing more than simply connecting people socially; it creates an avenue for people to share their opinions with the world."* (Richards, 2011: 618)

While this used to be the exclusive territory of journalists and those whose words were covered by them, now anyone with a Twitter account can potentially reach a worldwide audience from their computer or mobile phone. Ahmad (2010) writes:

> *"Now, for the first time in recorded history, witnesses to news events are able to post their unmediated testimonies as events unfold, in real time."* (Ahmad, 2010:145-54)

The internet – and Twitter as a result – allows people to shift their media habits from "passive consumption to active engagement" says Hermida (2011:6). Despite this, he states that journalists still see themselves as an "elite group", who "mediate the flow of information to the public" (2011:16).

But, as Hutchins (2011) points out, when a high-profile athlete sends a tweet, they are now addressing the public without the need for a journalist to deliver the message. Communicating instantaneously with fans, friends and observers, bypassing the gatekeeping functions of journalists, publicists and sports officials. (Hutchins, 2011: 237).

Football journalists and Twitter

In practice, how did sports journalists come to use Twitter? Many say they initially resisted but soon saw the potential. Phil McNulty, BBC Sport website chief football writer who worked on regional and national newspapers until going 'online', had "observed it from afar and never thought it was for me". He was encouraged by his then-editor Lewis Wiltshire (who then became head of sport at TwitterUK) who explained its worth as a tool for breaking news and hearing about breaking news, as well as a platform for his own work and the work of others at the BBC. McNulty was still skeptical.

> *"Why would anyone want to sum things up in 140 characters when we could use all our writing skills to paint a bigger picture?" he said. But: "I was converted within about five minutes of creating an account. Everything Lewis said fell right into place."*

Twitter is a 'constant source of news and opinion," says McNulty, with a rising 150,000 followers (July 2012). Initially prolific on Facebook, he admits he has scaled down his use of this.

> *"I use Twitter to break news, pass opinions on football (and the odd word or two on music), link to blogs or stories I have done – and especially to provide instant live coverage of events I attend. Many people follow live sport on Twitter now. The reaction to this is huge. Twitter is excellent for live match reporting and it used extensively by pretty much every reporter I know. It can also be used as part of a running live text commentary on a sporting events, as it is on the BBC."*

Iain Macintosh (The New Paper, The Irish Examiner, Sports Illustrated) also remembers initially not seeing 'the point' of Twitter.

> *"I'm ashamed to say I was one of those people saying things like: 'Why do I want to know what everybody else has had for breakfast?' Failing to realise, of course, that if you're following people who are talking about what they're having for breakfast you're doing it wrong. Eventually enough people said to me there's enough potential here and you can get your name known. To cut a long story short, it just changed everything in a very short space of time."*

Oliver Kay (The Times) initially felt it was "self-indulgent and a bit egotistical" and was persuaded to join Twitter by an American journalist who told him it was going to be "so important long-term" particularly for journalists' profiles and driving traffic. He told Kay he should do it even if he didn't think at first it was worth doing, because "it would ultimately have a great worth in terms of individual profile", which Kay says proved true within two years.

Jeremy Wilson (football news correspondent, The Daily Telegraph) says he had "mixed feelings" about Twitter being all time-consuming and yet 'another thing to be doing', especially when observing early-user colleagues.

> *"People like Henry (The Daily Telegraph) and Daniel Taylor (chief football writer, The Guardian) – you would always see them on their phones doing it all the time and people are like 'do you ever get a few hours off from thinking about football?' But then, anyone with anything about them could see that there were advantages and potential benefits and also that it was becoming a big thing. It becomes a no-brainer really; you have to be involved with it, if everybody is doing it and it's clearly becoming important as a source of stories."*

He says other benefits are communicating his stories, "selling and pushing yourself and your work".

As does Gabrielle Marcotti (world football columnist for The Times, also Corriere dello Sport, Wall Street Journal, Sunday Herald, Melbourne Age) who says he initially found it useful as an immediate news source but increasingly realized its power in promoting his own work whether an article or a radio appearance.

In the case of the BBC, McNulty feels that Twitter benefits his employer by increasing his profile as a reporter and writer, and enabling him to do the same for colleagues by retweeting their stories and encouraging people to follow them.

Jack Pitt-Brooke (The Independent) is uncertain how effective tweets are at driving traffic to his newspaper's website, as Twitter is full of people asking others to "read my stuff!".

> *"I probably read about 3% of things I see on Twitter, if that, and that means that your conversion rate isn't going to be that high. Obviously the more followers you have, the more chance you have of getting read. I think it's not always that successful, as much as you'd like to be."*

But Iain Macintosh (The New Paper, The Irish Examiner, Sports Illustrated) believes Twitter has transformed his career due to its uses as a platform for content. Without it, for example, his articles on English football for Singapore-based The New Paper would pretty much remain read in that country alone. He has over 20,000 followers and consequently anything that he provides a link to on Twitter potentially has an audience of that size - and even bigger due to Twitter's retweet function. He recalls tweeting out a link to one topical blogpost and seeing it pick up 10,000 views within the hour and getting up to 60 audience comments within minutes. As Twitter is an online medium, anything a football journalist posts is not restricted by the geographical limitations that bind the reach of a newspaper. Articles can be read and shared by people anywhere – as Raphael Honigstein (The Guardian, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Stuttgarter Zeitung) says: "It's opened up the world even more for you, because people read your shit all over the world".

The balance can be trickier, however, for print journalism, which needs a fine balance not to 'give away' stories and make its newspaper defunct. Although this could happen previously with the internet, Twitter amplifies the risk. It's an ongoing issue for the tweeting football writers of the national newspapers.

Honigstein says "I think you have to be very careful because you don't want to scoop yourself! That wouldn't make much sense." He often tweets a small "taster" to his work, encouraging his followers to buy the newspaper or read the full article online.

Every Friday The Sun's Charlie Wyett tweets a link to his interview column in the paper, but takes measures to avoid affecting sales of his newspaper, as he explains:

> *"I make a point of posting it late morning to early afternoon. I'm not one of those, and each to their own and I'm not criticising them, that puts it on at 11 o' clock at night because I'm a firm believer in people buying the paper."*

For Daniel Taylor (The Guardian, The Observer) the dilemma tends to be more between a tweet or his digital-first paper's website. "Sometimes if you hear something at 3:58 for example, and it's going to be announced publicly at 4 o'clock, you just think "I haven't got time to write 500 words for the website", so you announce it (on Twitter)". So it is, he says, that

> *"quite often good stories are broken on Twitter. If you follow the right people, there are a lot of foreign journalists, decent people to follow. It's always interesting and useful to monitor what they're saying – for example a Portuguese journalist might tweet he's heard someone from Manchester United is at a game in Portugal, you might not have known that otherwise."*

As a consequence of the speed with which tweets are sent and received, news has become more immediate and football writers have had to adapt their print content accordingly. Daniel Taylor said: "It has changed the world we live in, in terms of newspapers, everything's so immediate now." But Twitter is just the fastest of the methods pressurizing print news, he says:

> *"If you write a match report on a game on Saturday at 3 o clock Monday's paper, it can look horrendously out of date. It's already old news by Monday because everyone knows via Twitter or the internet, or Match of the Day later on what a good goal you may have seen or something. So you have to always be always trying to throw things forward."*

The Daily Telegraph's Jeremy Wilson believes that Twitter is particularly well suited to reporting on football news because fans are so eager to learn any new information about the team that they follow. Some stories won't make it into space-restricted newspapers (and even online stories) but are well suited to Twitter:

> *"There's certain stories that you might know - like the dates of Arsenal's pre-season games. If I offered that as a story for my paper there would be more important things to put in, but if I tweeted that on Twitter that's of huge interest to thousands of people out there – that's their team, it might affect when they have their holiday that summer."* (Wilson, 2012.)

Wyett says it's all about finding the balance:

> *"As a journalist you want to use colour to tell the readers something they didn't know from a match, be it body language between the manager and a player, maybe some of the chants from the fans, the banners in the stadium. All sorts of things - things that they wouldn't know. Now, there's a fine line between putting that on Twitter and saving it for your article. If you put everything on Twitter, who's going to read your article the next day? There is a balance, and I'm all for saving stuff for the paper."*

Meanwhile chief football correspondent Oliver Kay at The Times (which has a paywall) argued that stories being placed on newspaper websites the night before publication was more damaging to the industry than Twitter.

> *"I think the newspaper industry as a whole does itself no favours by putting things out at 11 o clock at night for free, I find it very self-defeating. I think that is far more of a threat to newspapers than Twitter is."*

Twitter's impact on the relationship between journalists and footballers

The general consensus amongst the journalists interviewed was that the relationship between footballers and the media has deteriorated in recent years for a number of reasons. The Guardian's chief football writer Daniel Taylor argued that modern footballers are now financially rewarded so abundantly that they do not require newspaper interviews to boost their own profile and as a result "feel like they don't need the newspapers anymore".

Iain Macintosh suggested the misrepresentation of footballers by the media - a frequent occurrence in his opinion - was another contributing factor.

> *"The thing players hate when they talk to some journalists is that certain things they say may be twisted out of context and thrown together with a different headline and opening paragraph to make them look really, really bad."*

According to The Sun's Charlie Wyett the relationship was much more affable ten years ago. He describes it as such:

> *"You'd just be able to ring players and have a chat... I'd probably have eight or nine numbers from the Tottenham team, four of five from the Arsenal team... now it's very different and not for the better."*

Football clubs want complete control over all media coverage focusing on the club and its players, he says, and it is increasingly difficult for journalists to secure interviews with footballers. Taylor said:

> *"It's very hard to get interviews out of footballers... you're looking at maybe one a season at a top club – a proper interview, sitting down and having a good 45 minutes to an hour with them."*

Wyett notes the irony in political journalists having more access to the people tasked with running the country than football journalists do with the footballers they report on.

With Twitter and footballers speaking directly to their audience, there is a removal of the journalists' gatekeeping role as previously discussed – and Jack Pitt-Brooke feels when players use Twitter to reveal news and their opinions it "removes journalists from the equation" - but paradoxically for the journalists there are also benefits.

Jeremy Wilson believes Twitter allows journalists to circumnavigate the bureaucracy that would otherwise be required for a journalist to get in contact with a footballer. He said: "this whole industry of press officers, sponsors, agents has created a buffer in between players and journalists a lot of the time. With Twitter, that barrier disappears".

He added: "It's amazing how many footballers, if you directly deal with them, are happy to deal with you back".

Phil McNulty says it varies but agrees:

> *"Manchester United's Rio Ferdinand is very active on Twitter and prepared to interact with journalists. I have contact with players through Twitter, such as Everton captain Phil Neville, and as a single example I once set up an interview with West Ham's chairman. I contacted him via Twitter and we set it all up. I've also had instant responses to questions from the likes of England coach Gary Neville so it can really work for a journalist."*

While Twitter may give footballers an unmediated outlet, Gabriele Marcotti and Oliver Kay believed that the overwhelming majority of what they tweet is not newsworthy – "99% of what they tweet is completely anodyne," says Marcotti. However Kay also said that if footballers want something to appear in the media, they were still more likely to talk to a journalist than write a tweet although Wilson suggests footballers often feel more comfortable tweeting their thoughts, as opposed to talking to a journalist and appear unguarded in some tweets. "On Twitter it's quite emotional and reactive to things, it's quite surprising what people say – it's provided a whole stream of stories."

And McNulty believes it has been a "force for good" in improving direct contact between journalists and players. "In fact it is one of the few remaining ways of making direct contact," he says.

Some footballers have used Twitter to correct what they say are erroneous newspaper stories. Taylor (and others) believe this has made football journalists more accountable and forced them to be even more rigorous in their fact checking before submitting a story:

> *"If I was writing a transfer story about Rio Ferdinand, I would want to make sure that it was absolutely 100% nailed on before writing it, rather than have him tell two million people that I've just written a load of shit."*

And Wilson feels that for players who regularly tweet - "it gives them a more human face" – and they are giving a clearer sense of their personalities than if mediated through press officers with some "coming across amazingly well" and even transforming previous perceptions.

Twitter's impact on the relationship between football journalists and their audience

Equally Twitter provides an element of instant accountability in terms of the audience too. However when Bruns (2011) refers to the ability of the audience to feed back to the journalist, he doesn't make mention of problem of unmitigated abuse which has caused some journalists and footballers to leave Twitter.

Twitter provides an easy means for readers to provide feedback on the articles they read as the medium makes users are so accessible, as already shown by Macintosh's example. And he will use his Twitter audience to inform his work:

> *"It's very difficult to say anything even slightly contentious about big clubs, because you vanish underneath an avalanche of abuse, but that's important as well. You get so many sides of the argument. If I've got a difficult article to write I'll often start talking about it on Twitter, just to see the different sides of the debate."*

Raphael Honigstein said people have less of an inhibition to contact people they don't know on Twitter as opposed to via email or other means of communication.

Charlie Wyett enjoys the interaction and believes that it has had a positive effect on the relationship between football journalists and their readers. He said:

> *"I've always been open to what people have to say, whether in a restaurant or a pub or my friends, and this is an extension of that."*

Honigstein believes the quality of debate on Twitter was generally high and Oliver Kay felt that the open dialogue between journalists and those who view their work has fostered a better relationship.

> *"Sometimes when you've got the opportunity to explain things a little more it helps build up a little more trust and a*

better relationship between journalists and the reader."

Football fans are very passionate about the team they support and as a result many struggle to read articles objectively, in the opinions of Jeremy Wilson and Jack Pitt-Brooke. Wilson said: "someone will say one thing and someone will have a completely different view and that's all just part of football really."

Daniel Taylor said: "It's very hard now to make comments and opinions as I once could because you do get abused and it does become a bit relentless" Wilson did feel there was an air of predictability about people abusing journalists online: "Twitter allows anyone to say anything doesn't it? So it's pretty inevitable that you're going to get people on there saying stupid things. I don't see that as that big a deal".

Phil McNulty says it's been the catalyst for a closer relationship with readers, although this inevitably can be good and bad.

"There are those who respect you are trying to inform them and I am happy to cultivate a relationship with them but sadly there are others who just wish to deliver abuse - but you can block those. I have now formed contacts with some readers on Twitter who have actually proved to be quite reliable sources of information, but you have to trust your judgement very carefully on that. The capacity to make yourself look foolish is great."

All those interviewed were aware of the professional limitations on what they might tweet, whether media law or practice-based. "If you are working on a story and someone pays you for that you cannot reveal the information before it's been printed," says Honigstein, who also thinks "every single time, very hard" about what reactions a tweet might get. " As Wyett says: " I treat it as though my editor is reading it."
Honigstein , like others, has experienced the almost intangible effect of Twitter in making contacts:

"I think the beauty of Twitter is also that it's almost a third thing – it's definitely not your email address, it's not your Facebook account, it's almost like a public profile and I think

> *there is less of an inhibition to get in touch – and people expect that you will respond. If I was to read a writer I respect somewhere I wouldn't think of writing him an email, but if he's on Twitter I find myself making points to people I don't know. Then there's a really interesting phenomenon of actually getting to know these people and I've met so many people, colleagues, but also people from related industries through Twitter it's unbelievable. I can say that every single one so far has been absolutely brilliant. My non-professional life is much richer as a consequence."*

So how essential is Twitter for print football journalists?

Those interviewed all agree football journalists should be monitoring Twitter, though vary on how essential it is for the journalists to tweet themselves.

Honigstein said: "I can't think how I would live without it actually. There are people who resisted for a long time – colleagues of mine – but they all see the light". Macintosh said that Twitter, along with a keyboard, was one of his most essential tools.

Marcotti and Taylor did not feel it was perhaps essential for football journalists to actively tweet themselves – both mentioned the Daily Mail's Martin Samuel as an example of an excellent football writer ("for my money, the best football journalist in England," says Marcotti) who does not use Twitter. However, as they also shared the belief that it was important to keep an eye on Twitter. Taylor said: "I think it is essential, not to tweet, but to monitor it, because you get so much breaking news".

Oliver Kay feels Twitter had become an important part of a football journalist's armoury because of the increased profile that it can give to football journalists. He said: "If you can have more of a presence online then it's clearly a good thing, and I think Twitter is a real guaranteed way of having that presence online".

Iain Macintosh agrees:

> *"It puts you in a very strong position for attracting more freelance work, because people will say not only can this person write - hopefully – but also this person can bring eyeballs to the website. If you get Gabriele Marcotti to write for a website you're not just getting him, you're getting (an audience of)*

> *100,000 followers. So, it makes you more useful in an industry that is contracting all the time."*

Which is something Raphael Honigstein has found when working on a TV project. "The fact that I had 40,000 followers made it a much more believable proposition, it allowed the person who's making it to say: "we want to do something with Raphael Honigstein, and by the way he's got 40,000 followers."

There are football journalists who continue to be successful without using Twitter, although Wilson said: "I would say it's possible to still be very good without using it, but I think you can be even better if you do use it".

And Phil McNulty firmly believes:

> *I don't think there is any turning back now. Twitter is here as an important tool reporting live in matches, events and also breaking stories. I think more and more journalists will use this immediate form of reporting."*

Gabriele Marcotti believed that Twitter could have a "democratising" effect on football journalism, resulting in a wider variety of content (Marcotti, personal interview, 24 April 2012). He used Michael Cox, creator of the football tactics website Zonal Marking, as an example. Cox analyses matches from a tactical point of view and Marcotti knew that mainstream media outlets and newspapers were not interested in this subject from his own experiences. Cox's website proved to be successful and Twitter played a significant role in attracting his readership.

> *"It's a voice that would not otherwise have been heard prior to the web obviously, but really prior to Twitter because it's just so easy to disseminate stuff like this via Twitter... I think that's really the main way it can impact football journalism going forward. Media organisations necessarily have to be cognisant of trends and changes, and hopefully people will be a little bit more willing to experiment and do things differently going forward."*

In Honigstein's opinion, the faster news cycle that Twitter has helped to perpetuate has increased people's desire to learn new information about the background to the stories they read, and as a result it provides real benefits to writers of comment pieces and features.

> *"If you have a tool that breaks the news even quicker and manages to inform people better, then the effect in my view is not that they want to hear less, but they actually want to hear more. You'll get a lot of feeds about something and then you still have a question – why?"*

Honigstein also revealed that he had spoken to employees of Twitter about communication with German football clubs. He asked them about the company's plans to make the company profitable in the future, and while they did not provide details, Honigstein believes writers with a large following will want a share of the revenue that Twitter generates – perhaps through adverts running alongside a user's news feed.

Kay believed the ability to develop an online profile and to promote an individual journalist as their own brand was one of the major benefits Twitter provided for football writers. If Twitter users with large followings do eventually receive financial reward for their use of the service, this will only become more important.

But back to the basics of reporting, Phil McNulty has no doubts over Twitter's value:

> *"Twitter is essential as a tool to break news, hear breaking news and is now essential for newsgathering. Plenty of journalists remain sniffy about it, and I can understand this to an extent because it has its dangers, but I firmly believe journalists should be on Twitter and more will be in the years to come."*

As we've seen in this chapter, there is no doubt that social media is influencing aspects of sports journalism. As the example of Twitter shows, an increasing number of stories are rising from the Twittersphere itself and journalists adept in the medium are likely to have the advantage at spotting them and developing them. But finding news and stories is only one use, as our subjects have explained. Sports journalists are using Twitter and other social media to harness audience interaction to inform and feed back on work, drive audiences to their work, increase their audience by establishing a profile or 'brand' and, of course, network. There are some pitfalls to be avoided, and downsides to be accepted, but the general view – albeit a slightly surprised one

– is that Twitter is a positive tool.

Notes

Many of the personal interviews were obtained in the course of research by Daniel Anwar for the purposes of his Bournemouth University BA (Hons) Multimedia Journalism degree dissertation.

Challenging Questions

- How has Twitter affected the way in which football journalists report the news?
- How do football journalists use Twitter as a platform for their own content?
- How has Twitter affected the relationship between footballers and the media?
- How has Twitter affected the relationship between football journalists and their readers?
- To what extent is Twitter an essential tool for football journalists?
- How will Twitter affect football journalism in the long-term?

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19 Journalism as a Profession: Careers and Expectations

Vanessa Edwards

""The journalist has a position that is all his own. He alone has the privilege of moulding the opinion, touching the hearts and appealing to the reason of hundreds of thousands every day. Here is the most fascinating of all professions."

Joseph Pulitzer,
The North American Review (1904)

Ask most people to describe what journalists do and there's generally a swift reply – they report the news. Of course, the truth has never been as simple as that. Journalists work in a wide variety of areas from writing and filmmaking to archiving and data analysis and this has always been the case. From the days of the first printing presses; through the introduction of mass distribution networks; to the first computers; journalism has always been a profession in flux.

Over the last decade however, journalism practice has undergone an unprecedented revolution and scrutiny of such intensity, that many new questions are being asked, not only about the future of the profession, but about the roles and careers of working journalists. For journalists and employers alike, there are two central issues. Firstly, whether new forms of journalism can, or ever will, raise enough revenue to allow for the quality and quantity of professional work seen in the past. Secondly what should (and can) be the roles and responsibilities of professional journalists in the new media world?

When it comes to examining the financial future of professional journalism, many of the predictions are bleak. In his book "The Big Switch: Rewiring the World from Edison to Google" Nicholas Carr (2008, Pg 156) quotes former New York

Times Executive Martin Nisenholtz saying: "How do we create high quality content in a world where advertisers want to pay by the click, and consumers don't want to pay at all?" Carr then adds his own pessimistic conclusion: "The answer may turn out to be equally simple: We don't."

In the wake of the phone hacking scandal of 2011 and other crises of trust in journalism, the criticism of the profession and those involved in it has been vociferous and widespread, Journalists have been accused (with considerable justification) of fundamental failings their in ethical and professional standards. Professor of Journalism at New York University, Jay Rosen (2011) has said: "Things are out of alignment. Journalists are identifying with the wrong people. Therefore the kind of work they are doing is not as useful as we need it to be." Former Daily Star Editor Brian Hitchen (2012) summarised much of the outrage, when he told the trade publication, Press Gazette he was "appalled, angry and disgusted" by the phone hacking affair, which he said was "another example of poor journalism today".

While such debate about the role and purpose of modern journalism is undoubtedly critical at such a time, this chapter seeks to investigate the implications of the crisis at a more fundamental level. It looks specifically at the lives and working conditions of journalists today and considers the possible future awaiting those young people hoping to enter the profession.

According to data from the Higher Education Statistics Authority, in 2010-11 there were 11,840 students studying journalism in the UK at either undergraduate or postgraduate level. There are many hundreds more studying at further education and private colleges. Each of them hope to join a profession that many would argue is in turmoil. So when these young people finish their training, this chapter asks:

- Are there enough rewarding jobs for journalists entering the profession?
- What can they expect their working lives to be like?
- Why are significant numbers of working journalists apparently disenchanted with their careers?
- And can such a rapidly changing industry offer the financial and personal development needed to provide lifelong professional development?

Death by a thousand cuts?

The journalism trade press is full of stories of job cuts. Among working journalists it has become a commonplace belief that jobs are disappearing and career opportunities shrinking at a rate unrivalled in other workplaces, but does the evidence bear out that conviction? In 2010 researchers from international public relations company Burson-Marsteller spoke to a hundred and fifteen journalists from across Europe, the Middle East and Africa. 81% of those interviewed said they were experiencing cost-cutting measures. Of those, nearly a quarter said the spending reductions would be implemented as job cuts, while just short of a third said they'd be cutting freelance budgets. The subsequent report makes depressing reading;

> *"A common thread across the region, like the US, is the enormous number of journalists being laid off. All across the region editorial departments are downsizing significantly in response to the economic crisis and the intense competition in the media sector. Even for journalists lucky enough to be in full-time employment, their lot is not a happy one; job uncertainty, vastly increased workloads, demands for multi-platform content; less editorial space to put that content into and (often) moves to "dumb down" the content and editorial agendas in general."* (Burson-Marsteller, 2010, Pg 3)

This may well be true, but are these cuts any worse than those for other professions? In its most recent "Employee Outlook" survey of general employment, the Chartered Institute for Personnel Development found that around a third of working people questioned said their employers were cutting jobs. That figure is higher than the 25% in the Burson-Marsteller survey and for staff working in the public sector, the number experiencing job cuts rose dramatically to 57%. These two sets of data aren't strictly comparable as the sampling and methodology are different, but they do give a rough indication that the pressure of job cuts in journalism may well be no worse than it is in many other professions.

One area of employment where journalism is distinct from other industries is the large number of freelance journalists who produce thousands of pages of copy and fill the rotas in dozens of newsrooms. As we have seen in the Burson-Marteller research, many editors have been making cuts by reducing their freelance budgets. There has been much written about the growth of digitally published "citizen journalism" and whether this is directly related to the demise of freelance journalism, but for many commentators, the situation appears more complex. City University Professor of Journalism and former Daily Mirror Editor, Roy Greenslade (2012), has blogged about his belief that many newspaper publishers are using new technology as an excuse to boost their bottom line:

> *"Beware publishers who link announcements about going online with the cutting of journalists' jobs. The digital revolution is not a sensible (or ethical) reason for news providers to reduce the number of staff engaged in journalism. Part of the problem is about appeasing investors."*

The Director of media think-tank Polis, Charlie Beckett (2009) also thinks the situation is far from simple. This is from a blog post:

> *"The problem is not that the work is being done by the public instead of professionals. Although personally I would welcome that if it was the case. I think that the pressure on freelancers is part of a much broader industry trend towards some fundamental restructuring which will has [sic] already seen widespread job losses with more to come."*

Pay and Working Conditions

So while the reasons for cost-cutting may be complex, it is undoubtedly true that there are more journalists chasing fewer jobs. What does this mean for those who are lucky enough to remain in employment? How much can they expect to earn and what will their working conditions be like?

The official graduate careers website "Graduate Prospects" suggests the average salary for all journalists in 2011 was around £24,500, with a top salary after ten years in the business being around £40,000 and a little higher for journalists working in broadcasting and particularly television. In comparison, the current average (median) annual full-time salary in the UK is £26,200 (ONS, 2011). While most journalists would probably argue that salary was not the main reason they entered the profession, the National Union of Journalists claims its members' pay and working conditions are deteriorating dramatically. The organisation's General Secretary is Michelle Stanistreet:

> *"A long-hours culture and stress is rife in our industry. Too many newspapers and website services are being run on goodwill, with journalists working very long hours. This is simply unacceptable. Cuts to editorial posts and recruitment freezes mean that many are working longer and longer hours. We are all prepared to go the extra mile when required, but members are routinely covering for their former colleagues and working excessive hours."* (Email to author, 16th April 2012)

This may well be true, but once again are these working conditions any worse than those of in other industries in these tough economic times? The CIPD found that fewer than half of those employees surveyed, across the general working population, were satisfied with their jobs and more than a third said they were under excessive pressure at least once a week. Clearly journalists are not the only workers who claim to be dissatisfied and over-worked.

In addition, considerable numbers of media organisations would argue that they invest time and money to improve the experiences of their employees. According to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (Emails to author, various dates June – July 2012), around forty employers connected with, or working within, the media are accredited by its "Investors in People" staff management kitemark programme. These include some very large players, such as Channel Four, the BBC and Real Radio.

Stories from the Newsroom

Although figures tell part of the story, it's journalists themselves who can reveal the most about their working lives.

In an attempt to find out more about their personal experiences the author of this chapter conducted a small and very unscientific study. A short questionnaire was promoted via professional contacts and the website "www.journalism.co.uk".

Contributors were anonymous and self-selecting and since the survey drew only forty-eight respondents it would not be wise to draw any broad conclusions. With that caveat, it was interesting to note that the numbers of journalists claiming to have had good and bad working experiences were roughly equal. More than 44% of journalists who took part said they found their jobs enjoyable, while around the same number said their roles were unrewarding. Perhaps more enlightening though, were the additional comments of those who were unhappy in their jobs:

> *"The cuts make me feel very unsecure [sic] about a future in journalism. The way that long-serving employees were treated also shows what little respect the multi-national corporations show their staff." Another replied: "Although changes have not led to a decrease in my salary, I have not received the two pay rises I should have in my first year of work."*

One wrote simply that their current job had given them depression.

Of course such comments should come with a number of health warnings, not least that there is a natural tendency for people to use such an anonymous survey to gripe. What is interesting though is the dissonance between the intensity of these comments and the general satisfaction expressed by large numbers of the respondents. It's a pattern that many editors and newsroom managers will recognise. Most newsrooms have a small but very noisy coterie of journalists whose dissatisfied voices can be heard regularly and frequently above the general hubbub of workplace debate.

One theory to explain the most extreme views is that the complainers might be older journalists who have experienced a longer and more sustained period of change. Although there were not enough respondents to this writer's survey provide accurate statistical analysis, additional interviews conducted for this chapter suggest age and career length might be a factor. Former Chief Sub Editor Paul Stevens decided to take redundancy from the Bournemouth Echo a few years ago. He's now retraining as a teacher and works at a local radio station. Like many print journalists of his generation, Paul built his much of his career within the same newspaper group and saw the transformation of his workplace.

> *"Those places are a lot softer now. I can't imagine the newsroom I worked in to start with being replicated now. The technology didn't change that. It was just something that happened. I just think it was something that happened across society. All workplaces changed and newspapers are no different. Now they just look like banks and they're very quiet. The thing I miss really …there was a lot more pressure. We were used to working much harder and more intensely."*
> (Interview with author, 2011)

In his Press Gazette interview, former Daily Star Editor Brian Hitchen (2012) was far more damning about the lives of those working in modern newsrooms, saying he felt "sorry for journalists today" likening them to "battery hens sipping Evian water and eating half-frozen sandwiches from the vending machine".

Many young journalists however are comfortable with a working environment which is arguably greatly improved for being more open, fairer and less aggressive. They also accept more easily the constant technological and economic change which has unsettled many of their older counterparts. Recent graduate Lee Sibley secured his first job as a staff writer at a major magazine publisher. Within six months of starting work he was delighted to be called into the editor's office and offered a pay rise. Just a few weeks later he was under threat of redundancy. He is sanguine about the likelihood of it happening again:

> *"When it comes to journalism it is a bit 'new school' versus 'old school'. The new school, that's me, we're not afraid of innovation. It doesn't matter what job I'll be in, in 20 years time. I actually know a lot of people who've left long-term jobs to go freelance. In a strange way, in a job you don't have security, but if you're your own boss – if you don't get paid it's your problem. Working for yourself gives you some security. People my age are used to not living in the comfort zone. They want to get out and see the world. It's not really an issue for us."* (Interview with author, 2012)

For younger and older journalists alike, the reality is that journalism has always been a challenging career. While new entrants may dream of high-profile reporting or presenting roles, many journalism jobs have always been somewhat repetitive and unrewarding. In small news organisations there are naturally relatively few opportunities for promotion and journalists have been forced to move from job to job to climb the career ladder. The digital revolution and economic constraints have made the opportunities fewer, yet the evidence suggests that despite these limitations, large numbers of journalists of all ages remain perfectly happy and satisfied in their jobs.

It's all about quality not quantity

It might be asked then whether some other aspect of the lives of working journalists might account for those strident voices complaining about their careers and working conditions. A significant factor that affects any workers' job satisfaction is the confidence they have in the quality of the product or service they are providing. This issue was raised very clearly by journalists who replied to the survey for this chapter. One respondent wrote: "I do not consider many of the tasks I now do to be journalism." Another said: "Whenever the newsdesk receives a press release, no matter how small or insignificant, it 'must be webbed immediately, which means time is often taken away from writing and researching proper stories." It's a concern that former newspaper journalist Paul Stevens also recognises:

> *"As a layout sub for most of my life I can see the changes are going to affect how the papers look. They're going to be less creative. They're already less creative, because they have less well-paid, less experienced people producing them. I don't think I'm being disrespectful to the people who took mine and my colleagues' jobs. The readers know when something's good and isn't good. You can see it. There's sloppy writing and spelling. It isn't just quite as dynamic. It doesn't leap off the page at you in quite the way it used to."* (Interview with author, 2011)

Paul, like many older, more experienced journalists partly blames their managers' recruitment policies for a perceived drop in the quality of their publications. In the Burson-Marsteller survey, 40% of the journalists interviewed said they believe the employment of less experienced, lower salaried journalists is the biggest threat to high quality journalism today.

Alongside the concern that their work is not as good as it should be, many journalists are being forced to ask themselves whether in a wider sense they are falling short of the role which they should be playing in society. In their book "The Elements of Journalism" Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenthal (2007, Pg 53), remind us "People who gather news are not like other employees. They have a social obligation that can actually override their employers' immediate interests at times, and yet this obligation is the source of their employers' success". For many journalists, such beliefs are central to their perception of their jobs and their working lives. Former local newspaper journalist Paul Stevens explains:

> *"I liked reporting on my community. It did have that symbiotic relationship. People expected their local paper to stick up for them when the chips were down."* (Interview with author, 2011)

It may be the difference between these wider professional expectations and the reality of the working world that provides the biggest clue to the arguably disproportionate job dissatisfaction experienced by some working journalists.

Managing expectations in the changing newsroom

Harold Shaver (1978), an Assistant Professor at Kansas State University published research which involved sending a questionnaire to more than four hundred relatively recent journalism and advertising graduates. Respondents were asked what had been satisfying and dissatisfying about each of their jobs since graduation.

Although Shaver admitted there were some flaws in the research, it suggests that in most respects journalists evaluate job satisfaction using the same criteria as other employees; low salary being the most important specific complaint. One significant difference for journalists though, was the importance they placed on the possibility of personal development and promotion. Shaver suggests this might be due to the weight given to professionalism in journalism training; something that may not be realistic in any busy news environment. "The importance of growth in the job is probably because journalism graduates are conscious of and conscientious about professionalism".

So it could be argued that journalists, who are by their nature high achievers with a heightened scepticism about the world, leave their training instilled with strong ethical standards and high expectations. Then faced with the reality of the workplace, some can become very rapidly disillusioned. Shaver suggests that two stakeholders should shoulder some responsibility for this. He argues it's up to employers to do more to foster happy satisfied staff, but suggests journalism educators should also consider spending more time giving students realistic expectations of the working lives ahead:

> *"If journalism graduates went into their first jobs aware of the reactions many people have to their own first jobs, the journalism graduates might be less likely to become quickly disenchanted and to change jobs."* (Shaver 1978, pg 61)

Undoubtedly many journalism educators, former journalists themselves, would argue they do their utmost to give their students realistic expectations. It should be also be noted that young people aren't always inclined to take advice, however useful. Indeed, like many graduate journalists, Lee Sibley would acknowledge that in the excitement of securing a first job, realism can easily be overlooked.

> *"I was so excited to get this job, that before I started; I expected to forget that I was working and that my pay packet would be a side issue. That hasn't happened."* (Interview with author, 2012)

A career for life?

If young people enter the industry with realistic expectations and solid skills it seems quite possible that they can still secure an enjoyable and rewarding first job, but what opportunities are there to build a long-term career and earn enough money to buy a home and support a family?

In many cases, young graduates' natural familiarity with technology, newly-acquired multimedia skills and insight into the requirements of young consumers can make them highly valued employees. If they keep those skills updated, employers may well feel it worthwhile to reward them and support their personal development.

The spread of new media also offers young journalists the opportunity to bypass traditional career paths by starting their own businesses. Not only does this mean such entrepreneurial journalists can become employers of the future, but it arguably opens up more opportunities and widens participation in the profession. The NUJ's Michelle Stanistreet (Email to author, 16th April 2012) describes a recent encounter with a young reporter:

> *"At a recent NUJ event, Hannah Pool, a freelance journalist who worked at the Guardian for fourteen years, said the rise of new media had opened up exciting opportunities for young black and ethnic minority would-be journalists. She said, 'One of the best things about modern technology is how it is breaking down the old boys' club, brick by brick, Tweet by Tweet. It used to be that you had to have a mum or dad in the business to get your first by-line, now you can just set up a blog'."*

While many focus on the opportunities offered by new media, there is a small, but persistent chorus of voices arguing that the print media, although undergoing dramatic change, will continue and thrive. The Director of the Society of Editors, Bob Satchwell (2012) has written passionately on this subject in the book "What do we mean by local?" In a version reprinted in former newspaper editor Roy Greenslade's blog he writes:

> *"There is a future and it may not be just online. The World Wide Web is an ancient old hat; mobile on phones and tablets are the present. Someone is already working on next week and next month and we need to keep up with them."*
>
> *"We need trained communicators to ensure readers, viewers, listeners, surfers and, above all, editors know what is coming. The job cannot be left to the techies in the IT department. It's a job for journalists who will see the possibilities for themselves and for their audiences."* (2012)

The NUJ's Michelle Stanistreet believes that whatever future they are expecting, the most important challenge for young journalists it to ensure they're at the forefront of discussions about future of the industry; shaping their jobs and making sure employers are forced to listen to their voices.

"Young journalists need to be part of the debate as the industry finds itself in transition. That is why journalists, particularly in the digital age, should be able to act collectively and, critically, to stand up for journalistic principles and ethics, wherever the workplace and whatever the platform." (Email to author, 16th April 2012)

In conclusion

Journalism is a unique profession, which despite the current turmoil, still offers a fascinating and exciting career for many bright young people. There will be those however who graduate, trained to the very highest ethical and professional standards, only to discover the money and time are not available to allow them to fulfil those ambitions. This disappointment may well be exacerbated by the pressures from a wider public debate, which is placing journalism under intense scrutiny and demanding ever higher professional standards, in an environment where that may be neither possible nor expected by employers. It's an inconsistency that offers challenges not only to working journalists, but to those who manage them and those who train them. There is a danger that some young graduates, who join the profession with the very best skills and intentions, may also be those who are also become most disenchanted and most tempted to leave.

"That doesn't mean though, that a journalistic training is worthless; far from it . Even though he has now left the newsroom, Paul Stevens has no regrets: "I wouldn't change a single minute of it. I'm still a professional journalist. I'm just not being paid to be a journalist. I've gone into radio now. I've found that my soft journalism skills are the best thing that I could have brought with me. I'm doing a commercial radio breakfast show now. I wouldn't be doing the job I'm doing now if I hadn't brought those skills with me."
(Interview with author, 2011)

And new journalist Lee Sibley remains optimistic. He believes that in whatever form, employers will always want his skills:

"Actually I think the media at large is quite future-friendly. Journalists have been around for a long time and I think

they'll continue to be here. I don't think that's an issue. If people hear about something it needs to be qualified, not just gossip from Mildred next door. If it's qualified, it has context and is unbiased. That need will always be there." (Interview with author, 2012)

Challenging Questions

- Compare and contrast the working lives of journalists in the 1970s and the first decade of the 21st century. How were they trained? Where did they work? What technology did they use? In which decade would you most like to work?

- Write a profile of a journalist from the past or present you particularly admire. Consider what professional values this journalist brought/brings to their work; how they approach their assignments and what qualities in their work you find of particular interest.

- According to the former editor of the Daily Star, modern journalists are like "battery hens sipping Evian water and eating half-frozen sandwiches from the vending machine". Can this description of a modern newsroom be justified?

- Watch the 1976 film "All the President's Men" and the 2003 BBC television series "State of Play". Compare and contrast how these classic productions portray the working lives of journalists, their personal ethics and their relationships with their audience.

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20 Entrepreneurial Journalism:

The Life of the Freelance

Mary Evans

"I was a writer for 40 years. Now I'm a content provider. And content is free."

P J O'Rourke (2012)

"If there are any students out there thinking of careers in journalism, think again. My advice is to go into accounting and specialise in the administration of companies that have gone bust."

Toby Young (2009)

Oxford Dictionaries.com proffers two possible definitions for the word 'freelance':

1. *adjective: self-employed and hired to work for different companies on particular assignments*

or:

2. *noun, historical: a medieval mercenary.*

Anyone who has ever tried to earn a living as a freelance journalist will be quick to tell you which is the more pertinent description.

The challenge facing freelance journalism has never been more pronounced: there isn't enough work to go around. With ever-growing numbers of freelancers – some through choice, more through necessity – there is a surfeit of journalists willing to supply in a market that doesn't have the demand. As publishing budgets are squeezed, publications are cutting the luxury that freelancers have become. Freelancers across all genres are accepting more work for less money and professionals whose careers have always relied on the ability to say 'yes' can simply no longer afford to say 'no'.

But in a world where the written word proliferates like never before, there will always exist a need for highly - skilled writers – and freelancers will forever be an essential part of an industry that relies on people to power it. So the challenges for any freelancer are simple: where is the work, where is the money and where is the future? The answers may be rather harder to find, but this chapter will explore the industry from the perspective of freelancers and those who would employ them, as well as taking an overview of a sector both besieged by – and finding salvation within – advances in new media.

The freelancers' perspective

Over his 20-year journalism career, media consultant Adrian MacLeod has observed the industry from every perspective. A technical journalist since 1990, Adrian established his own technical magazine, Approval, in 1995. He now advises print and digital publications through his website writethinking.co.uk, 'helping them to improve what they call content, but I like to call writing'. His assessment of the current outlook for freelancers paints a gloomy picture.

> *"The commercial side of publishing has had a massive impact on staff writers and freelancers. Everyone is expected to do more for less,' he says. 'It's always been difficult as a freelancer to get the work, very difficult to get paid and you seem to spend a horribly small proportion of your time actually writing. And that's got a lot worse."*

Blogger fleetstreetfox has been freelancing for nearly 20 years and believes it has always been a tough industry:

> *"Freelance-wise there aren't many changes. It's just as hard as ever it was, except, as newspapers have had to make cutbacks, the market's a little more crowded. Quite a few people though leave staff jobs and abandon journalism altogether, so it's not impossible. I think the money available is probably roughly the same, i.e. dreadful."*

Sally Brockway has enjoyed a highly successful freelance career for two decades, writing for myriad publications including The Sun, The Mirror, What's on TV, Woman's Own, Essentials, Soaplife and Woman. Her professional life has often suffered the inevitable highs and lows of a freelancer, but the present climate is a whole new ball game.

> *"It's never been this bad. All the work has gone in-house now and it's becoming impossible to get in anywhere. You always keep several irons in the fire and of course jobs come and go. But at the moment it's awful. I always used to be able to drum up some work in a dry spell by pitching features or doing some shifts. But so many places are just not taking work from freelancers. I once earned £97K a year, a long time ago. Those days are long gone. Now if I earn half of that, I'm happy. I'd never recommend anyone to go into freelance journalism anymore."*

It's easy to see why print media is watching the pennies. Even the most superficial analysis of circulation tells a sorry tale. According to the ABCs (Audit Bureau of Circulations) to March 2012, every national newspaper reports a drop in year-on-year circulation, from -4.28% at Daily Mail to -44.67% at The Independent – although all have seen significant year-on-year growth in their digital editions (Newspaper ABCs, March 2012). The magazine industry is holding up better with an overall average drop per publication of -1.4% (Professional Publishers Association, March 2012), but the figures vary dramatically from sector to sector. The men's mag market is in crisis (Loaded -30.2%; FHM -20.6%; Zoo -20.4%) while Private Eye has enjoyed 10% growth in the past year (Magazine ABCs, February 2012).

Ian Abbott, editor of TV Times magazine, confirms every freelancer's suspicion:

> *"I would say we use less than half the amount of freelancers compared to the good old days,' he says. 'We do a lot more in-house with our staff because it's cheaper. For slightly more than the cost of one feature commission, I can get someone to come in for a whole week and write four or five features, so*

we tend now to use freelancers on a day basis."

And there's the rub – a feature that would earn a freelancer several hundred pounds in a few hours is being replaced with a day's work for less than half as much – burdened with travel and childcare costs, but without the tax breaks that self-employed freelancers enjoy. And that's for those fortunate enough to get the shifts. It is no surprise then that the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has observed many people leaving the profession. 'While many people are forced to go freelance through redundancy, a lot are finding that they can't make ends meet and are heading away from journalism for greener pastures,' says NUJ organiser John Turner.

The advantages of youth

But the aspirant journalist need not lose heart altogether. While many publications are relying solely on tried and tested freelancers, many are opting for the younger – and cheaper – journalists who enter the profession at its grass roots. Ian Abbot says that at TV Times:

> *"We tend to go for younger people because then we can train them up how we want to. We don't really need hard-bitten news hacks, who are fed up with it all and just want to pay the bills. We'd rather have people who are massively keen. And we can help them to improve. Everyone who works here came in on work experience and then we took them on as a freelancer."*

Work experience remains the key to that crucial break, but it's not without challenges of its own. There are many parables of 'workies' expected to do hours of menial tasks with little or no professional or financial reward. A degree of this is to be expected at the entry-level to any profession, but experienced freelancers are noticing a new phenomenon that is putting even more pressure on a strained industry. 'At the moment, if people can, they will pay you nothing,' says Sally Brockway:

> *"A friend of mine, a medical journalist of 20 years, her freelance work dried up and she thought she'd go for a staff job. Someone offered her £15K a year. This is working 9am – 6pm. They said*

> *that although she was experienced, they could get an intern for that money and train them up, so weren't going to pay her anymore. If publications can get away with it, they will. Why would they pay more if they don't have to?"*

Adrian MacLeod agrees that his generation of freelancers are 'scandalised' by the notion of writing for free, but believes that the canny journalist can turn it to their advantage:

> *"The Huffington Post has some good writers working for free – and other people are trying to do the same thing. But the interesting thing is that the most successful Huffington Post contributors have done quite well out of it. It's a bargain that works for some people – in all this noise, if you're noticed you start getting work. But other people are writing stuff for free and it just gets nowhere. The pressure to work for nothing is just horrible."*

In a cut-throat market where only the fittest will survive, the ethics of personal finances soon come into play. Rates for day shifts have risen significantly below inflation and publications are determined to get as much bang for their buck as possible. Freelancers often find themselves stuck between the rock of being asked to do more than is reasonable for the money and the hard place of knowing there is a queue of people waiting to take the work if they don't. Arguably, freelancers do one another no favours by agreeing to work below an acceptable rate of pay, thereby keeping the rates for the job artificially low. But as Sally Brockway says, principles don't pay the mortgage:

> *"There's not much honour going on here. It's all about making money. And we shouldn't be working for tuppence ha'penny. But if you've got kids to feed and bills to pay and there's nothing else around, you have to take it."*

The way ahead

The onslaught of digital media has certainly done traditional freelancing no great favours, as the sheer volume of free content is doing little to ease the print media purse strings. As P. J. O'Rourke (2012) said 'I was a writer for 40 years. Now I'm a content provider. And content is free.' The fact that anyone can write and publish material instantly online raises questions about why you'd pay someone to do it. But as Adrian MacLeod points out, along with a need for quality content, digital media also creates new opportunities for the entrepreneurial journalist.

There's an interesting merging between blogging and journalism. It has negative effects, but it also has opportunities to be your own brand and be your own publisher. There are a number of freelance journalists whose financial model is totally different. A colleague found his work drying up when his main employers closed down. He could see, almost overnight, his work disappearing. Yet companies were bemoaning the fact that there was nowhere for them to advertise. So he carried on writing exactly the same features, but he set up his own website. He needed four advertisers to break even. He got eight the first year and was up to 13 the second year. It's a model that seems to be working. You only need the courage to do it and you can become an international publishing guru.

So what does the future hold for freelancing – and if it is to survive, what does the modern freelancer need to do to create opportunities? 'I think there will be freelancers, but I don't think there will be as many,' says Ian Abbott:

> *"And they will have to be very good and put a lot of effort into it. The days when you can dip in and out are gone. You need to really be focused. You need to find the stuff no-one else can get. That's what a good freelance is about."*

And for successful freelancer, Sally Brockway:

> *"The most important thing is knowing people and having contacts. So you've really got to have had a staff job so you can get to know people. When I left The Sun I had really good contacts. People have got to like working with you. You can't just phone up and no-one's ever heard of you – there will be 10 other people they know 10 times better."*

'Plug away at it,' says fleetsteetfox:

> *"It's all a race but the difference is that as staff you are a sprinter, but a freelance is more like a marathon runner, and you need to keep all your plates spinning in the air and just plod on*

even if you have three bad weeks when you don't sell anything. A journalist is a journalist is a journalist, and you get stories wherever you can. It takes a journo to spot one, whether you overhear it at the hairdresser's or see it on Twitter."

But Adrian MacLeod believes that freelancers need to move with the times:

Embrace new media. Some journalists use Twitter (among other tools) to create a personal brand. If you keep Tweeting about what you know, what you're researching, who you're interviewing, it acts like a drip feed, keeping you in the consciousness of editors and commissioners without having to be too pushy (or in addition to being too pushy). You can also use it to directly promote what you have written.

Twitter is brilliant for crowd sourcing. If you build a following of people interested in your specialist area, you can ask them what they think, do rough and ready polls, get instant feedback on ideas and angles. Increasingly, editors are looking for these skills in a freelance and, if the editors are also among your followers, they will get continual examples of your social media expertise.

The first thing I do when someone new approaches me is to Google them. So you need to manage how you show up with a blog (with your name in the URL) and listings on Journalisted.com and similar sites. Your Twitter account will also show up. Being right up to date is one of the things expected of a journalist and I find Twitter the easiest way to post new stuff all the time and quickly.

Stage one is to find people who are useful to you and follow them. Try:
http://muckrack.com/
http://www.journalisttweets.com/Europe/UK
http://www.twellow.com/
http://wefollow.com/

Stage two is to get them to follow you. That means Tweeting useful, interesting, vital, funny, human stuff. Getting into conversation with people. Responding to people who communicate with you. Twitter loves openness, authority, scoops, links, heated debates, correct English, and funny cat pictures. Should be a snap for any good journo. It is surprisingly hard work.

> *Allow four to six months of Tweeting and following before expecting to see any real benefit. But if you talk to freelances who have stuck it out, they'll tell you Twitter is invaluable.*

The more the challenges facing freelance journalism change, the more they stay the same. It was ever a tightrope walk of finding work, keeping work and getting paid for work and will ever be thus. People skills, business management and skin like rhino hide remain crucial weapons in the freelance arsenal. But the revolution in how we communicate means that freelancers must find a way to move with the times if they are not to go the way of the dinosaur. With innovation comes opportunity – digital media may threaten some forms of print journalism, but it also creates a whole new world-wide web of opportunities for the savvy freelancer. Or even better, The Savvy Freelancer.com.

Challenging Questions

- 'I was a writer for 40 years. Now I'm a content provider. And content is free' (P J O'Rourke, 2012). What are the differences between a 'writer' and a 'content provider' and how do they affect modern freelancing?
- Should freelancing be better regulated to prevent under-cutting? Or is it every freelance for themselves?
- 'Video killed the radio star' (The Buggles). Has digital journalism killed traditional print media freelancing?
- In a new age of 'citizen journalism' when anyone on the street can publish fact or opinion, what role is there for the freelance journalist?

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Section Three:

Debates and Controversies in Journalism

21 News and free speech

Barry Richards

"All dictatorial systems, secular and religious, have a capacity [..] to move from attacks on their enemies which can be rationally explained to random [..] assaults on the smallest transgressions. It is best to stop them before they get started."[1]

Cohen, (2012)

"It is a critical premise of freedom of speech that we do not honour the dishonourable when we open the public forum to their voices."[2]

Bollinger, (2006)

Freedom of the press

It would take a very long chapter[3] to address the full range of topics around news and 'free speech'. They include issues concerning the principle of a 'free press'. Many people would probably think that a chapter on journalism and free speech would deal primarily with the principle of journalism as the 'fourth estate', according to which journalists are seen as a powerful group in society but one with the function of holding the other 'estates' to account.[4] According to this principle, journalists are vital to the health of democracies through their challenging of politicians and other powers-that-be, investigating their activities and generally trying to inform the public about the workings of power in all its forms.

Some conceptions of what the 'fourth estate' is about may describe it in less noble terms, and prefer to see it as another self-serving interest group, but let's stay with this morally positive vision of journalism. It requires that journalists are free to report on what and in what way they wish. On this view, the major threat to their work of interrogating power is censorship by the powerful, whether that power is governmental or economic or derives from some other major institutional base (e.g. a faith or military organisation). Without such censorship, journalists would be free to give media space to critics of power, to whistle-blowers, dissidents and opponents of the present regime. Where necessary, they may also themselves become the primary voices of dissent, as when their reports contradict official narratives of reality and become key drivers of opposition, or when they use their access to the public sphere to lead campaigns against particular government or corporate policies and actions.

In these contexts, the key issue concerning free speech is that journalists are free to make the news without censorship or other interference from those in positions of established power – that they are free to report the voices and views of all others, and thereby through the news to 'speak truth to power', to use a phrase originated by American Quakers but popular today amongst some political campaign groups.[5] However this chapter will suggest that the key challenge facing journalism today is somewhat different: that it lies in knowing where today's main threats to freedom of speech come from, what drives them and how to respond to them.

We will begin with an example of political censorship by the state, then consider three other sources of attack or constraint which in very different ways all pose threats to the capacity of news media to embody freedom of speech. These are commercial agendas of media organisations, the selective practices of news media professionals themselves, and vigilante attacks on the media. The chapter ends with a discussion of the fundamental dilemma on censorship which is intrinsic to liberal society, and which journalists have a particular responsibility to resolve in the best possible ways.

1. The secretive state

The vision of journalism as speaking truth to power has an illustrious past and is essential to a full appreciation of what news is or can or should be. However it is arguably less useful than it has been at other times as a guide to what the key issues are today. Of course in the UK the media remain subject to the Official Secrets Act and to Defence Advisory Notices (whereby the government can ask news editors – with an expectation that they will comply – not to publish certain material for reasons of national security), and all states will continue to need some minimum of security-related constraint. However the last attempt by a UK government to muzzle political journalism beyond that minimum was in 1988, when the Conservative administration of Margaret Thatcher imposed a ban on news broadcasts including interviews with members of eleven organisations involved in the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland (see Carruthers, 1996; 1999). The main target of this move was Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, and the ban remained in force until an IRA ceasefire in 1994. However the ban covered only the voices of interviewees, and broadcasters were able to subvert it by carrying footage of interviews with IRA leaders in which their speech appeared in subtitles or was reproduced in voice-overs by actors.

This attempt at censorship was widely ridiculed, and may have stemmed more from a belief in the moral wrongness of public figures known to support terrorism being taken seriously as political actors on national television, and from Conservative hostility to the news media as soft on the IRA, rather than from evidence that broadcast interviews were increasing support for the Irish Republican cause. Public opinion in the UK was not hospitable to the IRA and Sinn Fein.

Since then, although there have been occasional attempts to silence 'whistleblowers' in the civil service or the security services, there has been no official action to censor any particular political voices, except in the proscription of certain organisations and in the prosecution of individuals under the 'hate speech' laws. These are embodied in a number of statutes, notably the Malicious Communications Act (1988) which prohibits the sending of communications in any medium intended to cause distress or anxiety, and the Racial and Religious Hatred Act (2006), which prevents the use of words intended to stir up hatred.

Since the IRA voices fiasco, the internet has arrived in our midst and brought a compelling technological reason for governments and other major vested interests to give up efforts to control the content of the public sphere. Such efforts continue in parts of the world: Twitter is currently blocked in China, for example, while elsewhere it is prepared to have country-specific censorship in order not to violate national laws. Yet internet users in these countries are able to access Twitter content fairly easily if they want to.

In any event, even without the internet, as journalism outgrew its deferential phase (Barnett, 2002) the growing confidence and boldness of political and investigative journalists, and increasing public demand for the products of their uncensored work, would have made it increasingly difficult for 'power' to silence 'truth'. There is a cost for democracy in this, as John Lloyd (2004) and others have noted. If we believe that power is often or always associated with lies and corruption, that creates a public expectation of news about lies and corruption which can encourage investigative journalism, but it can also feed cynicism and despair about politicians, politics and society as a whole. But, for the purpose of this chapter, we need to ask what other issues about freedom of speech are now at least as important as the freedom of journalists from censorship by state power.

2. Corporate criminals

Although we clearly want our media to be free from political control, we also want them to be free from commercial imperatives which may seem to degrade their activities. This is the context for the often high-profile debates around privacy and intrusion: under what circumstances and to what limits do journalists have a right to invade the privacy of individuals? At the time of writing, UK news media are carrying daily reports of a long-running inquiry into the press, the Leveson Inquiry. This was commissioned by the government in July 2011, primarily in response to growing public concern about the extent to which journalists working for Rupert Murdoch's News International (NI) papers had been hacking into the mobile phones of numerous people in the public eye: celebrities, politicians and - most controversially - a teenage murder victim and her family.

Why stories about the private lives of figures in the public eye are seen to be so desired by the public, and therefore to be so important in the competition for readers between print titles, is a question beyond us here. To answer it would involve a careful analysis of the complex forces shaping mediatised popular culture, in which we should probably be careful to avoid a rush to judgment on the vacuity of celebrity culture. But in any case, whatever the underlying cultural dynamics of what the public 'want', tabloid journalists' understandings of the competitive nature of their business seem to have driven them to arrogate for themselves much more freedom of action than either decency or the law would permit.

The Inquiry's terms of reference were expanded to include press relations with the police force, members of which were suspected of colluding with journalists and with NI, and (since close links existed between NI and leading UK politicians) journalists' relations with politicians. Thus the Inquiry is linking the privacy issue with the broader topic of the politics of the media. Traditionally, as we have noted, what has been seen as the key issue here has been the independence of the press from government – the principle of a free press as the 'fourth estate', as the watchdog for and guardian of democracy, and the need for it to be free of state censorship or editorial interference. In the context of the UK today, however, the issue is arguably more one of the independence of the government from the press, and particularly from NI, the influence of which over large tabloid readerships is widely believed to have determined, or at least influenced, the outcomes of recent UK General Elections.

The Inquiry has heard much evidence of the close relationships between corporate leaders of NI and elected leaders of the UK's two major political parties, and is asking whether the Conservative government's management of the NI bid to take over the lucrative broadcaster BSkyB was impartial. At stake here is not the ability of the press to 'speak truth to power', but the ability of governments to govern in the public interest rather than in the interest of a media conglomerate on which they depend for their electoral success. It could be said that journalism appears to have eaten itself, in that the preoccupation with malpractice which has characterised much of its coverage of politics has been turned back onto journalism itself, in the Leveson Inquiry's exposure of malpractices within Rupert Murdoch's News International, and the consequences of this example of 'speaking truth' for the power of News International.

We have arrived at this situation because of the ambivalent role of market forces within liberal democracy. While some markets can be seen to generate the economic and cultural dynamism which can underpin a healthy democratic polity, others - depending largely on the degree and nature of governmental regulation - can lead to oligopolistic concentrations of wealth and 'soft' power which can impose themselves damagingly on the culture and processes of democracy, as seems likely to have been the case with News International and the British government. It seems probable that in the second edition of this book a number of chapters will have been revised to take account of the Leveson Inquiry's findings and its influence over the next few years on British news media and their relationships with politicians, government and other public authorities. Some commentators see the inquiry as an opportunity for a major revision of these relationships, not just of the practices of Britain's notorious tabloid press.

For the present, amidst the complex web of issues which the Leveson Inquiry is grappling with, we can conclude that there is wide public support for two changes to the way our news media operate. Firstly, we want some restriction on the freedom of the press to investigate and to publicise the private lives of individuals - though codifying this is difficult, to say the least, since the public are happy for this to happen to some people and not to others. Secondly, while we accept that some news media will be partisan, we want their freedom of political speech to be exercised with integrity. The independence of the media in the sense of their freedom to speak should go with their independence in the sense of not being in hidden collusion with a government, a police force or another source of power.

It is not only media corporations whose material interests cast a heavy shadow across the principle of free speech. As the British journalist Nick Cohen (2012) argues, wealth in any form (corporate, oligarchic, individual) can buy suppression of potential news by using the libel law, especially in the far-reaching form of it available in UK courts, while whistle-blowers can be intimidated by the power of corporate employers to destroy careers. In liberal democracies today these censorious tendencies of the wealthy and powerful, and the other threats to freedom of speech discussed below, should concern us more than the possibility of the state overreaching itself to stifle political or cultural expression.

3. Subtle censors

Another issue concerns the potential role of journalists themselves as censors. Although the internet has created a profusion of news outlets, most people still consume their news from mainstream sources (national television channels, and major news organisations' online and print outputs), and so mainstream news producers still command major market shares. So the internet has not supplanted the mainstream media, much as it has transformed them. Wikileaks needed to collaborate with major news organisations to maximise the impact of its online publications; new forms of news production and distribution (blogging, citizen journalism, Twitter and so forth) are intertwined with the old, and feed off each other. Although personal webpages, blogs and new social media can bring anyone to the threshold of entry into the public sphere, very few people from outside the media world cross that threshold and become audible voices on the national stage. The few who do have often been helped along by being picked up by national news media.

So those media retain the power to select which voices will be heard, and moreover they have the power to create or determine the context in which voices will be heard and therefore to influence the reception they will get. Apart from their potential for direct influence on governments, commercial interests which own the media most prominent in the public sphere have the power to shape the national conversation on matters of current concern. They cannot prohibit the speech of others but they can influence the hearing given to voices of which they disapprove, through marginalising, misrepresenting or mocking them. Again, the 'freedom of the press', or a section of it, thus becomes antithetical to freedom of speech in the most profound sense of the term.

One of the most-used concepts in research concerning how news content can influence audiences is that of framing (e.g. Entman, 1993; Baresch et al., 2010; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). This refers to the multitude of ways (whether deliberate or inadvertent) in which the news production process can shape audience perceptions of actors or events in the news. In making choices about what to report, which sources to use, which quotes to select, which visual images to include, how to contextualise the item, and so on, reporters and editors have abundant opportunities to influence audience reactions and understandings. At times this influence might amount to a power of quasi-censorship, not censorship in the simple sense of being silenced, but in the more subtle sense of non-acceptance within a consensual or dominant field of political discourse.

We might return here to Daniel Hallin's (1984) distinction between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' controversy: in the former, protagonists in an argument are seen as equally legitimate, while in the latter, voices seeking to raise a certain question are deemed to be illegitimate. For example, we might say that in the UK today, debates about immigration control are a sphere of legitimate controversy, while the repatriation of settled immigrants is, in mainstream media discourse, an illegitimate topic for debate.

So how much media space should be given to such marginal views? While the idea of free speech is one of the cardinal principles of democracy, we know our freedoms are or should be limited, since many things we do have consequences for other people. The basic interconnectedness of individuals, which has increased throughout history, means that one person's freedom can be another's injury. So while the European Convention on Human Rights Article 10, Freedom of Expression, begins by saying 'Everyone has the right of freedom of expression', it continues by saying the exercise of that freedom carries with it duties and responsibilities, and so may be subject to various restrictions. It proceeds to list eleven broad areas to which restrictions may apply. Gatekeepers such as newspaper editors, channel controllers and producers may have difficult judgements to make as to when one or more of these restrictions should apply. They perhaps need to be especially careful when considering who should speak in a manufactured 'media event', that is something which is being expressed at the initiative of the media. The media of course produce speech as well as convey it or report on it.

The example we will discuss here is that of an invitation to leader of a Far Right party to appear in 2009 on a flagship BBC programme. Nick Griffin became leader of the British National Party in 1999, and is seen as having led a major shift in its strategy towards electoral politics. Under his leadership it has sought to present itself as a party of reason and respectability, and to distance itself from the fascist and Nazi associations of its earlier years and its predecessors, and indeed of the histories of many of its members.

The influential programme Question Time has been going since 1979, and although it occupies a later evening slot than it used to, it remains one of the flagships of BBC television's politics and current affairs coverage. Studio audiences selected from applicants put questions to leading political figures. The BBC explained its decision to invite Griffin by saying that the recent electoral performance of the BNP meant that the impartiality principle, under which the BBC operates, required them to do this. The BNP had secured 944k votes in the European elections in 2009 (6.2% of the turnout), resulting in their taking up two MEP seats in Brussels.

There was a loud debate about the BBC's decision. Across the political spectrum, amongst all those who shared a revulsion from the BNP, there was a sharp divide between those who saw it as a good thing, good for British democracy and bad for the BNP, and those who saw it as being good for the BNP and therefore as bad for democracy and for Britain. Those who believed it was right for the BNP voice to be given a hearing did so for one reason: they assumed that this would expose the ugly racism which is at the heart of this organisation, and so discredit rather than credentialise the BNP in the minds of those who might otherwise have been vulnerable to its charm offensive of recent years. According to this argument, the party would be exposed as the obsessed and menacing force that it is, and its leader would appear as the duplicitous closet-Nazi that he is. The programme would therefore help to thrust the BNP back to the outer margins of British politics. On the other side, the argument was two-fold. It was, firstly, that Griffin sitting amongst well-known figures in a BBC studio would legitimise the BNP, and so 'lift the taboo' on voting BNP. And secondly, if Griffin were subjected to hostile treatment, it would risk presenting him as the victim of an establishment conspiracy. Not many people advanced that argument beforehand, though it was a major theme in the debates afterwards.

Normally the programme proceeds with questions from the audience covering a wide range of the most topical issues of the day. On this occasion nearly all questions were about Griffin or the BNP - e.g. Griffin was asked what right does the BNP have to claim the legacy of Winston Churchill; what was its repatriation policy; why does he see Islam as wicked. Many were not really questions at all, but were expressions of outrage or contempt, many winning intense applause for their impassioned rejections of Griffin and all he stood for.

There was certainly a lot of public interest in the programme. The audience for this edition of Question Time was over eight million, more than four times its usual size. In the press coverage of the programme in the next few days, there was widespread agreement that his performance could not be seen as anything other than shifty, nervy and highly unimpressive. Observations made by some commentators beforehand that he was likely to be a formidable performer were not confirmed. Basically the debate that had preceded the broadcast was repeated after it, this time with the difference that the way the programme had actually gone was at the centre of the debate. The strong focus of the programme on Griffin, and the levels of hostility expressed towards him, were a cause of celebration for some and of regret for others. Either Griffin was seen as getting the treatment he deserves, and with the ugly truth exposed, or there was anxiety that he could be perceived by some as the victim of an establishment ambush. For example, the Independent headline was: 'The BBC gave him the oxygen of publicity – and he choked.' The Sun celebrated that 'We nailed Nazi Nick'. The Daily Mail, however, described the programme as 'The BBC show trial that taught us nothing', while the Star claimed that 'BBC "lynch mob" was a gift to BNP'.

Electorally the programme was not followed by a sustained upward shift in the fortunes of the BNP, in the way that a similar television 'breakthrough' had been years before for the National Front in France. Indeed it may have been the catalyst for a bout of damaging internal turmoil for them. Following the programme, a senior BNP figure blogged about the shortcomings of Griffin's performance, which became a factor in a subsequent internal struggle and leadership challenge in 2010 (Copsey & Macklin, 2011). This internal conflict is likely to have developed anyway, given the tendency of extremist groups frequently to split into fragments which hate each other as much as they hate the 'Other'. But the programme may have helped this process along.

So perhaps the invitation to Griffin to appear on the programme was justified by his performance and by the overall public reaction, and by the absence of any discernible longer-term benefit to the BNP's popularity. This may be more a matter of luck than judgement, however, since the outcome may have been different had Griffin been a more intelligent and assured performer, able to withstand the assault on him with dignity and no loss of articulacy. And also, what of the principle of free speech, and the question raised in some press commentary that actually freedom of speech was not granted to Griffin, because of how the programme was conducted? Did the BBC subvert its own decision to invite him by effectively putting him in the stocks and inviting the audience to throw rotten eggs? Could emotions within the studio have been managed so as to ensure that the principle of free speech was genuinely adhered to, while also ensuring that hate-filled and divisive voices were not given unnecessary opportunity to influence others? The complexity of these questions highlights the difficulties facing journalists and other media professionals in this area.

4. Violent gangs

We must also discuss another danger to freedom of speech and to the open-ness and inclusiveness of the public sphere: not overbearing state censorship, nor media corporations manipulating the democratic process, nor their commercial agendas trumping political and principled ones, and not the often invisible censoring intrinsic to news production. This final threat to freedom of speech is often terrifyingly visible: it comes from strident voices issuing threats to others, and sometimes demanding silence from them. Cohen's impassioned review of contemporary censorship is again a fertile source (Cohen, op.cit.) on this dark development.

In September 2005 the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published a number of cartoon images of the prophet Muhammad. Some fundamentalist Islamists believe that making images of the prophet is blasphemous. The images provoked a substantial demonstration by offended Muslims in Copenhagen, threats to the cartoonists and protests to Denmark from Muslim countries. But Cohen argues that over a period of months they became a global phenomenon, through some Denmark-based activists seeking to build a cause around the cartoons. In February 2006 the Qatar-based Egyptian Islamist Yusuf al-Qaradawi (who in had supported Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against the author Salman Rushdie in 1989) called for a 'day of anger' about them. In the following days a large number of death threats were issued against the cartoonists and the paper's editor, and attacks on Danish embassies and protest riots occurred in countries across the world, causing 139 deaths.

Opinion amongst media professionals and publics the world over was divided: were the cartoons a gratuitous provocation, or a morally legitimate attempt to insist by action that in liberal culture it has to be possible for any religion to be made fun of? The initial publication of the cartoons was an editorial initiative, not a piece of reporting on something that had already happened. The Jyllands-Posten editor wanted to take a stand against what he and others saw as an increasingly tyrannical approach by Islamists to things that offended them. Thus the whole affair could be described, to apply Simon Cottle's (2005) term, as a 'mediatised public crisis'.

The scale and severity of the response to the 'Danish cartoons' shows how careful journalists need to be, in a volatile and reverberative world, when giving media space to certain voices and representations. Moreover they need to consider carefully how they report on extremist reactions to certain media content. In a discussion of international media treatments of the affair, Powers (2010) contends that the focus on the violent protests in a number of Islamic countries was at the cost of neglecting more restrained and constructive Islamic voices. This inflammatory reporting of the affair was, he argues, in the service of promoting a fearful perception of Islam as an intolerant and violent creed. The violent protests were arguably a legitimate topic for headlines, but this need not have denied media space to other responses in the way that Powers argues it did. He acknowledges that media and governments in Islamic countries, and Islamist organisations, were involved in using the affair to stoke anger with the West. The fomenting of anti-Western sentiment in such ways is also, we might note, a legitimate topic for reporting. But the lesson here is that Western media will be much better placed, morally, to report on that if they are also properly representing the heterogeneity of Islamic opinion.

In this example we have an illustration of the active ('performative') role of the media, and of how a certain media framing of the global consequences of such a performance may have contributed to a legacy of heightened suspicion. But the fundamental threat to freedom of speech came from self-appointed defenders of a faith who believed in their right to transcend national and international laws and to demand revenge against those who had transgressed their rules of speech and expression. While there are many other examples we could from the recent past of Islamist groups operating as globally alert gangs in search of people who have given offence and can thus be terrorised, there are of course other types of vigilante censors:

far right mobs and militias, fundamentalist Christians, anti-abortionists. The protection of rights to expression against this threat rests, as does protection against the corporate criminals, on the courage of media professionals and on protective interventions by states and transnational authorities.

State censorship and the liberal dilemma

For some, though, the most fundamental or frequent risk to an open and healthy democratic discourse remains that from government censorship of the press, not that from rampant media corporations bullying or bribing governments, nor that from journalistic framing of public perceptions, nor that from outlaw fundamentalists. Steel (2012) holds this to be true not only for states we may have reason to regard as totalitarian or dictatorial, but also for the liberal democracies. The possibility of censorship may be clearest in relation to situations of war, when the release of information of various sorts about military activity or perhaps about domestic developments may put military personnel at additional risk or in some way jeopardise the conduct of the war.

One debate in this area in recent years has been about whether the practice of 'embedding' journalists with military units narrows or distorts the coverage of the conflict in ways that prevents media audiences coming to informed judgements about the progress and perhaps the justness of the war. Although the most systematic analysis of embedded journalists (Lewis et al., 2006) found that their reporting was not adversely affected, it must remain the case that unrestrained reporting of conflict situations (e.g. about the outcome of engagements, or levels of morale) will on occasions be at odds with military and arguably national interests.

The publishing of sensitive information which may put some individuals at risk of various adverse consequences was one of the foci of debate around the Wikileaks release in 2010 of archives of 250,000 US diplomatic cables. For those who see state censorship as the major, abiding problem, the key UK media event of recent years would not be the Leveson Inquiry but the emergence and impact of Wikileaks – a global phenomenon, of course, one which illustrated the way in which the internet has facilitated the internationalisation of news and the production of news, and thereby complicated issues of freedom of speech.

The content of, and the controversy surrounding, the Wikileaks releases showed the extent to which governments in liberal democracies prefer that considerable areas of the process of government are not exposed to the public gaze. The censorship exercised here was of information rather than of opinion or ideas, but this is covered in the category of freedom of expression as defined in 1948 by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19 of which is cited as a core principle by Wikileaks Editor-in-Chief Julian Assange (Assange, 2012). The Article reads:

> *"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*

Not surprisingly, though, the Article does not indicate whether it applies to all information and ideas, or whether there is some material to which it may not apply. It must also be read alongside Article 3 of the same Declaration:

> *"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."*

The conjunction of these two statements encapsulates the well-known dilemma of liberal governance: should we tolerate intolerance, and allow freedom of expression to those whose expressions may cause harm or distress for others and may even put the life, liberty or security of others at risk? Or should we qualify our commitment to freedom of expression and be intolerant of intolerance, and thereby seek to protect groups of people from exposure to certain messages and their potential consequences? In the UK, there are legal thresholds beyond which divisive or threatening speech is proscribed, by the 'hate speech' laws referred to earlier. But there is a very large territory of speech which is below that threshold, yet which may in a long-term or background way be instrumental in building or catalysing feelings of resentment and hostility, and through this contribution to the 'emotional public sphere' (Richards, 2010) may feed social or political violence. Proscriptive law cannot extend across this territory: even if desirable, it would be too complex and demanding to enforce.

So the national media and their journalists are crucial in determining the degree of freedom allowed to speech which is at or near the margins of the consensual public sphere, in deciding how much of the 'oxygen of publicity' (in Margaret Thatcher's famous phrase) should be given to, say, anti-democratic and intolerant extremisms. Here, the issue for journalists is not whether they are free to speak themselves, as tribunes of the people contesting official secrecy or exposing the lies of the powerful, but whether, and if so how, they report on the speech of others. These are questions about the role of journalism in defining and defending the boundaries of liberal democracy. They include questions about if and how journalists should publicise the statements and activities of those people of extremist views who are seen to be promoting conflict between different groups, and some of whom may be advocating or supporting violent solutions to perceived social or political problems.

Does the 'oxygen' of publicity confer some sort of legitimacy? Or, as the U.S. academic Lee Bollinger (2006) has put it, does giving access to the public forum not carry any implication of giving 'honour'? Does the mere presence of a voice on the national public stage of speech endow that voice with any measure of moral credibility, or does it put its core values under critical scrutiny? The answer could be that it does both, depending on the audience. The two quotations at the start of this chapter both insist, for different reasons, on the need to preserve the widest possible freedoms of speech. Yet we can agree on this while still wanting to take the probable consequences of certain types of speech into account in deciding how they should appear in the news.

While it covers only one relatively small area of debate, this topic goes to an issue at the heart of the challenge which this chapter is based on – that of knowing what are, in any specific context, the major threats to freedom of speech, and of being able to make the best response to them. This challenge brings into focus the fundamental role of journalists in society, in an age when news is ever more central to the dynamics of political and social change. Overall, whether reporting on war, extremism or scandal, commissioning a controversial special feature, lining up panellists for a TV debate, or deciding whether to publish classified material, journalists have the responsibility of achieving the best resolution of the liberal dilemma. Regrettably but inevitably, there is no simple rule to guide them in all situations; in each particular case the possible consequences of different courses of action have to be assessed. News journalism needs people who not only have the will to resist threats to freedom of speech but also are capable of complex and balanced analyses of risk.

Notes

1. The journalist Nick Cohen warning that fundamentalist assaults on free speech should never be tolerated.
2. From the statement by Columbia University's President in defence of his decision to invite President Ahmadinejad of Iran to speak at the university.
3. Or indeed another book, as in the case of John Steel's Journalism and Free Speech, to which the reader may turn for a much broader and more detailed review than that offered here.
4. This language of 'estates' comes from two centuries ago, from early modern political systems in Europe in which the most commonly recognised 'estates' were three: church, aristocracy and the 'commons'. See Hampton (2010) on the history of journalism as the 'fourth estate'.
5. For example in the 'Speak Truth to Power' project of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights.

Challenging Questions

- Describe the 'Danish cartoons' crisis. Was it the result of an unnecessary provocation, or of a tyrannically intolerant reaction?
- Extremist parties of the 'far Right', some linked with racism and violence, are currently doing well in elections in several European countries. What are the pros and cons of leaders of these parties appearing on prime-time national television?
- To what extent can journalists help to control 'hate speech' on the internet?

Recommended reading

If you want to get stuck into a much fuller treatment of this topic, try one of the books listed below.

For an emphasis on legal issues:

Barendt, E. (2007) *Freedom of Speech.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

A passionate (and persuasive) essay by a journalist:

Cohen, N. (2012) *You Can't Read This Book. Censorship in an Age of Freedom.* London: Fourth Estate.

For an emphasis on philosophical issues:

Cohen-Almagor, R. (2005) *Speech, Media and Ethics: The Limits of Free Expression.* Basingstoke: Palgrave (2nd. Edn.)

A comprehensive treatment by a journalism academic:

Steel, J. (2012) *Journalism and Free Speech.* London: Routledge.

Or, a less detailed overview:

Warburton, N. (2009) *Freedom of Speech: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Powers, S. (2010) Examining the Danish cartoons affair: mediatised cross-cultural tensions? *Media, War and Conflict* 1(3), 339-359.

Richards, B. (2010) News and the emotional public sphere. In Allan, S., ed., *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism.* London: Routledge, 301-311.

Scheufele, D. & Tewksbury, D. (2007) Framing, agenda-setting, and priming: the evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication* 57 (1), 9-20.

Steel, J. (2012) *Journalism and Free Speech.* London: Routledge.

22 Celebrity Journalism: Navigating the Stars

Nathan Farrell

"Celebrities are manifestations of the organisation of culture in terms of democratic and capitalism."

Marshall (2001: 246)

"We live in a celebocracy."

Hyde (2009: 94)

A quick glance over the newsstand or surf through the TV channels, on any given day in the Western world, reveals the prominence of celebrity in media content. Within the tabloid newspapers and corresponding television programmes (such as Entertainment Tonight), celebrities comprise a particularly notable feature. Celebrity journalism, which centres on the lives of film stars, pop stars or those who, in the words of Daniel Boorstin, are simply 'well known for their well knownness' (Boorstin 2006) is in many ways the staple of contemporary journalistic copy. It is, presumably, of interest to audiences who consume these media products and therefore crucial to media producers who feature this content and, by extension, the companies who pay to include their advertisements in the accompanying media space. Celebrity journalism is, in short, of cultural and economic significance.

The rise of celebrity journalism, in recent decades, creates a range of potential challenges but also opportunities for journalists to navigate their way through and in this chapter I want to explore three in particular. They are:

- the links between the media's focus on celebrity and tabloid-style 'soft' news

- the celebritisation of hard news (that is, the increase in framing hard news stories in terms of celebrity) and the dumbing-down of public spheres
- objectivity and bias in relation to the competition between media outlets for access and celebrity exclusives.

First, though, it is necessary to unpack some of the concepts bound up in celebrity journalism.

Celebrity and Journalism

In many respects, celebrities – famous individuals that are highly visible in the media, often emerging from the sports or entertainment industries, and whose private lives attract equal or greater attention than their professional lives (Turner 2004, p. 3) – appear to be a uniquely modern phenomenon. Yet, it is important, at the same time, to remember that there have always been famous people. However, the nature of fame and the systems that create and maintain an individual's fame have changed dramatically over time. For example, from the medieval period to roughly the Enlightenment, western fame was subject to rigid social hierarchies, and was thus the preserve of the nobility, the aristocracy and, most of all, the monarchy. Fame was consistent with the social hierarchy in that it was connected to breeding. Since then, the West of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has witnessed two significant political and economic trends: the emergence of democracy and the expansion of consumer capitalism. Indeed, P. David Marshall, in his analysis of celebrity, refers to them as 'the twinned discourses of modernity' (Marshall 2001, p.4). These two aspects of contemporary western society underpin its culture and thus impact its allocation of fame and suggest that there is a link between the overriding means of organising a society and the types of famous people produced by that society.

This can be seen in Leo Braudy's The Frenzy of Renown (1997) where the author charts the historical development of fame over a period of millennia. One function of fame that Braudy's study uncovers is that it can be used to ascertain what, in particular, a society holds in high esteem, due to the corresponding elevation of those who possess such characteristics to the rank of famous. In pre-democratic societies, military cunning, physical prowess, or to be born of a socially-regarded elite were held in high estimation and, therefore, those with such qualities rose to, or were born into, fame. Famous people were linked with characteristics and, through this process, such people become symbols of particular personal qualities. Charismatic leaders (such as Caesar) might be thought of in ways related to decisiveness or military strength. But at the same time, they also become a means of drawing the people together, of creating a single group identity among a disparate and varying collection of individuals. For example, a wide and diverse population might identify themselves as the subjects of a monarch. In doing so, not only are they creating the group 'subjects' but also assenting to being part of that group and validating the power structure of the group. In other words, they recognise and legitimate their position as followers of/subordinates to the elite individual and the social conventions that maintain these positions. In this way, a group identity can be forged around the symbol of the elite individual and a cohesive social identity can be maintained. More than this, the famous individual becomes a role model for the types of behaviours a society may collectively endorse, or character traits they may wish to think of themselves as possessing. This might include physical strength, intellectual rigour, or moral fortitude.

Celebrity, as it emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was a similar form of public identity in the sense that the dominant forms of social order reflected the dominant types of fame. However, where pre-democratic forms of fame were premised on rigid social hierarchies and were moulded in the shape of the elites who dominated, the new system of fame was dependent on the ascendant power of the masses. Democratic societies are supposedly rooted in meritocracy and social mobility. Celebrity within democratic society is, accordingly, often narrated in 'rags to riches' stories that highlight the celebrity's likeness to the ordinary masses while spotlighting their exceptional qualities. Where, in pre-democratic societies, fame reflected the status of elites, in democratic society, the ability to reflect and embody the masses – in whom political power supposedly resides – is a characteristic held in high esteem. And so, where democracy places emphasis upon the importance of the individual, celebrity is seen as comprising a democratic function and is bound up with a celebration of the primacy of the individidual in liberal, capitalist democracies. Correspondingly, celebrity vehicles such as films and music, and also consumer products advertised or endorsed by celebrities, become integral sites of this fixation upon the individual which coheres the masses into media audiences (see Marshall 2001, p. xi).

Just as celebrity can be seen as emerging from contemporary forms of democracy and capitalism, so is journalism linked closely with both expanding political enfranchisement and literacy during this period. In his overview of the intersections of celebrity and journalism throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Marshall concludes (among other things) that '[i]t is difficult to separate the histories of journalism and the emergence of the contemporary celebrity system' (Marshall, 2006, p.323). As newspapers, in particular, became key locales of public deliberation and forums for political debate they, at least on some level, represented the interests of the populace. Where journalism focused increasingly upon interviews with the famous or, more broadly, on celebrity's intersection with consumer capitalism, the ties between democracy and the type of contemporary individuality embodied in the celebrity strengthened.

Yet, it is not sufficient to regard celebrity as purely an effect of a democratic public sphere in which mass, popular audiences have their interests and desires reflected in new categories of exulted individuals. Nor is it wise to consider journalism as simply the vehicle through which this democratic function is performed. While the continuation of a celebrity's career is certainly dependent on the sustained interest and approval of audiences it is, at the same time, reliant on a system of cultural production by media industries. These media industries are largely corporately controlled and whether private or publicly owned are embedded into a market system. Celebrities are linked with corporate interests. They are public personalities produced and consumed as cultural commodities within contemporary capitalism; that is, they are individuals whose public personas are sold within a market, such as (but not exclusively) within the advertising industry. In other words, celebrities, have significance for both media corporations and consuming audiences, and the interests of each group may be in tension.

Within a framework set by the media industries, celebrity can act, as Graeme Turner describes it, 'as a location for the interrogation and elaboration of cultural identity' through its place as a source of gossip and its role in the processes of social and cultural identity formation (Turner 2004, p.24). It is through celebrities, in other words, that audiences can come to understand their cultural identity – as noted above. Celebrities, for instance, can provide role models in terms of how to be an individual of a particular gender, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. The personal indiscretions of celebrities, when disclosed by the media, provide the site for discourses on public attitudes towards individual behaviour and the shaping of collective norms. The tabloid press provides a typical venue for such content and these types of stories grant a seemingly inexhaustible fuel for journalists in the field as much as they do for the 'tabloidisation' debate.

Challenge 1: Celebrity Journalism, 'Tabloidisation' and 'Democratainment'

Tabloidisation

The term 'tabloid', while it might refer to the particular dimensions of a publication, distinct from a broadsheet, more often describes a specific type of journalism. Tabloid journalism refers to a style of journalism that is more heavily focused on human interest, scandal, entertainment, celebrity and sex. These are typically also defined as 'soft' news; news stories that might be of interest or hold entertainment value but do not necessarily impact upon the lives of many. This sets 'soft' news as something distinct from 'hard' news; typically more factual in content and more serious in focus (an economic summit or a global conflict, for example).

'Tabloidisation' can be thought of as a process through which the type of journalism fixated with soft news expands to other sections of the media. Turner has written extensively on 'tabloidisation', and defines it as a continually expanding category which has moved beyond a description of a particular section of the British daily press, muckraking television shows and talk-show confessionals, to a description of 'what is regarded as the trivialisation of media content in general' (Turner 2004, p.76). Tabloidization is a form of journalism through which the news media has 'become part of the entertainment industry rather than being a forum for informed debate about important issues of public concern' (Franklin 1999, p.4). Tabloidization, therefore, is bound up with concepts of 'trivialisation', and the 'trivial' content found within tabloid journalism is the opposite of 'important issues of public concern.'

The strong tone of such arguments hints at the nature of the tabloidisation debate: it often hinges on the perceived ill-effects of this trend. For some commentators on the political left, tabloidisation constitutes an anti-democratic trivialisation of civic affairs and a 'usurpation of public discourse by soap opera' (Gitlin 1997, p.35). For those on the political right tabloidization denotes a decline of 'traditional values'. What underpins both positions is a perceived decline in standards or, in other words, a 'dumbing down.' Celebrity, which sits at the crossroads of journalism and the entertainment industries is presumably a key player in this professional decline. The columns and airtime devoted to which pop star/film star/TV personality was drunk/had sex/had cosmetic surgery are created at the expense of debates concerning important social or political issues.

'Democratainment'

However, contrary arguments seek more solace in tabloidisation. Mick Temple, referring more specifically to 'dumbing down', argues that such distinctions miss a wider point: that 'the simplification and sensationalism of "serious" news by journalists, is an essential part of the process of engaging people in debates', particularly 'those who will fail to respond to more conventional coverage of social and "political" issues' (Temple 2006, p.257). Tabloidisation and dumbing down are, from this position, trends to be encouraged as they foster a more inclusive public sphere by engaging a wider spectrum of the electorate in political issues. The Oprah Winfrey Show serves as a suitable example. As a syndicated talk show which ran from 1986 to 2011, the show featured a range of celebrity interviews, social campaigns, discussions about social issues, self improvement guidance, a book club, etc. While it may be considered trivial in its style and content, Jane Shattuc argues that shows such as Oprah depend on social topics and allow the participation of average citizens. This is evidence of their capacity to fulfil a democratic function which is further enhanced by their lack of dependency upon 'the power of expertise or bourgeois education' (Shattuc 1997, p.93). In other words, rather than being lectured to by experts about how they should live their lives, audience members are given a stage on which to air their concerns and articulate their experiences. Although Shattuc does place limits on the progressive potential of such programmes, this type of research tends to see such platforms as, at least to some extent, democratic in nature.

So tabloidisation, from this more celebratory perspective, represents an opening up of the platforms of debate to the wider populace beyond traditional elites. It is a realising of the democratic potential of popular television and print journalism; in short, a form of 'democratainment' (see Hartley 1999). Celebrity dovetails neatly with this movement particularly in terms of what Mark Rowland refers to, with caution, as the 'levelling of fame' that 'made it universal: available in principle to everyone, irrespective of accidents of birth and innate endowments' (Rowlands 2008, p.7). Both celebrity and tabloidisation can be seen as serving some form of democratic function. Both are closely linked with an opening up of the public sphere to reflect the supposed power structure inherent in democracy. Journalism, in its embrace of these ideals – manifested in tabloidization – becomes the forum through which this occurs.

But is it really this simple? Although there has been a simultaneous levelling of fame that opens it up to ordinary people and a levelling of political participation in the expansion of democracy, can a link between the two be so readily assumed? While celebrity journalism found within the tabloid media appears democratic in terms of a widening participatory demographic, because celebrities are more often 'like' ordinary people, this does not necessarily translate into the inclusion of an increased range of ideas or political perspectives. In other words, while celebrities may offer role models of how to be specific types of individuals, how many different types of role models are evidenced in celebrity journalism? A survey of celebrity journalism might reveal the similarities between the types of celebrities covered both in terms of their appearance and behaviour. They might often look very similar, do similar things, and do them while promoting similar products. Celebrity culture, while offering something to audiences, does so within a framework of what is acceptable to the dominant economic order of consumer capitalism. This means that the diversity among the types of individuals offered by celebrity journalism might be more limited than its proponents suggest. In this respect, the democratic nature of contemporary celebrity culture and celebrity journalism could resemble a consumer choice made within a limited series of debates, each agreeable with the market in which journalism and celebrity both play a part.

So celebrity journalism represents an opportunity to journalists in that it provides a lens through which to view areas of social life. It allows the opportunity to discuss social, political or economic issues in a way that engages people who might otherwise be uninterested in such topics. Yet, at the same time, it presents a challenge to the conscientious journalist in that the scope of political perspectives that can be explored through looking at everyday celebrity culture – where celebrities go, who they go with, what they look like, what possessions they own – is often decidedly narrow.

Challenge 2: The 'Celebritisation' of 'Hard' News

As noted above, celebrity and journalism both simultaneously reflect the interests of the audiences that consume and the industries that produce. Although likely prompted by audience maximisation and/or profit, there is capacity for journalists to work with celebrities to engage with wider civic groups. Marshall (2006, p.319) refers to the machinations of the public relations industries and press agencies and notes how they encouraged positive press exposure of their clients. This was often in conjuncture with the promotion of particular events or products and this form of celebrity journalism provides a clear means of promoting cultural products. However, increasingly this is also the case within the 'serious' worlds of politics and economics. Politicians are keen to invite journalists in, granting behind the scenes access – presumably in exchange for favourable coverage. Thus, in a story that, on one level, was concerned with the decision of the Blair government to invade Iraq in 2003, a Sunday Times journalist and accompanying photographer, were invited to observe private meetings between the Prime Minister and his advisors and, moreover, to see Blair in his role as father and husband (Stothard, 2003b, Stothard, 2003a). In focusing on more than Blair's professional role and the consequences of his policy decisions, a glimpse of the seemingly 'real' Blair is revealed. This fixation with uncovering the real person behind the media presence is a key feature of celebrity journalism. Politicians such as Blair are acutely aware of the potential within this type of journalism to connect with the electorate. John Street (2004) convincingly argues that the performances of such 'celebrity politicians' becomes an important lens through which voters can identify with political candidates. This is because the persona constructed by, or for, a politician acts as an indicator of the political qualities (such as being in touch with the electorate) or character traits (such as possessing family values) with which they wish to be associated.

Politicians are not the only people to realise the potential benefits of the personalisation of their cause. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as charities and activist groups, frequently work with celebrities to raise awareness of the social or environmental issues with which they are concerned. This translates into stories concerning social issues framed in terms of the individuals involved. A good example of this would be the news coverage surrounding Bill and Melinda Gates. As a software designer, Bill Gates co-founded Microsoft in 1975 and became progressively more affluent as the company expanded and began to dominate the global software market with, among other products, its operating system, Windows. With a net worth in excess of $50bn, Gates became famous but, at the same time, increasingly interested in unlocking the philanthropic potential of his fortune. To that end, he co-founded the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2000. Since then he has transferred more of his time to philanthropy, taking less of a role in his company. The Foundation is involved in numerous large-scale projects within international development and, accordingly, has attracted the attention of numerous journalists. For example a feature on the Foundation's development work in sub-Saharan Africa for The Sunday Timeş established the credibility of Melinda Gates, and thus her organisation, through references to her role as a mother and wife – 'the brilliant brunette who snagged the boss [Bill Gates]...We may have called [Bill] Gates the übergeek but his bride is still smitten; when she talks about him you'd think she had married George Clooney' (White 2005, p.38). In a similar fashion, journalist Brian Williams' feature on poverty and development in Africa for MSNBC centres on the journalist's trip to the region with U2 lead singer Bono (Williams 2006). In the feature, the singer described himself as a 'travelling salesman' for ideas such as debt relief and the audience were given exclusive access to new lyrics the musician had penned. So, celebrity journalism can provide an important function in terms of using the fame of celebrities to raise the profiles of causes. Celebrities can offer to journalists, through their activities, a means of framing abstract concepts such as poverty and development. However, celebrity journalism also has the potential to create real challenges for journalists.

Celebrity activists such as Gates and Bono do much to raise the profile of their causes, as well as raising revenue. But, as Dave Timms asserts 'flying a celebrity around the world accompanied by an in-house film crew…doesn't come cheap' and so is a method more exclusively used by 'NGOs with the resources' to do so (Timms 2005, p.127). What, then, happens to NGOs without the revenues to secure a useful association with a celebrity? Are they as able to attract the media's attention as their more celebrity-inclusive rivals? This has implications for the range of stories to which audiences are exposed and, by extension, the democratic potential of celebrity journalism. It is not necessarily the fault of individual campaigners, journalists or celebrities; rather it is an outcome to which the system of celebrity journalism and celebrity-fronted campaigning tends. Put another way, a large-scale celebrity event, celebrity-inclusive publicity stunt, photo shoot or press conference, is more newsworthy than a report released by an NGO or even a press conference without a celebrity. As an illustration, campaigner and documentary filmmaker Jeremy Gilley noted how he struggled for years to gain media attention for his peace campaign. It was not until he enlisted celebrities that journalists granted him their attention (Gilley 2010). Celebrities, as established above, are of great interest to audiences but a challenge for journalist is navigating a path between using the social cause to focus on celebrity and using celebrity to focus on the cause.

A good example of this is the Make Poverty History (MPH) campaign and linked Live 8 concerts. This certainly represents a campaign 'with the resources' to attract media attention. Formed to coincide with the UK's presidency of the EU and hosting of the Group of Eight (G8) summit, MPH comprised of more than five hundred organisations, including numerous prominent UK-based NGOs, trade unions and faith groups. It sought to mobilise large sections of the western population around demands of the

G8 governments concerning trade justice, dropping developing world debt and providing more and better aid (Make Poverty History). More than this, MPH sought to raise the profile of global, specifically African, poverty and position it at the centre of mainstream political debate. A significant element of the campaign was the use of celebrity endorsement of the cause, in particular its merchandise (white wristbands), film broadcasts and, most notably, a series of Live 8 concerts organised by musician and businessman Bob Geldof. The Live 8 concerts, which formed perhaps the most high-profile element of the campaign, featured a number of prominent celebrities, such as U2 and Coldplay, who both hosted and performed music at the event.

In terms of awareness-raising, the campaign was certainly successful and issues relating to poverty and international development featured heavily in the press during the campaign – particularly during the weekend of the concerts. Yet what type of coverage did this amount to? While it can be reasonably assumed that there was more discussion of international development in the press at this time than would have occurred without the celebrity campaign, there were simultaneously accusations that celebrities dominated the frame at the expense of other voices. This gets to the heart of one key challenge concerning celebrity journalism; celebrities can be attached to a story as a means to engage otherwise uninterested audiences but how suitable are celebrities as a vehicle for discussing complex issues?

Media coverage of the event focused primarily upon the celebrity elements of the campaign. Where poverty was discussed, the media often relied upon celebrities to provide the political context of the G8 summit and African poverty. The nature of the media's reliance upon celebrities as information sources contributed to celebrities being represented as political outsiders, holding powerful governments to account on behalf of their supporters in the global north and those living in poverty in Africa. One journalist described Geldof as 'a modern-day Moses leading his people to the Promised Land' (Sylvester 2005). By the following week much of the press declared the campaign a success, citing that '[a]mong major outcomes of the summit will be a doubling of development aid for Africa to £28 billion' (quoted in Monbiot 2005, p.21). Yet this was in stark contrast to some NGOs and campaigners who noted that the £28 billion promised, half of which 'wasn't new money, but…[an] amalgam of old pledges, future aid budgets and debt relief' (Hodkinson, 2005b) and that debt cancellation for the some of the poorest nations was linked to those recipient nations embarking on economic liberalisation programmes of which those NGOS were harsh critics. Regardless of who was right or wrong, these NGOs did not receive the attention from journalists afforded to the celebrities. As such, academic Stuart Hodkinson argued, politics were 'buried by the personality' (Hodkinson 2005a).

In covering the 'serious' worlds of politics or economics, news stories often the focus on key individuals and the apparent need to uncover the 'real' person behind the public persona. Likewise, as celebrities from the world of entertainment become increasingly attached to political events and causes there is also a drive to frame such stories squarely in terms of their associations with celebrities. The personalisation of news stories in these ways is a commonly used formula within journalistic practice and it presents opportunities to frame stories in a way relatable to readers. Yet what happens to audiences' understandings of events when framed in this way? What is left out in the movement towards 'celebritising' news stories and can the celebrity dominate the frame at the expense of other aspects of the story? This becomes a key challenge to the responsible journalist.

Challenge 3: Exclusives, Access and Objectivity in Celebrity Journalism

Celebrity journalism is big business and the lucrative market for celebrity stories, in particular exclusives, is evidenced by the high price paid for such content. Indeed, at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival, the distribution company Alliance Films began charging journalists for interviews with film stars - €2,500 for twenty minutes with Brad Pitt (Spiegel Online 2012). Not only is there a potential financial cost but there is also the cost to journalistic content and the related concerns for journalistic accuracy and bias.

While seemingly popular with certain readers, celebrity journalism raises important questions regarding privacy and accuracy. In terms of privacy, the works of the paparazzi demonstrates the lengths press photographers go to in securing pictures of celebrities. While many photographs are taken in public locations, ethical questions regarding the right to privacy of celebrities is still an important consideration, as is the use of long distance images taken of celebrities who presumably thought they were in private. This says nothing of the interest taken by numerous British mass circulation publications in the details of the private lives of celebrities, sourced from their medical notes. As part of a sting operation by documentary filmmakers journalists from mainstream titles offered money in exchange for information regarding medical procedures performed on celebrities (Atkins 2009). Although the undercover team had no intention of passing on such details (nor did they even possess them) their findings point to the lengths (of questionable legality) to which some journalists will go. In terms of accuracy, the competition among news outlets for celebrity exclusives is such that many will publish celebrity stories without adequate verification. The same filmmakers were offered money over the telephone in exchange for celebrity stories they had fabricated. The stories were published unchecked and this suggests the extent of the market for celebrity material.

Moreover, the market for celebrity stories is growing online and this seems to occur in two interesting ways. First, celebrities may maintain their own personal web space in which they can communicate directly with fans. There may be MySpace or Facebook pages by celebrities and celebrities might have their own Twitter feeds. While this is an ongoing and ever-evolving field, there is scope for a decline in celebrities' need for journalists to reach their public. That said, the publicity drives for celebrities' film and music look set to continue on television and in the press for some time. Second, the internet has also given a platform to bloggers and amateur journalists, such as blogger Perez Hilton. As a popular site, Hilton's blog is a key forum for debate about celebrity gossip. Yet, Hilton is not bound by any professional codes of conduct and is free to publish (libel not withstanding) as he chooses. This includes unfounded rumours about the death of Cuban leader Fidel Castro (Hilton 2007).

The appetite for celebrity gossip is such that accuracy and ethics are sometimes sidelined. This poses a real challenge to the concerned journalist and it also suggests why authorised access is a coveted prize. An exclusive interview with, or access to the life of, an A-list celebrity or major political figure is surely a lucrative offer to a journalist. But what implicit or explicit conditions might be attached and how favourable must coverage be to safeguard continued access? There is certainly an incentive to sticking to the approved topics and while there is scope to use public personalities to unpack and understand complex issues, there are limits to the scope of these projects if their continuation is to be guaranteed.

Summary

Celebrity certainly comprises a lucrative topic for contemporary journalism. Despite its apparent popularity it is also a deeply polarising form of journalism with numerous commentators considering it a trivial subject for news which debases the public sphere. Yet for others it can have a wholly emancipatory outcome. In this chapter I have highlight three potential challenges that celebrity journalism might create for the conscientious journalist. First, the expansion of 'soft' news stories that feature celebrities might engage greater sections of the populace in social debate, but they might also do this while adhering to the interests of the corporate interests that run the media. Second, celebrity can be an important ingredient in a story about important issues such as poverty or the destruction of the environment. At the same time this creates a challenge in terms of striking a balance between the celebrity and the cause and ensuring the celebrity does not eclipse other voices. Third, the success of celebrity journalism in financial terms means that a competitive market has emerged around access to celebrities (both authorised and unauthorised) and this has the potential to challenge journalistic ethics. These are complex issues and while solutions are by no means easily apparent, their careful consideration does merit the attention of the responsible journalist.

Challenging Questions

- How can journalists use celebrities to frame social phenomena?
- To what extent can celebrities obscure social or environmental causes?
- Do celebrities have a right not to be photographed when out in public?

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23 News Documentary and Advocacy Journalism

Mathew Charles

> "When objective journalism decays into a cowardly neutrality between truth and lies, we need advocacy journalism to lift our profession… back to credibility."
>
> **Niles (2011)**

When a story becomes more than just news

This chapter examines how alternative models of journalism are emerging to counter the news values associated with the so-called mainstream media - news values, which are increasingly criticised for serving only the interests of the political and economic elite. In particular, this chapter looks at advocacy journalism, which focuses on a shift away from objectivity towards the arguably more ethical practice of attachment. The neutral and detached reporter, who remains outside of events and reports only facts, becomes a campaigner immersed in a story to call for and foster real social change.

From Journalist to Advocate

Every journalist has different reasons for entering the profession. As Harcup (2004) explains, they also have 'their own beliefs about what they do' and 'their own reasons for pursuing a career in whatever field of journalism they work in' (Harcup, 2004:5). It can be a very exciting career too, but it would be hard to find a journalist who chose their job for the financial rewards. In fact most journalists and journalism students are motivated by idealism, by a desire to make the world we live in a better place. The challenge is that many professional journalists are finding that the mainstream media of today unfortunately no longer affords this opportunity, so what are the alternatives?

The majority of journalists are motivated by a deep sense of professionalism. They are guided and abide by news values, which are an intangible, almost unconscious (if very rigid) set of criteria used to steer editorial judgment through the day's agenda (Brighton and Foy, 2007). Though these values have been the focus of enduring academic debate since the 1950s, they have only recently been brought into question in the newsroom itself. Individual journalists are becoming increasingly frustrated at an apparent narrowing of the news agenda and as a result, growing numbers of journalists are beginning to question their own professional purpose and even the future direction of journalism altogether (Lee-Wright, 2010a;Hummel, Kirchhoff and Prandner, 2012). Increasingly, journalists are leaving traditional media not because they are turning their back on the profession, but precisely because of their profession and the "passionate intensity" they feel "to right wrongs and to get the greedy bastards" (Lewis, 2011). In other words they no longer feel able (within the constraints of mainstream media) to pursue those who are determined to keep power and wealth for themselves and control the news agenda.

Lee-Wright (2010a) paints a disturbing picture of this existential- type crisis for journalism within the BBC newsroom. He describes how a once great journalist culture has been cut to the bone, spread impossibly thin and reduced to the 'churnalism' that Davies (2008) first reported. Lee-Wright (2010a) describes how technological changes and ongoing budget constraints in a world of increased competition are leading to radical changes in the journalism profession, which are ultimately forcing many journalists to re-think their position. Growing numbers are seeking voluntary redundancy or giving up a secure position to go freelance and invent 'new narratives of work' (Lee-Wright, 2010a: 39).

Former American news anchor, Nick Clooney, faced a similar dilemma after his visit to Darfur in 2006 with his son George (the Hollywood actor) to document the genocide there.[1] "I went as a reporter, came back as an advocate," he said . Not only did he want to tell people of the atrocities taking place in Darfur, but he wanted to encourage his audience to actually do something about it. He chose documentary over television news (which was the format most familiar to him) because he felt it gave him more freedom to be "honest" about what was happening in Darfur. He unashamedly took a stance, along with his actor-son George, to inspire change in the world. He was able to free himself from the constraints of traditional television news where the notion of balance prevails, and produce a film that uses creative and unconventional storytelling techniques that enable him to not only engage, but also to arouse his audience. 'A Journey to Darfur' gave Clooney the chance to "really bring the story home." Deeply affected by the atrocities and suffering he witnessed in Sudan, Clooney felt compelled to take action and his documentary is a result of this devotion to the story; a story that, for him, became much more than just news.

According to Canadian journalist Sue Careless, advocacy journalism 'openly speaks for or pleads on behalf of another, giving the other a face and a voice' (Careless, 2000). This is what Clooney achieves in his film by openly and shamelessly taking sides with the victims of genocide. The documentary is a personal story of his visit with his son to Darfur. Together they engage their audience in a 'personal point of view' that by its very nature is more 'persuasive' than traditional TV news storytelling techniques where 'subjects and subject matter are mediated by the impersonal director, who hides behind the voice of commentary' (Chanan, 2007: 6). This major difference in style does not detach the film from journalism - on the contrary. Whilst the motivation for the work is advocacy and the directors' desire to inspire change, the documentary remains fundamentally anchored within the sphere of professional television journalism. Indeed there has been an explosion of advocacy documentary - making in recent years such as An Inconvenient Truth, The End of the Line and The Killing Fields but these films must be distinguished from pure activism through their use of professional storytelling and maintenance of professional journalistic standards. In other words, they are not and must not be considered as pure polemics.

Beyond Partiality

The main difference between mainstream and advocacy journalism is not just about taking sides, it is about what actually constitutes news and how it should be reported. For advocacy journalists, it is no longer sufficient to report the news as mere facts. Advocacy journalists find a story, engage in the story and want their audience to act. To achieve this, advocacy journalists must embark upon radically different forms of storytelling and documentary provides a perfect vehicle for this type of reporting.

In his book Human Rights Journalism, Ibrahim Seaga Shaw (2012) writes of an urgent need to deconstruct news and provide more in-depth analysis of a story in order to fully engage the audience. There needs to be a bigger shift away from the familiar to the unfamiliar. This, according to Shaw, 'will then promote a better understanding of the undercurrents of the events and issues at stake,' (Shaw, 2012:38) which will in turn provoke a more adequate response from the audience and live up to the expectations that journalism can influence the future direction of society. Advocacy journalism can therefore act as a potential jolt for the audience; extracting them from their comfort zone to provoke some form of action for change. For Shaw (2012), journalism is not just about information and providing balanced viewpoints, it is about reporting a story in ways the story becomes a catalyst for change. In other words, advocacy journalism transforms a journalist from a mere communicator of information into a motivator for action. Furthermore, in this period of crisis for journalism, when we are told of audience 'compassion fatigue', (McLuhan, 1965 cited in Shaw, 2012:38) advocacy journalism has the potential to turn this 'fatigue' into engagement by reporting news not just as a neutral list of facts but through a real 'attachment' (Shaw, 2012:69) to the story and through a 'critical sense of empathy ' (Shaw, 2012:102).

Instead of merely acting as neutral witnesses to events, advocacy journalists get involved. They are increasingly working with campaigns – or with campaigning ends at least – to diversify the voices we hear, the people we meet and the images we see to procure real social change. Whether defending human rights abroad or civil liberties at home, supporting the struggles of the poor to improve their lives, explaining climate change or denying a call to war, advocacy journalism can speak up and speak back to the powers that be. However, this model of mission-driven advocacy journalism poses a central question that for some is problematic: should journalists be taking sides, getting involved in what they see and hear, and encouraging active change as a result?

The journalism of today's mainstream television news focuses on the ideal of objectivity, which stresses factual reporting over commentary, the balancing of opposing viewpoints, and maintaining a neutral observer role for the journalist (Schudson, 2001). The emphasis is solely on providing information and not on provoking action, but for advocacy journalists information alone is not enough to inspire change and fulfill the role journalism should be playing in society. This social responsibility model of journalism, which has objectivity and impartiality at its heart, is arguably too restrictive and serves only to maintain the interests of the consumer and not those of the community (Allan, 1997: 319). The crisis faced by journalism today is not best confronted with traditional forms of objective reporting, since it has arisen precisely because of mainstream journalism's seemingly unwavering bond to the ideal of objectivity. However, it is important to reiterate once more that to assume advocacy journalism is just about taking sides is an over-simplification. Instead advocacy journalism is a proactive approach that does not just report facts as they are, it seeks ways of improvement, solution and resolution.

Critics and traditionalists believe that advocacy journalism simply morphs into opinion media and leads to institutional bias like that of Fox News in the USA. This ignores the main issue with Fox News, which is the broadcaster's complete denial of and attempts to conceal its bias. In contrast, quality advocacy journalism makes clear its position from the outset and is open in its attempts to search for possible answers and solutions. Good advocacy journalism builds on a critical self-awareness that is constantly held up to scrutiny. It does not hide or conceal its messages through the presentation of false truths (Careless, 2000).

The former BBC war correspondent, Martin Bell, famously said at a News of the World conference in 1996, "I do not believe that we should stand neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, aggressor and victim." He has consistently called for "a journalism of attachment, a journalism which cares as well as knows" (Bell, 1997 and 1998).

New Media: A Way Out for the Alternative

Advocacy journalism is often criticised for a lack of credibility, but whilst advocacy journalists may work closely with NGOs and other campaign groups, professional journalism remains the essence of their work:

> *"If you are only a polemicist, you won't educate or persuade anyone, and those "on side" will find you boring and repetitious… A good journalist must play devil's advocate. You must argue against your own convictions. In an interview, you still have to ask the hard questions of possible heroes, the tough questions, even of the people you admire. You are not writing public relations for them and they will not be vetting your piece."* (Careless, 2000).

As news corporations and broadcasters continue their course of decline with drastic downsizing, including the closing of international bureaux and specialist beats, advocacy journalism can tell the stories that financially strapped traditional media outlets are unable or unwilling to report. As journalist numbers are cut from the mainstream, charities have availed themselves of the skills of experienced reporters who are committing themselves to a cause they feel passionately about. Andrew Hogg is a former investigative journalist at the Sunday Times, now news editor of Christian Aid. He recently worked on the charity's Death and Taxes report which showed global companies were cheating the developing world out of huge amounts of unpaid taxes. He told the Independent, "The subjects you are looking at are really deeply important subjects for the people on this planet who don't have anyone to speak up for them." (cited in Burrell, 2012). Emma Daly, the Communications Director of Human Rights Watch is also a journalist. She told the Independent, "We're doing investigative reporting, coming up with facts and writing about it. We have been in print for a long time, but now we are broadcasters." (cited in Burrell, 2012). NGOs are therefore increasingly using professional journalists and journalistic techniques to help them with their advocacy work; work which goes beyond pure activism.

Ongoing breakthroughs in digital technology mean advocacy journalists also have increasing opportunities to work alone. Social media are driving this change: whether it is Facebook or Twitter to broadcast the final piece of work, or the use of crowdsourcing sites to raise funds for a particular filming project, for example. Furthermore, technological advances mean advocacy journalists can link to audiences who, like them, have also deserted the mainstream. Increasing numbers of us now turn to NGOs and other groups directly for our news stories and especially for international coverage (Beckett, 2009).

The website snagfilms.com was founded by Ted Leonsis to develop a concept he calls 'filmanthropy'. He links filmmakers, philanthropists, NGOs and documentary fans on his site. The site says "we tie every documentary in our library to a related charitable effort and make it easy to learn more and get involved." Users can watch film, see related NGO campaigns and 'snag' the film, which creates links to it through an individual's social media accounts. Other projects like linktv.org and viewchange.org in the USA and the Community Channel in the UK also allow advocacy journalists to reach larger audiences and provide real opportunities for sustained issue awareness and action campaigns. You Tube, Vimeo and other video based websites offer outlets for documentary journalism, as well as the booming film festival circuit. Funding can come from advocacy groups as we have seen or from charitable foundations and even directly from the public and individual activists or philanthropists through crowdsourcing. Indeed the possibilities provided by the digital age have led to such an explosion of independently made films that some are referring to a documentary renaissance (Lee-Wright, 2010b;Lees, 2012).

We are constantly told journalism is in crisis and increasingly individual journalists are re-assessing what it means to be a reporter in today's media landscape. Many want to save their profession and regain the trust it appears to have so tragically lost. Journalism and news are undoubtedly in a state of flux. Advocacy journalism through documentary is just one option available for individual reporters and filmmakers who still believe passionately in making the world a better place.

Notes

1. In an interview with the author in 2006.

Challenging Questions

- To what extent can advocacy journalism provide an effective alternative to the mainstream media?
- What is meant by 'alternative journalism' and how does it differ from the mainstream?
- Can advocacy journalism be a trusted source of news?
- If journalism is in crisis, is advocacy journalism its saviour?

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24 Moral Panics:

Reconsidering Journalism's Responsibilities

Ann Luce

"I am deeply interested in the progress and elevation of journalism, having spent my life in that profession, regarding it as a noble profession and one of unequalled importance for its influence upon the minds and morals of the people."

Joseph Pulitzer

There is a fine line in journalism between reporting that enhances 'the minds and morals' of members of the public and reporting that causes fear and panic, intentional or otherwise. As a journalist, you shouldn't want to sensationalise news events, let alone cause fear or panic about any issue, yet it happens. Moral panics emerge when there is a misrepresentation of an important social issue. Moral panics, as Critcher (2003) states, have three dimensions:

- Moral panics have an identifiable process of definition and action;
- they mark the moral boundaries of society
- and they also create discourses of various kinds and at various levels (2003: 5).

What Critcher illustrates here is that the creation of a moral panic goes through a process. For instance, as you will see later in this chapter, moral panics tend to be ordinary issues that can serve as a warning to real danger. Moral panics tend to show underlying fears about issues that hit at the core of society such as the safety of children or the economic health and wellbeing of a nation. When a moral panic occurs, it highlights that the boundaries of society are being pushed past a comfortable level, and thus, various discourses need to emerge to try and stabilize the conversation. The media are important agents for change. They help to reproduce and continue those different discourses, representations and misrepresentations. The media's role is to help maintain stability in a society. A moral panic then threatens the social order of a society.

This chapter will discuss how moral panics are formed, paying particular attention to historical examples – specifically, the 'Mods and Rockers', 'mugging,' 'sex and HIV/AIDS', and 'video nasties' – before turning to a more recent example, namely news reporting of suicide amongst young people. We will discuss the symbolic nature of moral panics, and the reasons why journalists need to think about their responsibilities when it comes to reporting controversial topics, despite the otherwise understandable urge to grab a headline. The challenge this chapter will address is how to be a proactive, responsible journalist while not creating a moral panic. By its conclusion, there will be several suggestions for you to consider about how best to incorporate responsible values into your everyday reporting life.

Responsible journalism is built upon the assumption that journalists understand that their actions affect those around them. Aldridge and Evetts (2003) see responsible journalism as a 'discourse of self-control, even self-belief, an occupational badge or marker which gives meaning to the work and enables workers to justify and emphasize the importance of their work to themselves' (2003: 555). While this is a good way to look at responsible journalism, Hodges' (1986) definition from the mid-1980s still holds true today:

> *"The roots of responsibility per se lie in the fact that we are both individual and social beings whose decisions and actions inevitably affect others. The very fact that we have the ability or power to affect each other deeply, either for good or for ill, requires that we act responsibly toward each other if society is to endure."* (Hodges, 1986: 16)

In short, as a journalist, you always need to think beyond the immediate limits of a story to consider its wider impact. Your personal moral code entails recognising that what you write or broadcast can shape people's lives, sometimes in profound ways. It is when journalists forget this moral code, or do not practice responsible journalism, that moral panics emerge in society.

The concept of moral panics stems from Stanley Cohen's work in the early 1970s around delinquency, youth cultures and subcultures, as well as football hooliganism. Cohen, a sociologist who is credited with coining the phrase moral panic, wrote one of most influential books in criminology, called Folk Devils and Moral Panics. In the course of his discussion, he outlines the role the media play in depicting public behaviors, particularly when they are perceived – by journalists and their selected sources – to be outside 'acceptable' norms in society. He explains his thesis here:

> *"...the attribution of the moral panic label means that the 'things' extent and significance has been exaggerated (a) in itself (compared with other more reliable, valid and objective sources) and/or (b) compared with other, more serious problems. This labeling derives from a willful refusal by liberals, radicals and leftists to take public anxieties seriously. Instead, they are furthering a politically correct agenda: to downgrade traditional values and moral concerns."* (2002: viii)

For a moral panic to occur, Cohen (2002) describes three steps in his discursive formula. The first is that the issue is either new or old, 'lying dormant perhaps, but hard to recognize; deceptively ordinary and routine, but invisibly creeping up the moral horizon' or that the issues are 'camouflaged versions of traditional and well known evils' (2002: viii). The second is that the issue is either damaging or a warning sign of the real danger. Most moral panics tend to be about an underlying fear around something fundamental on which the society depends, for example, the Internet or energy. Third, the issue is transparent and opaque, meaning anyone can see what is happening regarding the issue, but 'accredited experts must explain the perils hidden behind the superficially harmless' (2002: viii); the public must be told why they should fear what is going on.

While an issue can be labeled a moral panic, Ben-Yehuda (2009) explains the characters that play a role in the story: 'Moral panics have to create, focus on, and sustain powerfully persuasive images of folk devils that can serve at the heart of moral fears' (1). A folk devil can be considered the enemy of a society; it can be a person, place or thing. It is a symbol of the issue at hand. According to Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 'All moral panics, by their very nature, identify, denounce and attempt to root our folk devils' (1994: 29). Ben-Yehuda goes on to say:

> *"... moral panics are about representations, images and coercion: about which sector of a society has the power to represent and impose its images, world views and interests onto others as being both legitimate and valid."* (2009: 3)

There are several different participatory groups, or actors in the creation of moral panics: the media, the public, the police, politicians and action groups. However, in a British context, Critcher (2009) argues that it tends to be journalistic assumptions about the middle class that helps to intensify fears surrounding an issue:

> *"The anxiety of the middle class intensifies and finds expression in social movements whenever moral order seems to be collapsing in general or at particular sites where some specific social anxiety serves to mobilize an array of different issues and alliances of disparate social forces. Such anxieties are provoked by crises, real or imagined, in the political and social order."* (2009: 21)

These 'crises' can lead to the creation of moral panics by journalists. Cohen (2002) has identified seven clusters of social identity—which can also be understood as how a society labels certain socioeconomic groups within the culture—into which these moral panics tend to belong:

- Young, Working Class, Violent Males; these can be considered football hooligans, muggers, loiterers, or mobile-phone snatchers, the lowest of the low in society who are 'out to get' hard-working people in the society.
- School Violence: Bullying and Shootouts; violence has always been a backdrop in schools. Historically, teachers used corporal punishment against students to maintain order. Now, violence is perceived to be student-on-student, with bullying, physical assault and the shooting of classmates.
- Wrong Drugs: Used by wrong people at wrong places; drug use has always been perceived as an interaction be-

tween the 'evil' drug pusher and the poor, defenseless user, with the drug pusher forcing the user to move from 'soft' drugs to 'hard' drugs such as heroin or cocaine.

- Child Abuse, Satanic Rituals and Paedophile Registers; children have always been considered the innocents in society, and in need of protection. In the early 1980s, a controversy emerged over a group of children who evidently remembered being abused as part of satanic rituals that were occurring in families. The story seems quite absurd now, but the fear and horror of a child being violated and abused in such a manner brings about a sense of panicked vulnerability over the life stage of childhood.
- Sex, Violence and Blaming the Media; there is a long tradition of blaming the media for bringing about, or causing societal ills. A recent example you might remember is Marilyn Manson's music being blamed for the mass shooting at Columbine High School back in the late 1990s. While the media might have a small effect on vulnerable populations, it cannot be considered the sole perpetrator when violence such as the Columbine shooting occurs.
- Welfare Cheats and Single Mothers; these can be considered the people who try to take advantage of the welfare state, submitting bogus claims for financial assistance and trying to 'rip off' the country.
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Flooding our country, Swamping our services; immigration in the UK has long been a contentious issue. Similar to the welfare cheats and single mothers, this cluster is considered 'those from other countries who are trying to rip off the country'. Yes, there is some compassion for those who seek asylum or refuge from a war-torn country, however, the discourses that mostly emerge are about the bogus 'foreigners' who are trying to get a free handout and those that are 'lying' to get into the country.

Of the most in/famous moral panics that have emerged from these clusters, several — 'Mods and Rockers,' 'mugging,' 'sex and HIV/AIDS,' and 'video nasties' —will be discussed in this chapter. The issue of suicide will also be examined, showing how one recent example of its reporting in South Wales resonated with several of Cohen's clustered identities.

The Mods and Rockers

What kicked off Cohen's (1972) original thesis on moral panics and folk devils was a highly contentious example of sensationalist news reporting about Britain's youth in the 1960s— 'The Mods and Rockers.' What created this moral panic was the media's attempt to exaggerate and distort what otherwise would have been described as a few rowdy drunk teenagers who got out of control in the seaside town of Clacton. The folk devils, as these teenagers had now become, were throwing rocks at each other, breaking windows, having scuffles, and wrecking a beach hut or two. Their escapades turned into headlines of exagerrated proportions: "'Day of Terror by Scooter Groups' (Daily Telegraph), 'Wild Ones Invade Seaside-97 arrests' (Daily Mirror)," amongst others (Thompson, 1998: 33). This 'panic' highlighed with an interesting change in post-war Britain, namely the ways in which economic factors contributed to the emergence of an increasingly commercialised youth culture, and with it public discourses about the country being transformed in a 'permissive society' (Cohen, 2002: 161). The rowdiness at the once-quiet seaside town of Clacton was an illustration that young people 'had it too good, too quickly'; they were openly 'flouting the work and leisure ethic' in the eyes of some media commentators. In short, the events at Clacton were depicted as signalling a dramatic change in moral and political values.

Mugging

By the early 1970s, the British public had moved its fear of rowdy teenagers, onto a new fear around crime, or more specifically, street muggings. Instead of studying mugging as a form of street crime, Stuart Hall et. al (1978), in their pivotal research in Policing the Crisis, wanted to look at mugging as a social phenomenon. They wanted to explore what it was about mugging that caused fear in the masses, but more specifically, what it was about this issue that made the country react in the way that it did. What caused this moral panic?! Hall et al. uncovered that the fear around mugging stemmed from a 'larger panic about the steadily rising rate of violent crime which [had] been growing through the 1960s.' But like the Mods and Rockers moral panic, the fear of muggings was not actually a panic around mugging, but rather, as Hall et. al stated: 'The society [came] to perceive crime in general and mugging in particular, as an index of the disintegration of the social order, as a sign that the British way of life' [was] coming apart at the seams' (1978: viii).

> *"Periods of moral panic are expected in a society: A condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or more often, resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and be comes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic is passed over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times, it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself."*
> (Hall et al., 1978: 16/17)

Moral panics then really point to the changes in morality within a society. Traditional societal values and interests change, and those who have been labeled as the 'moral watchers' of the society, such as editors, politicians, bishops and priests try to keep the society on track by telling the rest of us their solutions and why things are happening. In fact though, the society has already changed, thus creating new laws, new morals and, new societal values for all of us to embrace.

Sex and HIV/AIDS

One such example of a policy shift due to a moral panic revolved around the emergence of HIV/,AIDS in the early-mid 1980s. The condition was first discovered amongst gay men in San Francisco, California, and soon after in other vulnerable groups, such as intravenous drug users and haemophiliacs, before appearing in the population at large. It was a crisis that spread geographically, leaving fear and angst in its wake. In much of the media reporting, one of the most contentious dimensions to surface concerned a perceived linked with the 'immorality' of homosexuality (Critcher, 2003). At the time, stereotypes and sigma associated with being gay were much stronger than they are today. All too often, those afflicted by the condition were deemed by the press to be leading hedonistic lifestyles, or going against God. Some newspapers went so far as to invoke distinctions between those who 'caught AIDS' by 'being irresponsible' – such as by having casual sexual relations or by sharing a needle – and those who were 'innocent victims' who caught it from blood transfusions, or by other accidental means. Headlines ranged from, 'AIDS is the wrath of God, says Vicar' (Daily Telegraph, 3 May, 1983), to 'AIDS: Why must the innocent suffer?' (Daily Express, 25 September, 1985). In fact, it was not until 1984, when the National Union of Journalists issued guidelines on how to report AIDS that the disease was no longer called the 'gay plague' (Thompson, 1998: 74).

Some journalists got into the unfortunate habit of reporting exaggerated numbers of those affected, and consequently, ended up creating a moral panic around homosexuality. In response, public policy campaigners put forth the message that all people in the society 'should practice safe sex and harm minimization', helping to quash pernicious arguments in the press for a gay quarantine and related types of anti-gay propaganda (Thompson, 1978: 74). An overarching fear permeating much of the news coverage was the threat to social cohesion; relationships between same-sex partners were not the norm, thus 'allowing' homosexuality to happen could throw the balance of society off kilter, and thus change Christian cultures' beliefs around marriage Watney (1987) explains here:

> *"It is the central ideological business of the communications industry to retail ready-made pictures of 'human' identity, and thus recruit individual consumers to identify with them in a fantasy of collective mutual complementarity. Whole sections of society, however, cannot be contained within this project, since they refuse to dissolve into the larger mutualities required of them. Hence the position, in particular, though in different ways, of both blacks and gay men, who are made to stand outside the 'general public', inevitably appearing as threats to its internal cohesion. This cohesion is not 'natural',*

> *but the result of the media industry's modes of address—white and heterosexual. ... We are not, in fact, living through a distinct, coherent and progressing 'moral panic' about AIDS. Rather, we are witnessing the latest variation in the spectacle of the defensive ideological rearguard action, which has been mounted on behalf of 'the family' for more than a century."*
> (Watney, 1987: 43)

What Watney highlights here is the media's role in replicating the discourse that relationships should exist between men and women. By putting forth an alternative discourse about sexuality and relationships, the fear is that the notion of family and family life would disintegrate.

Up until now, moral panics around the 'Mods and Rockers,' 'mugging,' and 'sex and HIV/AIDS' have indicated societal apprehensions about a perceived decline of social order in Britain, unwelcome changes in moral and political values, and fears that social cohesion was breaking apart, particularly where identities associated with youth, ethnicity, sexuality and crime were concerned.

Video Nasties

In February, 1993, three-year-old James Bulger was abducted and murdered by two ten-year-old boys, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson. Bulger disappeared from the New Strand Shopping Centre in Bootle, near Liverpool, where he had been shopping with his mother. In the search for Bulger, he was seen on CCTV cameras leaving the shopping centre hand-in-hand with the two boys. Two days after his murder, his mutilated body was found on a railway line several miles away from the shopping centre. Accounts say that Bulger was battered to death with an iron bar and rocks, his body left on the track to be run over by a train. The two ten-year-olds were found guilty in November 1993 and at the time, were the youngest convicted murderers in modern English history.

It wasn't so much the child-on-child violence that caused a moral panic in this issue, but rather what emerged during the trial about video nasties. A video nasty was an overly violent film; they tended to be low-budget horror films. The video nasty that was highlighted during the Bulger murder case was the film, Child's Play 3.

Throughout Britain, there was massive outcry regarding the brutal murder of such a young child. The murder was widely discussed and heavily reported in all forms of media. The language used by some journalists reporting the murder and the subsequent trial was ideologically charged. By way of example, in contrast with the use of the affable 'Jamie' to name the victim, the two young murderers were described in newspapers as: 'street urchins' (so-called, Morrison (1997) argues, because they were of a lower social class); 'evil' (according to the lead policeman on the case) and 'freaks who just found each other' (according to a reporter who interviewed Thompson) (Morrison, 1997: 230-231). The two were also referred to by their last names, Thompson and Venables, which arguably made them sound much older, possibly encouraging in the public mind the belief that they were as answerable for their actions as adults would be. In fact, because of such emotive terminology in the lead up to the trial, it almost did not happen:

> *"Matters of opinion had been canvassed on page after page and, while the criminal investigation was proceeding, the nature of reporting went way beyond what was normally done by the media before defendants are charged and the trial begins. It was not a case where the publicity had been merely local. There had been widespread comment and articles containing alleged information about the case and the background of the defendants... editors had expressed opinion and comment and suggested innuendo that the defendants were guilty. Publicity had been misleading, prejudicial and, in a number of cases, highly sensational."* (Smith, 1994: 198)

During the course of the trial, the judge said, 'it is not up for me to pass judgment on their upbringing, but I suspect violent video films may in part be an explanation.' The film Child's Play 3 was singled out, with the judge adding it 'had some striking similarities to the manner of the attack on James Bulger' (cited Critcher, 2003: 67). These statements ignited further controversy. Franklin and Petley (1996) summed it up best: 'the "normal" requirements of reporting were abandoned in favour of undiluted, vitriolic editorialising' (1996: 134). According to Critcher (2003), 'the press wanted to lay the blame for moral decline on liberal permissiveness, the collapse of family life and the failings of schools'; (2003: 68), but ultimately, it was video nasties and the effects of media that came to be the focus of the story.

Too many journalists took a campaigning stand with the Bulger case, calling the two boys 'monsters,' 'bastards', and the like, day-in and day-out over the 30 days of the trial. Readers were told what they should think about what had happened, and why it represented a moral issue. The coverage indicated that the impact of video nasties such as Child's Play 3 needed to be censored in an effort to prevent moral decline. The underlying threat, however, was the fear of new technology, something that we will see still resonates today.

Suicide: A Newer Moral Panic

It is clear from the examples we have already looked at—'Mods and Rockers', 'mugging,' 'sex and HIV/AIDS,' and 'video nasties'—that serious issues regarding stigmatization warrant close and careful attention. A more recent example further illustrates how these concerns continue to reverberate.

In January 2008, the South Wales borough of Bridgend became the focus of local, national and eventually international media attention due to a spate of suicides in the region. Suicide, once believed to be a social issue that should be kept under wraps because of the stigma associated with it, became much more openly discussed as the former mining town made national headlines over the first six months of 2008 for having had 20 suicides amongst people aged 15-29. Unfortunately, several journalists failed to live up to their social responsibilities.

The Bridgend suicide story was sensationalized to the point that a moral panic around the issue of suicide began to emerge, thereby making it difficult for the citizenry to have a reasonable debate about its complexities. Several facets featured in the ensuing coverage, including the fear of the Internet. All of those who died were members of social networking sites, such as Facebook, Bebo and MySpace. Because many of them were 'friends' with each other on these sites, journalists jumped to the conclusion that the deaths must have been linked, despite evidence to the contrary. This misreporting was compounded by a degree of demonization regarding those who took their own lives, leading to simplistic (normal versus abnormal) distinctions reproduced as fact on news pages for more than six months. There is little doubt such insensitivity caused further anguish for those bereaved by suicide, as well as complicating the efforts of those working in suicide prevention amongst people coping with mental health issues. (Luce, 2012).

Here it is revealing to note how news reporting of the Bridgend suicides may be read in relation to Cohen's seven clusters of identity, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Specifically, the suicides touched upon young, working class people in South Wales, who had few job prospects. Bullying was suggested by some sources as a reason for why the deaths were occurring. Time and again, it was suggested in news reports that many of those who had died had participated in ilicit drug activity prior to their deaths (this was never confirmed by coroners).An overarching fear that found wide expression was that those who died belonged to an internet suicide cult, which corresponds to Cohen's cluster regarding child abuse, satanic rituals and paedophile registers. At the height of the coverage of the Bridgend suicides, the media was blamed as the main cause for the continuation of the suicides, even though this too was never proven. And, lastly, the Bridgend suicides brought to light familiar prejudices about welfare cheats, single mothers, refugees and asylum seekers, together with stereotypical views about Welsh identity.

All in all, then, it is regrettable to observe the extent to which news reporting of the Bridgend suicides stressed a perceived breakdown in moral and political values, particularly where young people are concerned. Lost in the swirls of panic were insights into the actual life experiences of those involved, the issues confronting their communities, and the lack of a suicide prevention strategy in Wales.

How to be a responsible journalist

This chapter has introduced the notion of moral panics, providing critical examples of instances where news reporting blew events out of proportion. How to improve this state of affairs may seem obvious, but there are obstacles in our path. Given that so many otherwise well-intentioned journalists (and their editors) become complicit in irresponsible reporting, we need to think through issues such as these ones:

- Creating a moral panic shows you lack solid reporting skills. If you need to embellish information, or make 'facts' up to grab a headline, then you are showing your readership that you do not have the skills to dig deeper and investigate the subject of your story in greater depth. Despite the fast-paced newsrooms that you are faced with today, always strive for excellence in your reporting. Stand for something; have principles.
- Creating a moral panic enhances stigma in society. As a journalist, it is your responsibility to understand how your reporting will affect those that are participating in your story, their families, and also those who are reading. This is particularly so where vulnerable people are conerned. Being a responsible reporter is not about you and your byline; it means being concerned for the greater good. Be an informed, socially alert and conscientious journalist. Remember, you have a duty of care to members of the public.
- Creating a moral panic inflicts pain. Following on from stigma, your reporting can have an impact, especially if you are reporting about poverty, sexuality, ethnicity, illness or death. Recognize that if your reporting has a tinge of hysteria to it, your readers will pick up on that, as will your competitors. Also be aware that what you do matters, and you can inflict pain. Imagine if you were the brother or sister of a person struggling with HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. Would you like to read that your loved one 'deserved' to be suffering from the 'gay plague'? Think before you write. And then think again.
- Creating a moral panic is unethical. Every journalist wants that one big break, that story that will put them on the map, that will make their editor or producer sit up and take notice. You don't have to create a moral panic to do it! Make sure you have standards when you are a journalist. Know what your limits are, and know what lines you will not cross. Discuss ethics with your colleagues, your family, your lecturers, your editors and producers. Ask yourself, what would you do if you were covering the James Bulger murder? How would you write the story? Know your own ethics, know what you stand for, and don't be morally compromised by

anyone.

- Creating a moral panic prevents public understanding and compassion. If you find yourself in the midst of the reporting of a moral panic, recognize that instead of facilitating public discussion, you are closing it down. Moral panic, as we have seen throughout this chapter, prevents citizens from having meaningful, solution-focused conversations about particular issues. As a journalist, it is your responsibility, as protector of the Fourth Estate, to put into the public domain accurate information. When conversation occurs, a society becomes more open. When it is stifled by prejudice, which happens in the case of a moral panic, fear and panic rear their ugly heads instead.

Concluding thoughts

This chapter has shown what can happen when journalists fail in their responsibilities to you and me. Since the coining of the phrase ‘moral panic’ by Stanley Cohen back in the 1970s, we have become increasingly aware how sloppy, shoddy and sensationalistic news reporting can cause fear and panic. As a journalist, you will strive to hold your profession to high standards, and yourself to even higher ones. As Joseph Pulitzer said, you have the power to influence ‘the minds and morals of the people.’ And with that comes great responsibility.

There are several challenges facing the journalism of tomorrow, as this book clearly outlines. However, if you are aware of how moral panics can develop, and take to heart the lessons learned from the above examples, then you will make a rewarding career by participating in new forms of reporting that are smarter, ethical and compassionate.

Challenging Questions

- Pick a social issue in the news that proved to be controversial and trace whether or not it became a moral panic. If it was a moral panic, why did this occur? If it was not a moral panic, why did it not reach that status?
- How do we encourage journalists to be more responsible in their reporting?
- Explain the steps you think journalists can take to avoid the creation of a moral panic. What are the biggest problems to overcome?
- What is your personal code of ethics?

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25 The Trauma Factor:
Reporting on Violence and Tragedy

Gavin Rees

"Whenever you and hundreds and thousands of sane people trying to get out of a place and a little bunch of madmen trying to get in, you know the latter are reporters."

H.R. Knickerbocker, Hearst Reporter in the 1930s (quoted in Randall, 2007: 24)

"Then, and later, I felt nothing. I never talked about what happened in those places, but I wrote about them. I disagreed that reporters suffered from trauma; after all, I argued, we were the ones who got out. It was the people we left behind that suffered, that died. I did not suffer the syndromes, I did not have the shakes. I did not have psychotic tendencies. I was not an alcoholic or drug addict who needed to blot out memories. I was, I thought, perfectly fine and functioning."

Janine di Giovanni, senior foreign correspondent, The Times (2011: 139-40)

Anyone who turns on a television, opens a news browser, or leafs through a newspaper will find evidence to suggest that the world can be a violent and capricious place. On the 24-hour news channels, production teams race to get as close as they can to riots, shooting sprees, armed conflict, natural disasters and other situations where violence has become the focus of public attention. In local news too there is a steady flow of trauma narratives - the traffic accident, the street stabbing, the fatal house fire. Some trauma stories seem to flare up spontaneously, others only meet the public eye if investigative journalists put weeks of systematic labour in uncovering them:

abuse in children's homes, the hidden complications of unsafe pharmaceuticals, government-backed torture campaigns, are all stories of this kind.

Trauma is news, and the contribution to the public good that journalism can make here should be clear enough. That said, no area of coverage arouses greater ambivalence. We may find ourselves gripped by the news, while simultaneously wishing that we had never seen it. News on trauma has a high signal value: it is attractive because it tells us about threats that can affect ourselves or are communities, and it can galvanise active responses that may reaffirm our sense that life has value (Granatt, 2004). And equally, news of suffering can frighten and demoralise us, leaving us feeling overcome and helpless (Newman and Nelson, 2012).

The media is often accused of overplaying coverage of violence and tragedy and of using its inherent emotional charge to boost audience figures and circulation (See for instance discussions in Seaton, 2005; Moeller, 1999). At times that may be so, but closing our eyes to violence and tragedy hardly seems a viable path. How, for instance, would have casting a veil of silence over the mass killing of young Norwegians on the Island of Utøya in July 2011 or the continuing consequences of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, have served the public interest? These stories need to be told: the question that remains is how.

Insightful trauma reporting can promote accountability, bolster the resilience of individuals and help the public to meaningfully engage in issues that have a determining value to the quality of their lives. Partial and inaccurate reporting or journalism that is high on entertainment value but low on insight and sensitivity, on the other hand, is likely to compound distress, marginalise victims and survivors, and, in general, diminish a society's capacity to face key decisions.

There is nothing necessarily straightforward about doing this well. On all levels and in nearly all walks of the profession, journalists will face intense, practical dilemmas regarding how to cover trauma effectively. Since journalism first began, local journalists have been knocking on doors and asking bereaved parents how their children died. But what does it take to do that without making things worse for the family? Moreover, there are also audiences to think of: news can influence public behaviour. How might an editor frame the suicide of a celebrity in a way that is less likely to inspire vulnerable individuals to take their own lives? Or how might a broadcast news-team produce a package on a mass killing in Syria that effectively communicates its horrors without impelling viewers to switch off and disconnect from the issues? And if that is not enough, we also need to remember that the news is brought to us by human beings who may have to work with dark and disturbing material for prolonged periods of time. How do journalists handle the toxicity of such topics as war and sexual abuse without it leaking into their personal lives and corroding their own health and relationships?

Given the urgency of this, one might think that journalism as a professional activity pays significant attention to preparing media workers to meet these challenges. Traditionally this has not been the case, unfortunately. Debate about ethics and reporting standards in journalism has a long and distinguished history, and instruction in ethics is a core part of nearly every professional and university training curriculum. But such framings rely largely on a discussion of abstract rules and principles; what they lack is something we are calling here the trauma factor, namely precise, detailed and substantive discussion of what violence and loss do to people. A trauma literate approach has sight of two interconnected sets of questions: what is human distress and how might trauma be managed? Before going on to examine the implications of this for innovation in journalism, we need to look at the animal itself and see how empirical research into trauma shapes the subject.

What is trauma?

Trauma is old as human experience. Accurate depictions of the consequences of violence abound in the world's great literature. Writers and poets, as diverse as Homer, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Wilfred Owen and Sylvia Plath, have scattered throughout their work passages that express a profound awareness of how people are altered by violence. In the twentieth century, the experience of each of the two world wars led to a flurry of scientific research and new understanding of the mental health implications of trauma, but in both cases the level of interest fell off during peacetime and the new ground was lost.

The development of trauma research as a coherent scientific field is relatively recent. It stems from the late 1970s when two separate groups of mental health clinicians, one working with combat veterans from Vietnam and the other with female victims of sexual violence, began to notice surprising connections between their respective study populations (Herman, 1997). Both groups were working with patients who had difficulty in neatly filing away memories of what had happened to them. Some would experience vivid sense impressions returning, unbidden and with such force that it would be like it was happening all over again; however great the separation in space or time, it would feel to them as if they were back in combat or being raped again. The researchers also noticed significant changes in how people related to others. Sometimes victims and survivors complained of emotional numbness and of losing the capacity to feel love and intimacy towards people who had been close to them. At others, they reported such reactions as intense, hard to control anger, lapses in concentration and feelings of radical insecurity. These could make it difficult for them to manage relationships and hold down work. The people affected often used the metaphor of a glass wall - they felt that an invisible barrier had come down and cut them off from the world as they had previously experienced it. In the accounts of both combat veterans and rape victims, shame and isolation were common themes. However much family members, friends and colleagues might urge them to move on, they felt stuck and unable to find a combination of buttons and levers that would lift the glass cage.

The precise constellations of these patterns differed from person to person, but there was enough commonality to lead to the diagnosis of a new condition, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and the development of various highly-effective treatment strategies. The identification of PTSD was an important breakthrough in the understanding of trauma but one that we should not be too distracted by in terms of the discussion in this chapter. The term can have a rather mesmerising effect on the public debate. In the popular imagination, there is a tendency to view trauma as a binary thing: one either gets "traumatised" - i.e. ill - or one does not. What is often lost is a sense of the manifold ways in which people's performance and decision-making may be altered in traumatic situations. As we will discuss in more detail throughout this chapter, this has profound implications for journalism. Trauma can subtly impact the judgement of both reporters and sources, in ways that is quite independent of whether anyone on either side of that equation develops PTSD or not. Modern trauma science has far broader implications than just the health dimension.

Trauma comes from the ancient Greek noun for "wound" but it may be more useful to understand that it comes from a verb stem that means to pierce into. When physicians talk about trauma, they are referring to physical damage to the body. Here, we are considering the capacity of an event to pierce into the psyche, altering how people think and feel. In standard definitions, for an event to be classified as traumatic it has to involve exposure to actual or threatened death, injury or violation of the physical integrity of the person, as happens in rape. One need not necessarily witness an event directly to be affected by it: hearing on the phone about the death of somebody close could qualify as a trauma because of the centrality that person has in one's own identity (NICE, 2005).

Just because an event is traumatic, and is likely to pierce into the psyche, doesn't mean that it will necessarily have an impact that will be adverse and long lasting. The event and the response to it need to be distinguished (Newman and Nelson, 2012). When confronted with death or danger people experience a range of short-term automatic reactions. These have evolved over millions of years to aid our survival; as humans we share parts of the inbuilt defence apparatus that is common to all mammals. When the brain registers an external threat, a complex cascade of hormones is released: blood-flow increases to key muscles so that they can work harder; reaction times decrease, and the body feels less pain and bleeds less if cut. On a perceptual level, people may become more responsive to sudden movements in their peripheral field of vision or find themselves unusually focussed on the task at hand, as if operating on autopilot. These reactions are often very useful in a survival situation, but they are also pre-verbal - they happen largely independently of the brain structures that deal with words and abstract thought. For journalists working at the scenes of disasters, this is something of a double-edged sword. On one hand not reflecting too deeply may help one to function amid carnage and stay on task, but, on the other, the same tunnelling of focus may lead to key details or important lines of inquiry being missed. In addition to making good survival choices, journalists also need their intellectual faculties to be fully online. The neurology of trauma suggests that we do not have as much conscious control over our reactions as we might like to believe (Wise, 2009).

The level of biochemical activation in the brain usually settles down in a few days or weeks after the threat has passed. In that time, people may continue to experience unsettling reactions such as intrusive thoughts - for instance, bad dreams or flashbacks; or high levels of arousal, leading to irritability and difficulty in sleeping. People may experience numbing, dissociation - feeling spaced out and disconnected - or an intense need to avoid remainders of what happened to them. None of these reactions are unusual and nor do they imply any long-term trauma trouble. Sometimes, though, such patterns can become more persistently etched into the psyche. If someone is still experiencing a wide-range of significant reactions two months after an event and the threat associated with it has passed, he of she may be suffering from PTSD or another trauma-related condition, such as post-traumatic depression, but that is something that should be assessed by a specialist clinician (NICE, 2005).

Trauma is not just reducible to survival brain chemistry. As humans, we have intellectual and existential dimensions to our lives that our mammalian forebears lack. We strive after meaning and invest ourselves in conceptions of justice, fairness and what constitutes a good life. We need to understand how bad things can happen, and want to feel that we are understood and valued by others. Violent acts often defy people's ability to make sense of them.

At first, researchers assumed that the level of objective fear - i.e. how unremitting that stress is and how likely a situation might be to result in actual injury - was the key index of the traumatic impact of an event. But the presence of human agency is also important. An accident at work takes on a very different nature, if it turns out that a close friend has deliberately sabotaged the machinery. And man-made disasters trouble people more than ones whose causation is purely natural. The psychiatrist, Jonathan Shay, who works with combat veterans, uses the expression "moral injury" to describe the increased psychological vulnerability that soldiers experience if they believe that they have been forced by circumstances or their leadership to participate in actions that are morally wrong. Combat trauma can lead "an unravelling of character" which may in turn result in further abuses. For Shay, the quality of leadership is key. Soldiers surrender a portion of their autonomy to their officers, and need to believe both that they are fighting for a just cause and that their leaders have their best interests at heart. Betrayal or disillusionment with a cause bite particularly deeply (Shay, 1994).

Interestingly, data is beginning to emerge which suggests that journalists may also fare worse psychologically if they feel guilty about how they treat their sources, or if they feel betrayed in some way by their editors, for instance if a story is unnecessarily spiked. Believing one's work has value is known to be psychologically protective; conversely reporters who feel that they their journalism has failed to bring the change that they hoped it would - for example new legislation to end an abuse or aid for a famine-struck region - may be more vulnerable (Browne et al., 2012). One seemingly perplexing addition to this is how ready people often are to blame themselves for events for which they had no direct responsibility. Trauma and guilt reactions are often closely entwined. We will come back to this later but it is also one of the reasons why journalists need to be particularly carefully about implying blame when discussing trauma with sources or with colleagues who have been caught up in traumatic situations.

Assessing impact

In general we tend to overestimate the impact of certain categories of trauma and underplay others. As journalists are just as prone to this as others in society, injecting some figures into the discussion may be helpful. Grief per se is not necessarily as incapacitating and long lasting as some might imagine. Research by Bonanno and Kaltman (2011) into the impact of significant bereavements, such as the death of a loved one, found that only between 10 to 15 per cent of people experience grief reactions that continue to impair their normal functioning several years after the loss. People exposed to natural disasters, such as earthquakes and flooding, also tend to show high rates of resilience, although the impact is likely to be greater where communities are poor and unable to replace lost resources (Norris et al., 2002).

The ratio starts to shift, however, the more human agency is involved. Particular kinds of interpersonal violence, such as sexual assault and abuse are associated with high rates of traumatic impact. A key study in the US found that 45.9 per cent of women and 65 per cent of men who reported rape as their most upsetting trauma developed PTSD (Kessler et al., 1995). These figures are significantly higher than the rates one would commonly see in soldiers returning from combat. Nevertheless war trauma and natural disasters seem to play more prominently in the news discussion of trauma than sexual violence. A Dart Centre survey of 1256 academic articles on journalism practice that reference trauma found that mass casualty public events, such as the Iraq War and the Boxing Day Tsunami were all well represented but only 2.2 per cent discussed sexual assault (Nelson and Newman, 2010). Violence that is geographically nearer to us and buried within networks of personal acquaintance, it seems, is harder to focus on and gets underplayed in a way that the more spectacular public events do not.

Epidemiological data for the impact on journalists is patchy. Depending on the study, research on US journalists suggests that between 86 to 100 per cent have witnessed a traumatic event as part of their work. In terms of the impact of that exposure, research worldwide has found possible rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, ranging between, 4 and 20 per cent, depending on the group studied (Newman and Nelson, 2012). War reporters are at the upper range of that spectrum with high rates of PTSD as well as depression and alcohol abuse. According to one study, the lifetime prevalence of PTSD in that group is 28.6 per cent (Feinstein et al., 2002). While that may seem very high, given the density of atrocity and life-threat these journalists had been exposed to over careers as war reporters that spanned an average of 15 years, the figure might be better read as a testament to resilience rather than vulnerability. (It is less than one would commonly find for civilian populations living in war zones.) Unfortunately, good data are lacking on media workers who find themselves stuck in a perpetual disaster situation that also happens to be their home, such as journalists caught up in the drug wars in Mexico or covering political violence in Pakistan, for example.

The implications for journalism practice

Given the importance of this, one might expect that journalism as an industry invests significant effort in preparing media workers to understand how trauma may impact upon their sources, themselves, or their news choices. However, it is only relatively recently that journalists have on a grassroots and a managerial level started to look out beyond their own disciplinary boundaries in order to gain insight from other professionals who are engaged in trauma work. This is a little odder than it first looks. Other genres of journalism have always insisted on expertise. No financial editor, for instance, would send a reporter out to cover the financial markets without an understanding of what money supply is or how bond yields work. Nevertheless journalists who have no formal understanding of grief and trauma reactions are still routinely sent out to knock on the doors of the bereaved, and war correspondents are expected to perform at their best in conflict zones with no training in managing the trauma reactions that they or their colleagues may experience.

This picture contrasts with other first responders like the police and the fire brigade. Local journalists often arrive at the scene of house fires and traffic accidents soon after (or sometimes before) the emergency services do, and foreign correspondents are exposed to many of the same horrors that relief workers and soldiers are. Family liaison officers in the police, for instance, receive extensive training and on-going professional development in how to approach people who have been bereaved or attacked. Appropriate communication skills are now an integral part of contemporary medical training. The military and emergency services also have support structures and training to help them manage their own exposure to trauma. These structures barely exist in journalism.

To be clear, it should be stressed, that facing trauma squarely is not just a problem for journalism. By its nature it is a challenge for anybody. When MacDuff in Shakespeare's play Macbeth returns from witnessing the slaughter at the king's court, he describes scenes of horror that "Tongue nor heart cannot conceive nor name..." For MacDuff, the events he has witnessed are literally unspeakable, so aggressive to his senses that they feel prior to language. But nevertheless he also feels impelled to give shape to the horror and to tell others. This double-bind is what Herman (1997) calls the dialectic of approach and avoidance. It is a dance that all trauma reporters are locked into. Their job is to find words for events and feelings, which not only may they struggle to express, but which their sources themselves may have great difficulty in articulating. We may be caught between the contradictory desires to both bury the truth and to dig it up (Newman and Nelson, 2012). Trauma reporting is clearly no easy task and one that is likely to be freighted with best efforts, compromises and, in some cases, unavoidable mistakes.

Many journalists are highly skilled at navigating these contradictions and develop a deep intuition of how to tread lightly and respectfully when working with victims and survivors. The problem is that there is very little training in this, and so journalists are left to themselves to find out what works and what doesn't largely by trail and error, by practicing on the public. There is also surprisingly little peer-to-peer discussion of these issues, which further reduces the opportunities for experienced journalists who are good at trauma work to pass their approach onto others (Richards and Rees, 2011; Simpson and Boggs, 1999).

The industry does have a series of ethical codes that are designed to maintain standards and to prevent exploitation of vulnerable people. These, however, do not provide much in the way of practical guidance. They lack substantive discussion of how people experience traumatic situations, and without this it is almost impossible to sensibly frame the real world dilemmas that reporters encounter on the ground. For instance, the Editors Code issued by the UK Press Complaints Commission, encourages journalists to show sympathy and behave "sensitively" when intruding into "grief or shock" - note the code doesn't reference trauma explicitly (for a discussion of this see Rees et al., 2012). But how does one define sensitive? The same lack of specificity bedevils much of the academic writing on journalistic ethics. A traditional ethics course may draw reference to the importance of avoiding unnecessary distress, but one needs to know more about what that distress is composed of and what is likely to aggravate it. If these are lacking, practical dilemmas are likely to be overlooked. Why are certain questions likely to render a rape victim ashamed and inarticulate, even many years after the original sexual assault? How does one respond if an interviewee breaks down into tears in an encounter that an interviewer may personally find frightening and guilt-inducing? Why do victims often become so enraged by even small, seemingly trivial, inaccuracies in published copy? And so on.

One block to conceptualising these issues may come from something that lies buried deep within the intellectual furniture of journalism. If news-making has an ideology, a working world view that most of its practitioners share, top of that list might be the idea that a journalist should be focused on the world out there, on the people and their stories, rather than on themselves. There are genres of journalism that gain their strength from personal reportage - cultural criticism and magazine writing for example - but generally the consensus in current affairs reporting is that it is stronger when the journalist is firmly in the background. If a village is destroyed by an artillery bombardment, the audience is more interested in what has happened to the villagers than how the journalists themselves feel about it.

However, the valuable precept that it is not about the journalist can segue into a more general presumption that not only should the journalist not get in the way of the story but, in a sense, that he or she is not really there at all. In this schema, the journalist is like an optical device that allows images from the world to pass through, without him or herself, or the phenomena under observation, being in any sense affected. What is being communicated is pure objective reality.

There is not the space here to go into a fuller discussion of objectivity, its allied notions of fairness and impartiality, and its connection with the industrial logic of journalism production. (For possible approaches to this interesting, if somewhat labyrinthine, topic compare: Bourdieu, 1998; Deuze, 2005; Ward, 2005.) The most important point to make here about the myth of the unaffected observer is that it is just not true - the reporter is there, and responds to the events by virtue of his or her status as an embodied human being.

Philip Williams, a correspondent for Australia's ABC was at the Beslan school siege, in which 331 hostages were killed, 176 of whom were children. Like many of reporters who covered that horrific incident, Williams had difficulty in adjusting back to home life and relating to his colleagues and family afterwards. Reflecting on the impact those killings, he said:

> *"It is really important that we get our senior people to acknowledge that a) bad things happen and that we are human, and that we are.. just as vulnerable as any other member of the community.... otherwise we are setting ourselves*

> *apart, aren't we? We are sort of saying that somehow being a journalist magically makes us bulletproof and it doesn't."* (Dart Centre Australasia and MacLeod)

Williams is discussing an extreme situation, but even with less overwhelming trauma stories, the content and the human interactions involved in sourcing them have resonances that are at play within the journalist. Williams is also drawing our attention to an apparent double standard. We expect people in our stories to be affected by events and we believe our audiences have an almost insatiable appetite for human-interest stories and vivid emotional copy, but often we cast ourselves as unaffected observers, more interested in facts and the technical manipulation of words and images than in feelings. (For a longer discussion of this and the talismanic role the word objectivity has in journalism, see Richards and Rees, 2011). This is an oversimplification, of course, but there is certainly something suspicious about the idea that professional observers are and should be entirely, or to any degree, unaffected by the suffering they report on. A subtle everyday discounting of personal impact is nevertheless something of a norm in the profession, one that potentially handicaps anybody hoping to do effective trauma journalism.

A feeling of invulnerability may admittedly be useful in situations in which courage is being tested, but this discounting may make it harder for journalists to register and fully factor in their own responses to trauma. This has three potential sets of consequences. First, the straight health risks of doing intensive trauma work might be missed. PTSD, depression, compromised immune system response, alcoholism, etc. can all lead to missed deadlines and failed assignments and, ultimately, derail careers and personal relationships. Secondly, there is the danger that recognition of the more nuanced ways in which trauma affects both how sources relate to journalists, and how journalists do their journalism, may be impeded. These tend to get missed under the mesmerising glare that the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder exerts on the discussion. Trauma influences working performance in many ways. It is not unusual for journalists on traumatic assignments to experience sharp irritability, distrust of others, fixation on limited dimensions of the story, or lapses in concentration and memory, all of which can lead to poor decision making and errors in news judgement. The ability to calibrate risk accurately may also suffer as a result of trauma exposure. Journalists, for instance, may become so attuned to the buzz of danger that it starts to feel more normal and everyday than their lives before. People in this situation may even start to find safer environments uncomfortable and alienating and seek to return to places where 'being on edge' feels like a better fit. The converse can also happen: rather than feeling more alive and intensely there in dangerous situations, the accumulative abrasion of covering death may leave journalists feeling apathetic and unconcerned for their own safety or that of colleagues. In neither case is risk judgment likely to be optimal.

And lastly, being aware of one's own reactions to trauma is an essential factor in understanding how to work with sources more effectively. In interviews, the difficulty journalists have in digesting the traumatic content of what they are hearing can have a knock-on effect on interviewees, as well as on the quality of information obtained. Research suggests that being present with somebody and listening to raw testimony is a more demanding form of emotional labour than just gaining intellectual familiarity with the material. In a famous study, Harber and Pennebaker found differences in skin conductivity between subjects who were shown film of holocaust survivors describing their experiences and those who only read similar material (cited in Brewin, 2003 :19).

Listeners, when confronted with distressing material, may find themselves experiencing a need to change the subject or to press their own versions of events onto the person speaking. The denser the trauma content, the greater the challenges an interviewer is likely to have in containing their own reactions. Trauma victims and survivors will often go over the same events again and again in an attempt to make sense of them. It is not unknown for listeners - including journalists - to blank out, or feel anger, and even, in some cases, aggression, when confronted with problems that they themselves do not see a solution to and which may arouse feelings of helplessness.

Earlier we mentioned the willingness of many victims and survivors to blame themselves for things which were done to them and which were thus not their fault. Unfortunately, onlookers often have an opposite need to blame the blameless.

Psychologists call this variety of other-blame hindsight bias. That is the strong motivation people may have to maintain a sense of their own invulnerability through seeking out reasons why a disturbing event could not have happened to them. The logic is: 'I'd have done something different and so I'd have been fine.' "Thus rape victims," as Chris Brewin (2003: 20-2) writes, "are blamed for what they were wearing or where they were walking, for not fighting back, or for being unable to read the minds of the men who attacked them." (Note there is nothing objective about this flavour of rationalising; it is a strategy the onlooker uses to manage personal anxiety.) Onlookers may also feel a need to offer reassurance or help, that may stem more from a need to reassure themselves than a realistic appraisal of the others' needs. In disaster situations, it is not unusual to hear people say such things as "everything will be OK soon", even when that looks far from being true.

Changing seats and returning to the perspective of trauma victims, we can see how undermining all this can be. Two of their principal anxieties are likely to be a) that they won't be listened to, and b) that they won't be believed. Survivors often have great difficulty themselves in making sense of what happened to them and bad interviewing technique can significantly undermine their attempts to gain some control back over their situation through their own understanding of it. Conversely, people appreciate the chance to be seen and to be heard. Skilled journalists who have learnt how to listen without passing judgement and who understand how to help structure a victim's narrative are likely to augment an interviewee's sense of security. They are also likely, of course, to get better information and material that is more quotable.

Non-judgemental listening is a vital skill for journalists doing trauma interviews. To some extent its practice is common sense, but it is not easily developed without focused effort and a recognition on the part of interviewers that their own psychology can affect the interviewing dynamic (Rees, 2007b). Sceptics might worry that this approach might lead to soft questioning, and overly victim-centred reporting. That is a misreading which stems from a common confusion regarding the difference between empathy and sympathy - the two terms are not synonyms. Sympathy has the connotation that one sides with the other. Empathy refers to the ability to read and understand another's emotional position; it says nothing about whether one agrees with it or not. Indeed, both empathy and emotional self-awareness are indispensable for journalists seeking to assess the veracity of an account.

Sometimes trauma survivors lie, and interviewers may find that a traumatic or dangerous context makes it much harder to work out what is really going on. When reporting on the fighting in Kosovo in 1998, the Canadian journalist Nancy Durham, came across a young woman in a field hospital called Rajmonda Reci. She told Durham that her six year old sister had been killed by Serbian soldiers and that was her motivation for wanting to fight with the Kosovo Liberation Army. The story went around the world. Later on, though, Durham returned to Rajmonda's home for follow-up piece to find that the supposedly dead sister was still alive. With hindsight, Durham wondered if she had asked more detailed questions of the exact circumstances of the alleged murder, the story might have started to unravel. But it is not always easy to ask probing questions about something so sensitive as the death of a close relative (Durham, 2012).

What if the source is telling the truth? On a practical level, fact-checking with a traumatised source requires real care: how does one query an account without implying that one does not believe it? Ill-thought out, overly interrogative styles of interviewing could do real damage where somebody is already predisposed to self-blaming. To complicate this further, sources may appear untrustworthy, even when trying to be truthful. Victims of violence may have great difficulty in accurately piecing together what happened. Typically the accounts of survivors of interpersonal violence are more fragmentary and inconsistent than accounts of other crimes (Brewin, 2003: 94; Koss et al., 1996). Victims, when trying to tell their stories may also exhibit different forms of emotional dysregulation - such as smiling for no apparent reason - or they may go silent when asked particular questions. These well-documented trauma reactions have a neurological basis: on a storage-retrieval level people are having difficulty in accessing the answers.

If a public figure behaved in any of those ways, one's first instinct might be to suspect a lie or a cover-up. In general we may underestimate how much the standard working techniques that we deploy as journalists have been honed in response to public engagement with powerful people, officials, business people and politicians, etc.. In these interactions, we tend to assume the following: that the public has a right to know, that sources are clear about what they are saying when they go on the record, that they frame their responses with regard to issues of public concern, and that adversarial interviewing techniques are not only effective but an expected part of the process of discovery. In other words, it is a power game that both sides know, fully understand and for the most part quite enjoy, despite usually protesting the opposite.

Trauma, however, typically disempowers people. It deprives them of a sense of security and control. And so we may need to re-evaluate our assumptions about public dialogue when working with vulnerable people, if we are not to leave them feeling unnecessarily battered and diminished by their engagement with the media. One of the alarming features of testimony presented to the Leveson Inquiry into the conduct of the UK press was how some journalists casually took advantage of the weak position victims were in to cajole them into acting in ways that clearly ran counter to their best interests, as the evidence of the McCann and Dowler families underscores (Leveson, 2011a,b).

So far in this chapter, we have looked at the challenges without giving adequate space to how they might be addressed. Good trauma reporting requires some specific knowledge, familiarity with certain interviewing techniques and a baseline ethical concern. But above all, it requires agility and precise attention to the specifics of each situation. Two brief case studies will illustrate how journalists have innovated to meet the professional challenges trauma poses.

Working with vulnerable sources

Kristen Lombardi first made her name by helping to expose the clergy sexual abuse scandal in Boston, a story that shook the Catholic Church in the United States and further afield. Later on, at the Center for Public Integrity, an organisation that funds investigative journalism, she began working with a team exploring the prevalence of sexual assault on US University campuses. The hypothesis was that the college authorities were covering up the true extent of the problem and failing to punish perpetrators effectively.

The challenge was how to lift the lid on a story that many hoped would be left unreported. The universities as part of their investigation into the alleged assaults had forced many of the women to sign dubious confidentiality agreements, and often students were under pressure from both peers and parents to remain silent.

Those who had spoken to the media had not necessarily had a happy experience of it. Kathyrn Russell, for instance, a student at the University of Virginia, had spent three hours going into great personal detail with a journalist from the CBS Early Show, but only a brief soundbite of twenty seconds made it to air, which bore little relationship to what she had hoped to communicate.

Lombardi realised the key to unlocking the story was to get fully informed consent, and to make sure that all her potential contributors knew what they were getting into before they opened up to her. It was important that they understood the implications of her working methods, as she explains:

> *"It was difficult. A lot of students thought they would just tell me their story and that's all I would need. But I needed documents. I needed to corroborate what they were saying, and, if I was going to feature their cases, I needed people who were comfortable with me filing records requests for their judicial file, talking to the school officials, signing waivers granting permission so the school officials would talk to me. I needed them knowing I was going to go to the accused student. The women knew what this accused person would say about them."* (Lombardi quoted in Shapiro, 2009).

Before Lombardi explained this, it had not necessarily occurred to her sources that the accused had a right to reply and that their views would appear in print. Some were astonished that anybody they trusted could give their alleged perpetrators such time and consideration.

Lombardi showed the women sections of her copy before publication, in order to steel them against painful surprises. In the UK, this is now more or less standard procedure for TV documentaries on such themes: contributors are shown a fine cut and asked to flag inaccuracies, usually with the proviso that there is no guarantee that anything other than factual error could be corrected. But the same practice is more controversial in print. If we switch the framing back to the political interview, the difficulty comes into focus: it looks like copy approval, creating a space where the source can exert influence on the editorial process, and it could potentially derail publication. (For example, if the source brings their lawyers in or pre-empts the story by giving a different account to another newspaper.)

But Lombardi was working with vulnerable women whose health could suffer if publication re-triggered adverse trauma reactions. The interviews had been more demanding than she had expected. Although a very experienced trauma interviewer, she was not fully prepared for working with younger victims:

> *"The difference between them and church victims was decades. The church victims had years to process what had happened to them. They were emotionally more mature. That made a huge difference in their ability to open up and to be able to handle what they were feeling when they were reliving their stories.*
>
> *With the student victims, people fell apart on me after the fact. I take great pride in the compassion and care that I exhibit. I try to be very thoughtful as an interviewer. I try very hard not to retraumatize. But I was really unprepared for how much people would flip out. People dropped out. People have disappeared. I have one victim who has an incredible story who disappeared, who won't respond. Also, I took it really personally. I took a lot of it really personally, and I was surprised by that."* (Lombardi quoted in Shapiro, 2009).

One of the golden insights that good trauma reporters develop through experience is to take each person as they find him or her. One has to meet people where they are, not where one would like them to be. No situation and no interviewee is the same as the last.

Fostering resilience in new teams

Twenty years ago, it was more or less a taboo to suggest that journalists themselves could get into significant personal trauma trouble. The framing was that real journalists ought to be able to "suck it up", or if one is finding it too hot by the fire, one should get out of the kitchen, etc.. Those attitudes began to take a concerted knock when a number of high-profile, multi-award winning journalists came out and admitted that covering the Rwandan genocide and the wars in the Balkans had taken a toll of their own mental health (See for instance this BBC documentary on war reporting presented by Jeremy Bowen: Langen, 2005).

By the time of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, several international news organisations - including the BBC and Reuters - were all moving to implement innovative trauma management programmes for their news staff.

The BBC scheme, which the Dart Centre helped to set up, drew on a model first developed for the Royal Marines called TRiM. Both the military and broadcasters faced a similar problem. There was a tendency to believe that admitting to being in difficulty was a sign of weakness that could harm their future careers. The idea behind trauma education programmes like the BBC's, elements of which have also been adopted by Sky News in the UK and ARD in Germany, is to put in place a culture where colleagues and mangers know what to look out for when somebody may be getting into significant trauma trouble and that there is no stigma in seeking help. This is important because PTSD is a condition that responds very well to appropriate treatment, a fact that is perhaps not as widely known as it should be. But, rather like a broken limb, it is better to have it dealt with earlier than later. The longer one ignores PTSD, the more likely that other complications, such as failed work assignments, relationship breakdowns, and alcoholism, etc. will start to bite (Rees, 2007a).

Helping managers to be better mentors is a key element in the broadcast trauma management programmes. Evidence from the military suggests that poor, inconsistent and emotionally illiterate leadership styles are a key contributing factor in breakdown among soldiers. When it comes to trauma work good, insightful leadership makes a real difference (Jones et al., 2012).

Workplace schemes also aim to give journalists a basic understanding of how traumatic stress works and self-care strategies for alleviating its effects. It is important to know how to calm one's system down after being exposed to toxic situations, and to limit the amount of time in which one is exposed to harrowing material. (This may be particularly important for picture editors and photographers who work intensively with traumatic images.) Seemingly simple steps, such as getting proper sleep, good nutrition and exercise, things that tend to get pushed aside when on deadline, can substantially help in rebalancing the system (Brayne, 2007).

Perhaps the most important single factor that keeps people resilient is good social support (Hobfoll et al., 2007). The key thing to understand here is that trauma isolates and fragments, while being able to spend time with people one trusts and can talk to, or indeed just hang out with, works in the opposite direction. However, journalists may not feel able to confide in friends or family, either for fear that they won't be understood or out of a reluctance to burden others with the same dark material they have been struggling with. To help address this, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation has developed a sophisticated peer-support scheme, where volunteer journalists get a basic training in how to talk about challenging trauma-related issues with colleagues in a way that is less likely to alarm or stigmatise. The intention is to foster a culture where factoring in trauma is normal part of the job, as basic as talking about bias and impartiality might be in political reporting.

While trauma awareness has made inroads in journalism, its uptake has been patchy: newspapers, for instance, lag behind broadcast organisations, and freelancers, who tend to be isolated in any case, are poorly served. It is still often assumed that trauma work is the preserve of a small subset of war reporters and others who focus on disasters or highly traumatic human-rights-based content, whereas, in fact, the subject cuts across a much broader range of journalistic output. Sports journalists may find themselves reporting on mass casualty incidents such a stadium fires and stampedes, and local journalists routinely deal with assault and traffic accidents in small communities. Home affairs and crime reporters, who have to cover murder trials and harrowing child assault cases in great detail over long periods, may be particularly exposed.

Reporting craft and self-care are intimately connected, and it is important that training and newsroom management tie them in together. If trauma awareness is seen as something extraneous to the journalism and driven by those outside the profession, such as psychologists or those working to an occupational health agenda in the human resources department, then there is a danger that this crucial relationship will get lost. A journalist who makes bad or unethical reporting decisions, or who feels that they lack the necessary skills to handle interviews sensitively, is likely to find the work stressful in a way that could potentially increase their risk of developing the kind of moral injury discussed earlier in this chapter. Handling an interview well is important for the wellbeing of both the interviewee and the interviewer. Very few journalists get adequate training or guidance in how to work with victims and survivors of trauma, especially at the beginning of their careers when it is most needed. Considerable scope remains here for innovation in professional training and practice (Richards and Rees, 2011).

Some final thoughts

Most of the discussion here has been devoted to exploring the personal interactions that make news production possible, be they between journalists and their sources or between journalists themselves when working in news teams. We have not given much space to representation, to how the lives of victims and survivors are portrayed in the news.

Sometimes the words in a story, once crystallised into print or digital ink, can seem to develop a life of their own and float in a disembodied way high above the lives of anybody they describe. When tragedy hits a community, journalists may find ourselves shoehorning complex sequences of events into set narratives and defaulting to stock characters - the grieving widow, the feckless parent who can not control a delinquent child, the brave rescuer, etc.. Often these devices and templates may well provide a useful shorthand which helps the audience engage with complex events; at other times they may obscure crucial details and traduce the experience of victims and survivors. Take the story, for instance, of somebody who has rescued five neighbours from an apartment block fire. A news team might believe that they are doing him a favour by billing him as the hero of the hour, but what if he does not recognise himself in that picture and is instead waking up every night wracked with guilt towards those he failed to save from the inferno? Or what if the story of the feckless parent and the delinquent teenager is really quite different from how it was cast? The media also has a role in how people make sense of traumatic events and how they manage their fears. A TV report suggesting that a community is so blighted by a tragedy that meaningful recovery is remote is unlikely to be assisting its future. (For a discussion of victims' perceptions of media participation, see Maercker, et al. 2006).

Representation is a key part of the trauma-reporting jigsaw. But the concentration in this chapter on the interactional is a deliberate attempt to draw attention to a shortfall. For the most part, writing about how to do journalism is curiously blind to this dimension. The final products, the words on the page or the packaged video report - the concrete objects - are given forensic scrutiny, and often so is the technology that served as the tools for their publication, but the human dynamics - the behind the scenes conversations and relationships that are essential in the making of the news - are all too often skimmed over or lost. Journalism is about working with people as much as it is about working with words or new technology. Media theory is also culpable in this respect. Often it appears to work more like archaeology than social anthropology: its analysis proceeds from examining the artefact rather than from witnessing the processes and relationships that went into its making.

It could be that most of the time the interactional seems too mundane to comment on. Factor in trauma, though, and things begin to look different. We start to become more interested in the life of a story both before and after publication. How was it obtained and what were the consequences of its publication for the people in it? What did the reporter say to the partner of the deceased? When we factor in trauma, it starts to become clear that the challenges of trauma reporting slip underneath the radar of everyday professional deliberation not because they are simple and mundane but rather because they are challenging and hard to think through.

We started this chapter looking at approach and avoidance, how all of us – sources, journalists and whole societies are both attracted to trauma and repelled by it at the same time. Knowledge of the bad things that can befall us is something we both want to understand and simultaneously shelter ourselves from. Media work on trauma can be one of the most rewarding genres, because it makes the final product seem less transient and disposable: it gives journalism a different kind of depth and it gives voice to aspects of life that we have an existential need to understand. But it is also daunting territory. Finding a route through it that captures the essence of a traumatic situation, in a way that preserves the dignity of victims and survivors, requires attention, skill and experience. The best way for journalists to cultivate those capacities is through peer-to-peer discussion of the issues. The more we discuss trauma and our own responses to it, the more clearly we are likely to see the people we are writing about. And the reverse is also true: understanding how trauma affects others and what it takes for them to be resilient is the key to sustaining ourselves, and consequently our journalism, when working on challenging assignments. The full benefits of taking stock of the trauma factor, then, are in the end most likely to be seen in the quality of the reporting itself.

Challenging Questions

- When, in your view, does news become traumatic?
- Choose a news story pertinent to this chapter's discussion. Evaluate the strategies journalists adopted when reporting it – were they sufficiently trauma-aware?
- What suggestions do you have for making news reporting of traumatic incidents more responsible?
- In what ways might emotional literacy be useful for journalists?

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26 News Storytelling in A Digital Landscape

Vin Ray

"If the culprit [the internet] is obvious, so is the primary victim of this radically reduced attention span: the narrative, the long-form story, the tale. Like some endangered species, the story now needs defending from the threat of extinction in a radically changed and inhospitable digital environment."

Ben MacIntyre, The Times

"This whole idea of an attention span is a misnomer. People have an infinite attention span - if you are entertaining them."

Jerry Seinfeld, writer, actor and comedian

"Long-form narrative is not only alive, but dancing to new music."

Jill Abramson, New York Times

Introduction: Is the Internet Killing Storytelling?

Shortly before Christmas in 2009, social media networks across the internet were set buzzing with indignation. A collective state of high dudgeon had formed in response to an article in that most old-fashioned of platforms: a newspaper. The paper in question was The Times of London. The headline? "The internet is killing storytelling".

If the author, Ben Macintyre, articulated the fears of many in journalism, he equally upset a wide range of people who believe that, far from killing anything, the internet is liberating us from the formulaic structures and scaffolding the media uses to tell stories.

So what is happening? This chapter seeks to address these key questions: Is the internet killing storytelling or merely evolving it? How are journalists and news organizations adapting to a much wider variety of storytelling possibilities? What does it mean for craft skills? Will long-form stories ever work on a computer screen? In essence, can narrative storytelling survive the onslaught of byte-size data and diminishing attention spans when 'move and skim is the mood you're in'? (Achenbach, 2009).

Macintyre (2009) provides one view, and forcefully so: 'The internet, while it communicates so much information so very effectively, does not really "do" narrative,' he says. 'Very few stories of more than 1,000 words achieve viral status on the internet.' Macintyre was responding to – or building on – a seminal article in The Atlantic by Nicholas Carr (2008). Carr was writing about what he saw as his own diminishing attention span. Carr said his friends, too, could feel it: 'The more they use the web, the more they have to fight to stay focused on long pieces of writing.' Deep reading, Carr argued, is indistinguishable from deep thinking. So according to this argument, narrative storytelling – particularly long-form - is being washed aside by a tsunami of byte-sized information.

Susan Orlean, a writer at The New Yorker, has another view: that storytelling is thriving. She argues that there's never been a better time to be a teller of stories and this view echoes that of many: that new technology trends might be disruptive, but that this is just packaging. Basic content will not be threatened by changes to the delivery system. Many others would seem to agree. 'It's a very, very exciting and very heartening time,' says Jim Giles [2012], co-founder of the long-form science and technology journalism site, MATTER, 'because so many interesting, high-quality things are happening.'

Is there demand for long form journalism?

There is little doubt that stories in print had already begun to get shorter; the internet has taken up the baton and condensed them even further. 'There has been cause for pessimism,' says Evan Ratliff (2011), co-founder and editor of another long-form narrative site, The Atavist. 'But it would be hard to look around at the moment, with things like Kindle Singles, Byliner, Longform, Longreads, The Awl, and others, and not find some cause for optimism.'

Ratliff is one of a number of media producers and pioneers who are challenging the apparent incompatibility of the internet and long-form journalism. Companies like Mediastorm, The Atavist, MATTER and Byliner are all turning conventional wisdom on its head.

That said, it is perhaps worth guarding against the notion that we have lost a Golden Age of long-form narrative. These new pioneers are quick to point out that what they are doing is often compared to what is probably a mythical period in the past, when no 15,000-word piece was turned down, every story was Pulitzer quality and everyone was paid handsomely. Yet while the work of some writers – Gay Talese and Tom Wolfe among them – is rightly celebrated, the reality is probably more prosaic.

It is probably the case that long-form journalism has always been a niche activity, even in an age when there were fewer choices. And why should being long mean its good? Good is good, irrespective of length. Success depends on what you metrics are, according to Brian Storm (2012), Executive Producer at Mediastorm, a multi-media production studio, but the appetite is there: 'Do lots more people want to read a 10,000-word New Yorker article rather than a quick hit in USA Today? No. Does that mean the long form audience doesn't exist? Of course not.'

One recent episode would seem to demonstrate the demand for a more wholesome online diet. In early 2012, two experienced reporters, Jim Giles and Bobbie Johnson used the funding platform Kickstarter to appeal for funds to start a site called MATTER. The problem they set out was that 'the web has become a byword for fast and cheap'. Their pitch was that they would focus on doing one thing, and doing it exceptionally well:

> *Every week, we will publish a single piece of top-tier long-form journalism about big issues in technology and science. That means no cheap reviews, no snarky opinion pieces, no top ten lists. Just one unmissable story… It's an experiment to see*

> *if independent journalism, done right, can fill the gap left by mainstream media.”*
> (Giles and Johnson, 2012.)

They had set out to raise $50,000. They hit their target in less than two days. By the time they closed the appeal 2,566 people had, collectively, pledged over $140,000 to help them get started.

Is there a business model for long-form narrative journalism?

Demand aside, these new ventures also have the advantage of being born into this new and constantly changing environment. They have developed through an online business model from the outset, while traditional media may face a difficult transition. They have been heavily reliant on advertising revenue and, for instance, magazine sales. But while these relatively small newcomers may be lighter on their feet, they might look enviously across at the big players for one thing: deeper pockets.

Great storytelling takes time. Good writers need paying. The question is who will have the pockets to pay them? So as an increasing number of players move into the space of long-form narrative, it raises a fundamental question: can they sustain themselves? Is there a business model? It is early days yet, but the signs are good.

Smaller companies do not have the resources of the large news organisations. But neither do they have tiers of management or a legacy that tells them ‘this is the way we’ve always done things here’. In the past these ‘legacy news providers’ have had their formats dictated by technology and they have adapted successfully. But there has always been a pervading sense of feeding the beast. Few journalists are given the time, space, business model or even training to escape this way of operating. However, these new entrants to the market have stripped down their operations to exactly what they need for the job.

Two sites, the Atavist and Mediastorm, have a similar approach and their success is pointing the way for others to join them. Both are charging small amounts to access content. The strategy for selling Mediastorm’s films and Atavist’s long-form stories is to make sales of individual pieces, pitched at low prices, while ensuring that paying is a painless experience. In its first year, the Atavist sold more 100,000 copies of ten pieces of narrative non-fiction ($2.99 for the multimedia version, $1.99 for text). Audiences raised on an app store model will be familiar with this way of buying content. Revenue is shared with authors: the more readers, the more revenue - for both author and publisher.

At the same time, both companies have developed successful content management systems. These were initially just to house their own work, but both realized the commercial value of the systems they had created and so began to license them out to a wide variety of clients.

The Atavist system allows the user to publish work out to a variety of platforms like iPhone, iPad, Kindle and Android.

While Mediastorm exists to make great stories, its business model has diversified even further. It runs popular training workshops at its headquarters in Brooklyn and sells training resources online. It also makes a significant amount of money by making films for clients, particularly in the NGO sector.

These new ventures are significantly different from a conventional independent production company, primarily because they have their own means of publication. For some clients, the very size and existence of a ready-made audience spanning 170 countries is an attraction. Some of Mediastorm's clients find that more of their customers see the films on the Mediastorm site than on their own. Mediastorm's own storytelling, however, is its priority and it is turning down significant amounts of client work.

All this is a clear departure from the dominant business model in online journalism, which has been driven by advertising revenue based on page views.

New ways of working: upending culture of fixed lengths and focus groups

The business model is not the only departure from convention. These new pioneers of long-form storytelling are rejoicing in trampling across the conventional boundaries of mainstream media in other ways.

Firstly, there is no fixed length to their pieces: there is no set time or number of column inches. Brian Storm (2012), at Mediastorm, says:

> *"In traditional TV everything has to be 27 minutes or some other fixed time to fit the schedule. But we'll do a piece that's whatever length we feel is the optimum length to make it the most powerful piece of storytelling we could produce."*

Conventional wisdom at the time of writing is that two to three minutes is the maximum anyone will watch on the web. Yet Mediastorm is regularly producing stories in the region of fifteen minutes and reaching global audiences that some TV programmes would envy. More significantly, over two thirds of the audience is watching the films all the way through: a very high retention rate for the internet.

Length of output is not the only way in which formula and format are being challenged. We live in a time when the large news organisations know more about the demographics of their audience than ever before. Yet the make up of their audience is not a factor in the way either Mediastorm or the Atavist construct their stories. They worry that to do so would risk homogenizing their audience and that the key to their success lies simply in great storytelling. 'We don't think too much in terms of traditional demographics,' says Evan Ratliff (2011) at the Atavist. 'We're targeting anyone who loves to read great true stories. We don't really get too much more specific than that.' Mediastorm takes the same approach.

The real revolution: tablets and social recommendations

There is a revolution going on: a development that makes more difference than any other. But it is not in storytelling. It is in the tools available to tell and consume stories. The role of computers is changing. Tablet computers and applications, or apps, are changing everything. Kindles and iPads are merely early leaders in what will become the commonplace way of consuming long-form journalism. In fact, storytellers are probably not ready for the explosion of devices that will facilitate long-form storytelling.

Those who believe the internet is killing storytelling are thinking about play back on a desk-top computer. But the internet is a distribution vehicle for a whole variety of devices. The exponential growth in tablets – particularly for reading – marks a significant departure from the traditional desk-based computer used for work. Tablets are driving a change in the demand and consumption of long content. 'All our numbers support an audience need for long form play back," says Brian Storm (2012), 'and here's the killer fact: 65% of viewers who start viewing watch until the end.' Magazines do not have the benefit of analytics to measure the way their readers consume long articles, but how many would dare to claim that kind of retention rate from their readers?

Mark Armstrong (2012), the founder of Longreads, says that as well as the embrace of tablets and mobile devices, three other factors are driving a resurgence in long-form journalism: the rise of social recommendation—when people read something they really love, they become its biggest cheerleader; communites and publishers (like Longreads) that have embraced a new way to organize this content; and the rise of time-shifting apps like ReadItLater. The ability to take a story offline with you and finish it in places where you might not be online is critical to the success of long-form content.

Revolution or not, the development of these new tools cannot avoid an inescapable fact: the content has got to be good. In fact, because of the many alternative distractions available, it has to be very good. New tools and new technology will never be a substitute for great storytelling. Great narrative storytelling can provide a compelling signal through the noise of the internet, but it can only emerge from great reporting.

Traditionalists should be reassured. By and large, those investing in long-form journalism on the internet are not inventing some new kind of storytelling. Producers at Mediastorm do not even think about the web as their platform. Their output can be viewed from a distance of one foot away on a phone, two feet on a computer or tablet, 10 feet on a TV or 50 feet or more at a cinema. 'What we think about is how do we tell the best damn story we can tell,' says Storm (2012). A beginning, a middle, an end, surprise, humour, emotion: these remain the fundamental concepts, whatever the platform. It is the platforms themselves that are evolving rapidly. The internet is just a pipe. But for these new pioneers it is also a way of removing gatekeepers and enabling people to tell stories.

What none of this resolves, of course, is whether our attention spans are indeed diminishing. We are told that children have no attention span, yet they seem happy to read Harry Potter books at one sitting. Meanwhile, nearly 100 million people have watched the 29-minute KONY 2012 film on the internet. What this reinforces is that the quality of the narrative needs to be very high. That is why sites like Mediastorm and The Atavist turn down far more ideas more than they commission. There is an appetite for long-form journalism and an increasing number of providers are seeking to satisfy it. But only good storytellers need apply.

Challenging Questions

- Compare the production and consumption of long-form journalism in 2000 with 2012.
- Does the advent of the Internet spell the end of long-form journalism?
- Consider the effect of the Internet on television current affairs.
- Consider the effect of tablet computers on long-form narrative journalism.
- Examine the business models available to sustain long-form journalism.

Recommended reading

www.atavist.com
www.mediastorm.com
www.longreads.com
www.longform.org
www.byliner.com
www.kickstarter.com/projects/narratively/narratively
www.kickstarter.com/projects/readmatter/matter

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"How long-form journalism is making a big come back – an interview with Jim Giles, co-founder of Matter" 19th April 2012 http://www.postdesk.com/jim-giles-interview-matter-kickstarter-long-form-journalism

"Matter Kickstarter campaign" 22 February 2012 http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/readmatter/matter

MacIntyre, B., 2009, "The internet is killing storytelling" *The Times*, 5 November, 2009

Brian Storm interview with the author, Brooklyn, USA, 26 February 2012

27 You talking to me?

Journalists and the big conversation

Liisa Rohumaa

"My readers, I realized, had become my collaborators."

Dan Gillmor, We the Media (2004)

"Hardcore commenters can be exhausting to engage with."

Nick Denton in a Gawker comments thread (2012)

Robert de Niro in Taxi Driver asked: "You talkin' to me?" as he posed in front of a mirror. He was talking to himself, something which many journalists do on a regular basis as they publish to the internet , asking and answering their own questions, but often failing to engage and respond to their readers. Journalists are notable by their absence in the majority of comment threads.

In his book, We the Media, (2004) citizen journalism advocate Dan Gillmor looked at the real-time, interactive possibilities of the internet which he argued would transform journalism from a lecture to a conversation. Readers, collectively, knew more than media professionals. Journalists needed to bring them into the conversation in order to create a new media ecosystem of professionals and citizen journalists. And that conversation would have all the constituents of insight, expertise, editor's eye, feedback, and opinion. Journalism would be more relevant and transparent and public journalism would have what it was missing – the public.

Gillmor castigated Big Media for its failure to engage and criticized reporters who did not leave their email addresses at the bottom of their articles. Nearly a decade on from his cri de coeur most journalists leave their contact details at the bottom of their work, and they have tools such as blogs, forums and social media to express and exchange ideas. Journalists are breaking the ice with readers but many of those who have been 'flamed', harassed and trolled by commenters are justifiably angry, bemused and defensive. Being part of the conversation is not always a pleasant experience.

This chapter looks at the challenges facing journalists when much of their interaction with readers is in the public domain, often and specifically in the internet domain. The conversation, once private is in full view and open to all. It can be combative rather than polite, questioning rather than reverential. It can contain many voices, form its own community and be viewed as editorial content. People can log on to their computer, read an article and comment on it providing feedback or a different point of view. They are often referred to as commenters rather than readers. And those who seek to leave abusive comments, inflame opinion or manipulate it are viewed as trolls and have become the scourge of journalists who have to monitor and moderate discussions.

Value in below the line commentary

Despite all these challenges, broadcast, print and online outlets actively ask readers for their opinions. The Guardian's 'open journalism' venture has made it policy for journalists to engage with readers by opening up new comment sections and actively encouraging readers to comment, write, submit content and shape the editorial discussion at its daily news conference. It holds open days for the public to come to its offices and chat to journalists. And it consistently asks its readers for feedback. Comment editor, Becky Gardiner, in an explanatory video for readers entitled, 'We ask our readers what we should be writing about' (2012) describes a shift in editorial perceptions so that comments below the line now have a place above the line.

The 'commentariat', once the intellectual domain of professional journalists, has expanded to include what was formerly referred to as the audience. The word audience in itself is problematic as it denotes a passive role in communication. Criticism and opinion, however, are no longer consigned to the ghetto of the letters page. Journalists are getting used to feedback on their articles and blogs but still grappling with the best way to respond to it, if at all.

Internet sites such as Gawker are looking at comments as content with editorial and commercial appeal. In a bid to address concerns about those that love to upload abuse, poke fun and manipulate, it is rolling out a new feature so that each contributor, whether anonymous or not, will now be given the power to moderate the conversation. Gawker's owner, Nick Denton, took to his own website in a post entitled 'Why anonymity matters', (2012) to explain his rationale. "Give the source the ability to tell us what they know, then let the reader determine whether they've satisfied the critics, just as one would in judging a panel debate or a courtroom cross-examination." And when challenged he replied in the comments field.

Big Media and new online entrants such as Gawker are trying to stoke the conversation. The BBC regularly asks listeners to 'tell us what you think' and local newspapers feature 'Have your say' sections. The New York Times says it wants to actively encourage its best commenters. Why and how they are doing this and the challenges it presents to journalists will form the discussion contained in this chapter. While some journalists are embracing the challenge, others are still trying to figure out what this new relationship means for them and their journalism. Others have their faces turned to the paywall (and are having that conversation on other sites such as Facebook and Twitter). Many journalists fear what they see as an army of commenters who cloak criticism and abuse behind online anonymity. Media organizations blow hot and cold on the issue exhorting readers to join in but then limiting their involvement via word count, moderation or sign in rules.

The challenges are also practical – how, why and when sometimes just boils down to having the time to read a thread. The internet is unscalable and feedback (once just a sack of letters delivered daily) is now a 24-hour, global torrent. If we are all now members of the chattering classes, how do journalists make sense of all the clatter?

Where once the journalist was on the inside looking out telling the audience what was happening to them it is now the audience telling the story alongside journalists whether that be in their own blogs, participatory journalism ventures such as hyperlocal community sites or user generated content and comment often commissioned, often unsolicited. Editors ask readers to submit their opinions, photos, blogs and videos and journalists are increasingly under pressure to know what is significant and relevant to their readers. They can no longer rely on instinct or focus groups or a brand or the occasional glorious scoop. And they have to think about attracting traffic to their sites.

What was formerly referred to as the audience is still the subject of focus groups and surveys, advertisers, direct marketers and social media strategists but Dan Gillmor reminds us: "While it's possible to learn something from a focus group, or a scientific survey, those techniques don't add up to listening," (2004: 69). There is little evidence to suggest surveys have determined the editorial content of a newspaper or a TV station. But the comments section and the wisdom of crowds contained within it can, at best, be a valuable source for journalists.

Unravelling the comments thread

Sceptical? Journalist Jack Hitt is a fan of long string comments. Writing about its value in the New York Times he says: "These days, the comments section of any engaging article is almost as necessary a read as the piece itself."

It is certainly an acquired taste. In 'Science and Truth: We're All in it Together' (2012) he cites the case of readers who over a number of years conversed on the web to disprove the reported existence of an ivory-billed woodpecker which had reportedly been spotted for the first time in 50 years in an Arkansas swamp. "Sure, there is still the authority that comes of being a scientist publishing a peer-reviewed paper, or a journalist who's reported a story in depth, but both such publications are going to be crowd-reviewed, crowd-corrected and, in many cases, crowd improved. (And sometimes, crowd-overturned). Granted, it does require curating this discussion, since yahoos and obscenity mavens ten to congregate in comment sections."

The challenges for journalists are well described in the quote above. And it is clear that if journalists don't join the conversation readers will give them the bird anyway. Millions have already migrated to the blogosphere. The internet has changed the role and practice of the journalist and presents a new set of challenges for those who want to engage with readers and join the conversation.

According to Gillmor a hyperlink can spark a conversation online and offline. This chapter looks at what we have learnt so far and offers some practical ideas for journalists who, while quite accustomed in their professional lives to speaking and listening at the same time, are still finessing the art online.

Opening gambits

Conversation: *noun* " Talk, especially an informal one, between two or more people, in which news and ideas are exchanged' - Oxford Dictionary

Interacting with readers has always been a challenge for journalists. Those that are circumspect about the way the internet has transformed communication into a collaborative and participatory culture point to the fact that a good journalist meets the reader on a daily basis, talking, networking, quoting and maintaining relationships within their 'beat'. But, it can be argued, that even those within a local community who have reported it for a lifetime can never really get a true picture about those inhabit it. And what about those who are interested in the subject matter who exist beyond the boundaries of it?

Journalists can be defensive and dismissive when it comes to the notion of engagement with readers. The tensions are described in research by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen in Journalists and the Public (2007), which found that the traditional hub of community engagement, the letters page was a source of both pride and irritation for newspapers. And the notion of the audience as dumb, passive and unresponsive is not restricted to journalists, either. It can form a dominant strand of popular thinking. "Audiences are seen as mindless, ignorant, defenceless, naïve and as manipulated or exploited by 'mass media'" (Media Audiences, 10 :2005).

For those not convinced by the argument that the internet has wrought positive changes in the relationship between reader and journalists – transparency, accountability, collaboration – the us and them debate still holds true and is illustrated by Oscar Wilde's provocation in his essay, The Artist as Critic: "There is much to be said in favour of modern journalism. By giving us the opinions of the uneducated, it keeps us in touch with the ignorance of the community." But what if Wilde, the great journalist and conversationalist had held his salons in the blogosphere, and used Twitter for his aphorisms, would he have thrived or would he still have the same disdain? Famous for his excoriation of his critics who he accused of hiding in the letters page , would he have used the web to continue the conversation?

Wilde, almost certainly would have been a social media darling beloved by editors who could rely on his intellect for traffic to their websites, his flamboyance for YouTube, and his love of a bust-up with bloggers. Perhaps his audience would be his judge and jury. But, of course, he could have been a complete failure unable to understand that conversation, dialogue, is a two way street and perhaps a blogger such as buzzmachine.com's Jeff Jarvis would have reminded him that the internet is the first medium owned by the audience, the first medium to give the audience a voice.

Arguably, journalists need to remind themselves of this, too. Perhaps their changing role as a gatewatcher rather than a gatekeeper (Bruns, 2005) complicates their daily, professional lives and perhaps it is the use of language such as "produsage" to describe the blend of producing and consuming inherent in their online activities which they find so repugnant. Nonetheless, this growing model of collective and collaborative rather than parallel (Singer et al, 2011) could be a way forward from the isolation many feel as the industry addresses the commercial impact of the internet by cutting staff and forcing many into what they view as 'churnalism' (Davies, 2010). While journalists can no longer view themselves as an intellectual elite ,which filters and controls content they still have an important, crucial, role as a facilitator. The internet is a noisy, crowded place looking for those with a reliable track history of leading people to the truth or at least a version of the truth they can cross check themselves. Gillmor in his vision of journalism being a conversation sees no reason why professional journalists should be defensive about readers who he argues collectively know more than media professionals.

Why take part?

Journalists can choose not to respond to feedback or read comments about their own articles. They can detach themselves from the people they hope will read their articles. They don't have to blog, read or take part in forums, have a Twitter account or use Facebook. The conversation, the debate will take place with or without them and that conversation will also be between members of the community itself. The community can cut the journalist out of the conversation completely. Those within the public sphere can report its workings and investigate it without a professional qualification in journalism – many do, and are labelled citizen journalists even if they are not familiar with the term.

But what's wrong with this picture? Firstly, most journalists want to create journalism that is relevant and significant and there are few who do not want, at the very least, a reaction. Secondly, professional journalists are duty bound to find out what people think, what is happening to them and what is happening to their community.

Not all comments threads are the same. It would be naïve to assume that threads contain golden nuggets of information or lots of leads to stories. The quality of the journalism doesn't necessarily equate to the quality of debate that follows. And there are always comedians (sometimes funny) and smart alecks (irritating, especially when they are right.) There are those who love to troll and are not interested in conversation. And there are those who are vile, racist and homophobic.

While some journalists embrace the new world of interaction with readers others have questioned its value. Helen Lewis, deputy editor of The New Statesman magazine, in her blog likened the worst commenters to those who use the internet as a giant lavatory wall. "I think at this point it's safe to say there are two types of writer: those who worry about their comments and those who don't read them."

But Guardian data journalist James Ball has defended online comments and says there is a third type of journalist - one who engages with readers and who would find the internet a dull place without readers being able to challenge writers. He also argues (In defence of online comments, 2012) that the debate over trolling has spilled over into a general sideswipe against comments. "The purpose of writing on blogs, community sites like Comment is Free and much of social media is to start or further a conversation – not to share a few writerly pearls of wisdom." He says if five early commenters have misunderstood something in a news story he has written, chances are that it is his fault and not theirs.

Ball points to the huge amount of traffic a site can get – the most engaged 1 per cent of the audience on any given site accounts for a huge amount of traffic.

A site such as Gawker has tens of millions of comments in its database. Sites can't afford to ignore their commenters and are actively trying to engage them. The Guardian has a team of community editors tasked to ask readers for their views, to commission their articles, to track their comments and respond to them.

Individual journalists can and are doing it for themselves and are often surprised by feedback. Deborah Orr, writing in The Guardian, under the headline '10 Things not to say to someone seriously ill' found readers responding with their own insights and her article became a wiki of wit and wisdom. She also responded with a footnote at the bottom of the article.

How Do I RSVP?

So what are the key challenges facing journalists from reader feedback? If "The cacophonous world of participatory journalism is an exciting place," (Singer et all, 2011) what is holding them back? Genuine concerns include:

- fear of criticism
- online abuse
- verification of genuine commenters
- scalability, keeping tabs on everything
- not enough time
- not my job

Social media such as Twitter has made it easier and faster for journalists to engage with readers. Many of them prefer to respond in this way. Instead of checking back at comments threads it is much easier to scan Twitter feeds. Conversely, keeping track often means coming back to the point of coalescence – the comments thread of specific articles in specific sections populated by specific, loyal commenters.

The conversation is there if you want to find it and take part. The challenges are many. Journalists are still having to figure out how to balance the imperatives of distance and detachment with another imperative – willing membership in the community that journalists address (Rosen, 1999). At a time when issues of ethics, trust and transparency are under scrutiny journalists are under pressure to redefine journalism. Even if they are sceptical about participatory journalism, the organizations they work for continue to encourage them to invite readers into what was a formerly closed shop agreement. Many of those organizations are feeling the commercial imperative to drive traffic, get hits and returners to their sites. It is not unusual for a site to get several hundred comments on an article – even more on a big, breaking story. Homepages feature 'most read' and 'most commented' sections to help the reader navigate content.

The internet has enabled journalists to start a conversation and ask more questions of their readers. We can't be surprised if they turn round and ask more of us in return. Some of these questions, as Gillmor has pointed out, will be tough conversations but are needed if journalists are to serve the community, be investigative, and present accurate, balanced arguments.

A conversation with Kate Bevan, technology journalist

Kate writes for the The Guardian and says she has no problem answering readers even though she is one of many journalists who has experienced being 'flamed' online. I asked her how she reads and responds to those who engage with her online.

One commenter responded to her article on 'booth babes' and sexism at technology shows with:

> *"Tech is male. Now get over it!" She says: "I'm absolutely delighted to take part in a discussion and people raising a question but there has to be respect. I don't write for comments. I'm up for people who want to raise a question or challenge me, that's fine and I often have a conversation with them via Twitter or Facebook as well. I think journalists should be polite and engaging. But I'm not going to engage with the hateful, vile, sniping stuff. I don't even acknowledge that kind of crap and I refuse to feed the trolls."*

The challenge for journalists, she argues, is that the internet has fostered a "giant sense of entitlement, the 'cult of me' where people say the most hateful things but wouldn't dream of walking into the pub and saying it". Like many journalists she prefers Twitter. "There's more of sense of community there and people have a construct of you as a character, a human."

She also feels that organizations should take moderation more seriously and has reservations about allowing commenters to be anonymous. " The role of the moderator is really important to stop the really bad stuff getting through. Usually it's a case of there not being enough of them and quite frankly they are often young and inexperienced. In the old days, the role of the letters editor was really important. They verified and identified the authors."

Online, she advises journalists to make an effort to be professional and polite and to be open via blogs and social media but to keep the personal private. Never respond to people who are being abusive, she says, "it's a complete waste of time. Just remember, stand away from the keyboard!"

What's in it for journalists?

Many sites now actively try to engender a code of conduct and have warnings about civility. So, if journalists are still not convinced about tracking comments what, in a positive sense, can they get out of it?

- an indication of what is relevant to their readers
- engagement, feedback, does the journalism works at a basic level e.g .readers understand an article or graphic
- contacts, ideas
- transparency – (correction and polite acknowledg ment if someone points out a genuine mistake)
- discussion in which the journalist takes part
- chance to respond, clarify (could be just a hyperlink)
- help on a story
- quotes (the best comments are often used in live blogs)
- commenters who are commissioned to write articles.

Digital curation sounds fancy but is a practical necessity. Once it was notebooks, files, cuttings and the spike. Now it more likely to be social bookmarking services such as Delicious and RSS links. Journalists intuitively screen, scan, filter and dissect and while it is not possible to respond or participate all of the time it is still worth the effort to at least listen. "You have a responsibility to look after your own digital footprint," says Kate Bevan.

Conclusion: reading, writing and responding

Most journalists like talking a lot, it's part of the job and it is often because the researching, reading and writing can be isolating. They like to talk about the story, how they got it, what happened, who said what and lots of stuff that is interesting but doesn't fit in a report. These conversations used to take part in the newsroom or the pub but are now starting to happen online as journalists blog, tweet and respond to readers. It's one way of being transparent and accountable. There's also a growing expectation among readers that writers will engage with them.

For some journalists this is an onerous, self-defeating task particularly if they have been stung or targeted by armchair critics or worse. But for others engagement is now part of the job and they write for above the line and are happy to respond below it. Others such as Nicholas Kristof of The New York Times are happy to take the conversation on in other spheres, for example, holding an AMA session (ask me anything) on Reddit.

This pro-active way of engaging readers might not be for everyone, but at least journalists should make an effort and listen to what people are saying. The art of conversation is surely to be a good listener. Brian Solis, a digital strategist and blogger, acknowledges that scalability on the web is challenging for the media industry as a whole but in a post entitled 'The Conversation Prism' (2010) he argues that everyone has to make a start and listen in. As he says: "Influential conversations are taking place with or without you. If you're not part of the conversation, then you are leaving it to others and possibly competitors to answer questions and prove information, whether it's accurate or incorrect."

Challenging Questions

- Select the letters page of a national newspaper and compare and contrast the selection of topics discussed with the paper's website and comments from readers online.
- Analyse a breaking story via a live blog report. What are the strengths and weakness of how the journalist uses Tweets and comments?
- Reflect on your own journalism and your relationship with readers. How have your responded to readers?
- What methods do you use to gain feedback, track comment and verify information from commenters. What are the practical and ethical issues you have encountered?

Recommended reading

Read:

Dan Gillmor's blog at mediactive.com

Nieman Journalism Lab's timeline on Gawker comments : http://www.niemanlab.org/2012/07/for-once-nick-denton-seems-pleased-with-gawkers-commenting-system/

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Listen and watch:

Guardian comment editor Becky Gardiner on open journalism http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/video/2012/feb/29/comment-becky-gardiner-open-journalism-video

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28 War and peace journalism

Chindu Sreedharan

"Covering a war means going to places torn by chaos, destruction and death, and trying to bear witness. It means trying to find the truth in a sandstorm of propaganda when armies, tribes or terrorists clash... Our mission is to report these horrors of war with accuracy and without prejudice."

Marie Colvin, veteran war correspondent killed covering the Syrian protests

The last few decades have witnessed an "explosion" of conflicts across the world (Bercovitch & DeRouen 2004:147), with hundreds of cases of militarised violence in places as diverse as Angola, Myanmar, Sudan, Iraq, Russia, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Bosnia, and India. The latest in this series, the Arab Spring protests that swept across North Africa and the Middle East, has recorded an exceptionally heavy death toll in Libya and Syria, and is still continuing at the time of writing. Such events invariably attract much media attention. Regional, national and international news organisations invest significant resources to their coverage of the violence, and by and large the army of war correspondents that march to conflict zones attempt to report on what they witness as objectively as possible, in the best traditions of their profession.

But the journalism that emerge out of war zones is hardly objective (Carruthers 2000, Tumber & Palmer 2004). To record the truth, to track it down amidst the claims and counterclaims of places "torn by chaos, destruction and death" and report it "with accuracy and without prejudice" (Colvin 2012) is not an easy task. Issues such as patriotism, national interest, censorship and propaganda severely undermine a war correspondent's effort to remain detached and provide the even-handed reporting prescribed by the conventions of journalism. Often the desire to stay neutral and objective can skew news by reproducing views of the dominant parties in the conflict and passing those on as ‘balanced’[1] (Pedelty 1995). The result mostly is a narrative that is state-led, as much partial as partisan, which has the potential to exacerbate the conflict by projecting the ‘other’ as the ‘evildoer’ perpetrating violence on ‘innocent us’ (Wolfsfeld 2004).

There is a growing acceptance, hence, that conventional war reporting, with its stress on patriotic objectivity, needs a rethink, and that a more creative and conflict-sensitive approach is needed. This chapter focuses on the constraints that conflict zones place on war correspondents. The first section provides a historical context to war journalism, tracing its origin to the Crimean War. The significance of such reportage in the contemporary media landscape is then discussed, paying particular attention to the potential influences the media have on its audiences. It is argued that the conventional approach, often coloured by ethnocentric values and clouded by the fog of war, are counterproductive when reporting conflicts. Peace journalism, originally put forward by Johan Galtung and developed further by Lynch & McGoldrick (2005), is offered as an alternative. Though critiqued for being founded on ‘naive realism’ (Hanitzsch 2004), and fraught with operational difficulties, it is suggested that peace journalism can support a richer and more complete understanding of conflict situations by presenting overlooked, non-elite discourses, bringing to light untruths on all sides, and focussing on people caught in the conflict rather than the policymakers.

Going to the ‘hostilities’

The emergence of war correspondence as a specialist profession can be traced to the 1853-56 Crimean War, when major European powers fought over a declining Ottoman Empire. Among those who assembled in that theatre of activity by the Black Sea to witness the British-French efforts against Russia were two Irishmen: William Howard Russell of The Times from London, “the miserable parent[2] of a luckless tribe”[ii] as he was to describe himself later (McLaughlin 2002:6), and Edwin Lawrence Godkin of the London Daily News, who had been persuaded "to go to Turkey for the hostilities" (Knightley 1989:7).

In their individualistic ways, both produced remarkable journalism. Russell, riding up and down behind the action and interviewing every soldier he could stop, concentrated on an overview of how a battle was won or lost. This is his description of a French attack:

At five minutes before twelve o' clock the French, like a swarm of bees, issued forth from their trenches close to the doomed Malakoff, scrambled up its faces and were through the embrasures in the twinkling of an eye. They crossed the seven metres of ground which separated them from the enemy in a few bounds, and in a minute or two after the head of their column issued from the ditch, the Tri-colour was floating over Korniloff Bastion. (Knightley 1989: 10)

Godkin, on the other hand, focussed on the 'micro' picture, the human element. Here he reports from the same battlefield, as a French soldier — "beardless, slender, hardly able to trot under his musket, fitter to be by his mother's side than amidst the horrors of a heady fight" — is stopped by a general from panicked flight:

The general rushed towards him, tore one of his cotton epaulettes off his shoulder and shouted in his ear, "Comment? Vous n'etes pas Francais, donc!" The reproach stung the poor boy to the quick: all his fiery, chivalrous French blood rose up to him to repel it; his face flushed up, and constantly repeating, "Je ne suis pas Francais," he ran back, mounted the top parapet, whirled his musket about his head in a fury of excitement, and at last fell into the ditch, riddled with balls. (Knightley 1989: 10)

Despite the differences in approach, these accounts have a commonality. Both can be interpreted as partisan. Russell makes it clear which side he is on through his description of the effortless way the Russians were defeated. In the latter writing, the journalist's sympathy for the 'boy soldier' is evident, and in the way he chronicles his death, Godkin's own anti-war stance — his "hatred for war" (Knightley 1989:10) — comes through. Both stories also display a sense of 'us' and 'them' (Elliot 1986). In Russell's piece this is overt in the way he defines the Russians as the "enemy". In Godkin's this is rather covert, and is mainly a product of his point of view — his positioning with the French, the British ally — and his choices of focus and language, and is an example of the 'we-ness' influencing journalistic output from “the primary stage of selection, encoding and transmission” (Sonwalkar 2005:267).

Since the days of Russell and Godkin, war reporting has received significant scholarly attention. The sizeable body of literature on overt and covert conflicts that has arisen out of this sustained interest clearly acknowledges the partisanship that plagues most war reporting (Jamieson & Waldman 2003, Tumber & Palmer 2004). Carruthers (2000:17) summarises this most efficiently when she writes war coverage is not a reflection of the world as it is, “as the journalists are wont to claim”, but “a map of the broad preoccupations, interests and values of their particular society (or at least of its dominant groups)”.

Simply put, in war situations journalists need to negotiate a plethora of hurdles – patriotism, national interest, anger, censorship and propaganda, among others – that actively “conspire to prevent objective, factual even-handed reporting” (Maslog, Lee & Kim 2006:22). In war correspondent Kate Adie’s words, “The principles of reporting are put to a severe test when your nation goes to war … the very nature of war confuses the role of the journalist, that objective, independent, detached person of theory and media study courses” (cited in Allan & Zelizer 2004:3). Kalb (1994:3), speaking in the US context, put it more brazenly: “When America goes to war, so too does the press, wrapped in the flag no less proudly than the troops themselves.” News, in other words, is fundamentally ethnocentric and this ethnocentrism becomes especially blatant in times of crisis. Wolfsfeld (2004) writes:

> *“[T]he news media are easily mobilized for the vilification of the enemy. News stories provide graphic descriptions of the other side’s brutality and our people’s sufferings … Claims about our own acts of aggression and the other’s suffering are either ignored, underplayed, or discounted. We are always the victims, they are always the aggressors.”* (Wolfsfeld 2004:23)

And therein lies the challenge for journalism. While newsroom conventions call for reporting wars in an objective fashion to achieve a fair representation of the facts as they were, the reportage of such situations can hardly be objective or fair. Journalists are part of a citizenry, members of a nation. As such, they operate from a political and cultural base that defines their beliefs, attitudes, values and prejudices (Bar-Tal & Tiechman 2005, Schudson 1996). This, in turn, influences the way they report a conflict. Given the public are primarily reliant on the media for news from conflict zones, the version of events presented to them – what is reported, as also how it is reported – is incredibly important in shaping their perceptions about the violence.

Why war coverage matters

The idea that 'the masses' would decide political action by expressing their opinion (Lippmann 1922), and the media provides a 'public sphere' — an arena where the public can exchange thoughts and opinions, engage in debates to battle political power, and thus help constitute civil societies — for such an expression is well established (Habermas 1989; see also Allan 2010 for a discussion). The media's ability to influence its audiences has been widely debated. While most theorists have now moved away from 'direct media effect' stance (the belief that media content, by itself, can modify the behavior of the public), there is a consensus that the media do influence its audiences. This influence is indirect; exposure to news will, over time, have a cumulative effect on the audience perception of the world (Gerbner & Gross 1976, Weimann 2000). The effects are gradual and long-term, but significant; and they are on the attitudes of the viewer rather than on their behaviour. Thus, while the media content might not lead to direct behavioral changes, heavy exposure could cultivate attitudes more consistent with what is presented in the news.

Douglas Kellner (1995) places this in the context of what he calls the 'media culture'. The media are an integral part of modern existence, the driving force behind a culture. Kellner (1995:1) holds the media "produces the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, sharing political views and social behaviour, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities". He sees news messages as providing an "environment" in which people construct their view of the world. Media messages are not consumed in isolation, or in originality, but are interpreted by the receiver on the basis of own values, commitments, sense of belonging, etc. And as such, scholars have argued (Bar-Tal 1998, Bar-Tal & Tiechman

2005), audience immersion in this environment could result in an internalisation of the 'reality' – the version of events – presented over and over.

In such a scenario, the effect of war news on audiences is believed to be extremely significant – even more so, as we live in an era of "mediatized conflicts", an era wherein governments seek to "control the media in order to win the 'battle for hearts and minds'" (Cottle, 2006:74). This 'propaganda war', though it attracts less attention than the overt violence, is arguably a more crucial part of any conflict. It is a contest for winning public opinion for the cause of war and is common to all conflicts (Tumber 2004). The military and governments deploy "a combination of mechanisms ... to manage the flow of information in times of war" (Cottle 2006:74-75). This includes what can be termed as 'hard' censorships such as prohibition of journalists from war fronts (as it happened in World War I, when journalists were accommodated in castles, as 'chateaux warriors', and thus kept away from the Western front; and more recently in the 1999 India-Pakistan Kargil war, when reporters were contained to base camps) and the requirement all stories be approved by military 'minders' before being 'filed' (as it happened in the 1991 Gulf War); and 'soft' censorship, wherein the media are fed government-issue information at regulated press briefings, and absorbed as 'embeds' into fighting forces.

Such 'media management', as mentioned before, is the state's attempt to legitimise its claims, demonise the enemy, marginalise counterviews, and generally create a public mood that supports war. In this, states are mostly successful, particularly in the case of 'external' wars (as opposed to internal strife). An impressive number of scholars point to this in their writings on the 1991 Gulf War (among others, MacArthur 1993, Philo & MacLaughlin 1995). McNair's study of the British television coverage of Soviet news in the 1980s, which showed how the USSR was portrayed as "a threat, or an enemy" (McNair 1988, p47) is another instance when media reports were consistent with the government line. There is literature on this elsewhere as well: Northern Ireland (Miller 1994), Kosovo (Hammond & Herman 2000), the Israeli-Palestine conflict (Bar-Tal 1998; Wolfsfeld 2001), Falklands War (Morrison & Tumber 1988), the India-Pakistan Kargil (Thussu 2002) and Kashmir (Hickman & Barlett 2007) conflicts, and the post-September 11 wars on 'terror' (Allan & Zelizer 2004, Stromback 2005, Spencer 2005).

The influence of such coverage on the conflict itself cannot be underestimated. The way the public perceives the situation – not only whether 'we' are in the right, but also about the cost of the conflict, its consequences, and outlook of a win – can potentially influence how a conflict is pursued, whether it is exacerbated or not. As Wolfsfeld (2004:11-12) argues, one crucial way the news media could significantly impact a conflict depends on how it defines the existing political atmosphere, and the conduct of the antagonists involved in the violence. Is the situation conducive for peace, or to embark on a peace process? Or should the violence continue till the enemy is vanquished? Does the overall level of violence appear to be rising or declining? Is the 'other side' keeping its side of the agreements? Are 'we' in the right? Is the 'enemy' vile, perpetrator of evil? Answers to such questions help determine whether the public supports the policymakers in the way they pursue the conflict.

Journalists, hence, shoulder a great responsibility in times of war. But, as more than one scholarly inquiry has evidenced, the conventional approach to war reporting has been largely counterproductive, fostering conditions conducive to the continuance of the conflict, rather than its cessation. As Wolfsfeld puts it, "All other things being equal, the news media generally play a negative role in attempts to bring peace" (Wolfsfeld 2004:220). If that is so, are there other ways that can be explored to report war?

An alternate model

Peace journalism has emerged as an attractive alternative to the conventional approach to reporting war, sparking some productive – at times bitter – debates, not just in the academia, but among journalists as well. In recent years, a small but growing number of scholars and journalism practitioners around the world have argued a case for it – among them, Blaise (2004), Hackett (2006), Keeble, Tulloch & Zollman (2010), Lynch & McGoldrick (2005), Ross & Tehranian (2009), and Shinar (2007).

Traceable to the peace research of Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung in the 1970s, peace journalism is offered as an antidote to the ailments of conventional conflict coverage. Hanitzsch (2004: 484) sees it as a "special mode of socially responsible journalism", a "programme or frame of journalistic news coverage which contributes to the process of making and keeping peace". For Dov Shinar, it is "responsible and conscientious media coverage of conflict, that aims at contributing to peacemaking, peacekeeping, and changing the attitudes of media owners, advertisers, professionals, and audiences towards war and peace" (Shinar 2007:2). In sum, peace journalism gives a voice to the voiceless, focusses on the invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to social structures), aims to expose untruths on all sides, and attempts to arrive at a solution to the conflict (Keeble et al 2010: 2). Galtung explains it further:

> *"Peace Journalism stands for truth as opposed to propaganda and lies, 'truthful journalism' being, as mentioned, one aspect in peace journalism. It is not 'investigative journalism' in the sense of only uncovering lies on 'our' side. The truth aspect in peace journalism holds for all sides, just like exploration of the conflict formation and giving voice (glasnost) to all." (Galtung 2002:5)*

The peace journalist, Galtung continues, tries to depolarise the conflict by showing the black and white of all sides, and to deescalate by highlighting peace and conflict resolution as much as violence. He likens conventional war journalism to sports journalism and peace journalism to health journalism. Sports journalism, Galtung argues, is a zero-sum game. Winning is everything. In health journalism, however, the plight of the patient would be described – but so too would be the possible causes. Further, the factors that contributed to the diseases, the possible remedies, and preventive measures would be presented.

Galtung sees war coverage as falling into two categories – 'war journalism' and 'peace journalism'. This is based on four broad practice and linguistic orientations (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005). War journalism would focus on the conflict (visible effects of the conflict is reported), be propaganda-orientated (expose 'their' untruths, conceal 'ours'), present elite voices, and portray victory over the enemy as the end goal. Peace journalism, for its part, would be peace-orientated (explore conflict formation, aim to prevent conflict), be truth-orientated (expose untruths on all sides), people-orientated (focus on suffering all over, focus on peacemakers as people), and solution-orientated (highlight peace initiatives, present solutions rather than ways to victory).

Apart from the content of reportage, Galtung's classification considers an assessment of the language used. Words that demonise, victimise or are emotive, accordingly, are against the grain of peace journalism. Galtung's other prescriptions for covering conflicts include "taking a preventive advocacy stance" by writing editorials and columns "urging reconciliation and focussing on common ground rather than on vengeance, retaliation, and differences, and emphasizing the invisible effects of violence" (Maslog, Lee & Kim 2006: 23).

Building on Galtung's work, and drawing on conflict analysis and transformation literature, former journalists Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick present peace journalism as a broader, fairer, and more accurate way of covering conflicts. Their view "is premised on the importance of journalists understanding conflict and violence, because what they report will contribute to the momentum towards war or peace" (Maslog et al 2006:26). Peace journalism, in Lynch & McGoldrick's (2005:5) words, occurs "when editors and reporters make choices – of what stories to report and about how to report them – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict". They see it as a set of tools, "both conceptual and practical intended to equip journalists to offer a better public service" (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005:5). It is remedial, "a deliberate creative strategy to seek out and bring to our attention those portions of 'the facts' routinely underrepresented; the significant views and perspectives habitually unheard" (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005:224).

Lynch & McGoldrick (2005) expanded Galtung's classification of war journalism and peace journalism into 17 good practices, which include (a) focussing on presenting solutions (b) reporting on long-term effects (c) orientating the news on people and the grassroots (d) searching for common ground (e) reporting on and naming wrong-doers on all sides (f) disaggregating the 'us' and 'them' into smaller groups, (h) avoiding victimising language such as 'devastated', 'defenceless' and 'pathetic', (i) avoiding imprecise use of emotive words such as 'tragedy', 'massacre' etc (j) avoiding demonising adjectives and labels such as 'brutal', 'barbaric', 'terrorist' and 'fanatic', and (k) avoid making an opinion or claim seen as an established fact.

The literature on peace journalism, as we can see, is mostly prescriptive – and, compared to the literature on conventional war reportage, very limited. Besides Galtung, McGoldrick & Lynch, other contributors to the peace journalism include Maslog (1990), who offers a manual based on the conflict in Philippines. Another notable scholar of this school is Robert Karl Manoff (1998, 2000), who, based on conflict transformation theory, identifies 12 roles for the media in reporting violence constructively. Quite similar to Lynch & McGoldrick's version, these are: (1) channelling communication between parties (2) educating (3) building (4) counteracting misperceptions (5) analysing conflict (6) de-objectifying the protagonists for each other (7) identifying the interests underlying the issues (8) providing an emotional outlet (9) encouraging a balance of power (10) framing and defining the conflict (11) face-saving and consensus building and (12) solution building.

In recent years, correspondents such as Martin Bell, Tom Geltjen and Michael Nicholson have spoken out against conventional war reporting, advocating a journalism that fits in well with the notion of peace journalism. Several related coinages have emerged, including 'justice journalism' (Messman 2001), 'engaged journalism' (Lynch 2003), and 'human rights journalism' (Shaw 2012). Bell coined[3] the phrase 'journalism of attachment' for this brand of reporting, summarising it thus:

> *"In place of the dispassionate practices of the past I now believe in what I call the journalism of attachment. By this I mean a journalism that cares as well as knows; that is aware of its responsibilities; and will not stand neutral between good and evil, right and wrong, victim and oppressor."*
> (Bell 1997: 8).

While the idea has been much talked about since, and is considered something new, the practice has been in vogue for years. Reports by war correspondents Martha Gellhorn, John Pilger, and Robert Fiske, for instance, do not stand "neutral between good and evil". Though passionately argued, Bell's proposal does not find favour with a large section of journalists, as also scholars. Stephen Jukes, former global head of news at Reuters known for his insistence the agency would use the objective term 'militants' and not 'terrorists' in the wake of the September 11 attacks, touched on the issue in a personal interview: “I believe journalists can serve their society best by being objective. You can deliver better journalism by asking questions … by practising standard journalism properly.” John Pilger is certainly of a different view when he writes how the US media has promoted “the myth of Barack Obama” and allowed his siren calls for change to maintain status quo and muffle the opponents of war. “War journalism,” Pilger summarises, “does what power says it does; peace journalism reports what it does” (Pilger 2010:xi).

Peace journalism: issues

Not surprisingly, given that it advocates what is often perceived as a radical path from the conventional approach, peace journalism has met with much resistance. A major criticism levelled against it is by proponents who feel it undermines the journalistic principle of objectivity. There can be no greater betrayal of journalistic standards if reporters stray from this principle (Weaver 1998), as it is objectivity that gives the practice of journalism its undoubted nobility. This group believes the challenge for journalists remains the same as ever: “to report a conflict as objectively and accurately as possible without undue risk to self and without compromise to professional integrity” (MacLaughlin 2002:207). The media should not in any way try to prevent or influence conflicts, because once journalists do, it is a short step to accepting that any means to achieve that end is justified (Weaver 1998). It then becomes possible to use what is ‘good’ and lies become more important than truth. Journalist David Lyon, a passionate advocate of traditional journalistic values, doesn’t mince words in his criticism of the alternate model:

> *“Now there is ‘peace journalism’ – the most pernicious of the lot, especially since it is so well funded, academically backed and superficially attractive. I want to appeal for more traditional values such as fairness, objectivity and balance – the only guiding lights of good reporting. News is what’s happening and we should report it with imagination and scepticism (where appropriate). Full stop. We do not need to load any other demands on to it. And we certainly do not need to seek out peacemakers unless they are actually successful.”*
> (Lyon 2003)

A more foundational critique comes from Hanitzsch (2004), who argues peace journalism epistemologically draws from naïve realism. Accordingly, Galtung's position that media distorts the truths about the conflict – it distorts reality – assumes "the observer and the observed are two distinct categories" and that reality "can be perceived and described 'as it is'" (Hanitzsch 2004:488). Galtung's suggestion that conventional war reporting represents reality in a distorted way – in the way the dominant groups in the society want it to be represented, that is – "misses the point … In a world full of contingent descriptions of reality, war correspondents can only provide one version of reality that is just as 'true' as numerous other versions" (Hanitzsch 2004:488). Cottle makes the same case when he points out that peace journalists appear to "presume that 'truths' and 'untruths' are self-evident" (2006: 103).

Implicit in the realist stance of peace journalism scholars is also an assumption of powerful, causal, and linear media effects (Hanitzsch 2004), which has attracted severe criticism. While there exists a robust belief in the power of the media in political, economic and military circles, which today is well catered for by expensive media strategies, the theory of powerful media effects has not gained much empirical evidence (Gauntlett 1998, 2005). More acceptable is the theory of selective media effects, which Brosius (2003, cited in Hanitzsch 2004:489) summarises thus: "Some media have, at certain times and under certain circumstances, an effect on some recipients." Peace journalism, however, overestimates the power of the media (Hanitzsch 2004), assuming a linear relation between how it presents a conflict (whether it is solution-orientated, for instance) and how the presentation is perceived by the public. This, according to Hanitzsch (2004), is an overestimation of the power of the media, and is based on an out-dated conceptualisation from the early 20th century, which, ignoring the impact of interpersonal communication and social structure, propagate the notion of a singular audience, instead of pluralistic audiences, and assumes the media is the sole influencer of public opinion. Hence, peace journalism can have, at best, limited impact. Moreover, peace journalism overlooks the fact that "journalists and their employers do not orient themselves to an anonymous 'mass audience,' but they adjust their 'responsibilities' to the interests of their specific audiences. Any disregard of the audiences' preferences could jeopardize the media organizations economic existence" (Hanitzsch 2004:489).

Though a supporter of the philosophy, Keeble (2010) critiques peace journalism for its dependency on the professional values of journalism. The success of the model depends on the professional responses of the reporter, but journalism is more a political than professional practice. Peace journalism theory, thus, fails to take into account the "critical intellectual tradition which locates professions historically and politically", seeing journalism myopically as an occupational grouping with "a legal monopoly of social and economic opportunities in the marketplace, underwritten by the state" (Keeble 2010:5).

Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine the challenges that journalists face when reporting conflicts. As we have seen, the conventional approach, which insists that the journalist remain objective and impartial, often falls short of producing responsible journalism: mostly the media produce counterproductive coverage that accentuates the differences between the antagonists, thus contributing to the continuance of the conflict. Peace journalism is suggested as an antidote to this situation. Though not without issues, and critiqued by many traditionalists as discussed in the above section, this model arguably is more conflict-sensitive, with the potential to the present a more nuanced and richer version of war events.

It is also possible to discern some common ground between conventional war reporting and the philosophy of peace journalism. Both approaches, in effect, are advocating quality journalism – ethical, even-handed, responsible reporting. Peace journalism and the subjectivity it brings with it means taking a stand, but that need not involve mixing facts and emotions, or suppressing facts — which forms the foundation for the criticism that it compromises journalistic integrity. Similarly, the epistemological issue with peace journalism is something that is applicable to conventional war reporting as well. Truth and untruths are not self-evident in conflict situations, and the media can present only a distorted form of reality. The question, then, is what form this distortion should take – whether the journalists should make a deliberate choice to contextualise their reporting, provide voices to all parties involved, and explore possible solutions to the conflict so that it provides the audiences a more holistic picture, or whether they should narrow their focus to the violence at hand, reporting the views of those seen traditionally as newsworthy.

While it would be difficult to argue that the news media is all-powerful and the sole influencer of public opinion, it is safe to say that the media is a significant force in any conflict, shaping its pursuance and conduct. Such 'power' brings with it – or should bring with it[4] – heightened responsibility. It requires journalists to exercise an even more acute sense of ethics and responsibility in war zones. Unfortunately, as discussed earlier, this does not always come to bear; in the fog of war it is exceptionally difficult to apply the traditional principles of reporting. One reason for this could be that the canons of journalism were developed for 'normal' news, hence not suitable for an 'abnormal' situation[5]. The many practical, political, economic and ethnocentric forces bearing down on journalists encourage them to 'play up' war and violence at the cost of peace news. Continuous immersion of audience in such news, of violence perpetrated against 'us' by 'them', will shape their version of reality and societal beliefs, contributing to a frame of mind that encourages the continuance – even exacerbation – of war. Peace journalistic coverage, with its solution-orientation, on the other hand, could promote a different climate, one that is conducive to the cessation of war, to the promotion of peace.

Notes

1. American journalist Hunter S Thompson, noted as much for his radical journalism as for his radical lifestyle, seems to underline this point when he speaks about the built-in blind spots of objective journalism. By attempting to be objective, by paying lip service to the ideology, he argues, journalists are falling back on conscious and unconscious prejudices (cited in Hirst & Patching 2007).
2. Though this gives the impression Russell was the first professional war correspondent, that honour goes possibly to G L Gruneisen of the London Morning Post (Knightley 1989).
3. Galtung, the architect of peace journalism, had used the same phrase to describe his idea. However, for him journalism of attachment meant

being attached to "all actual and possible victims of the conflict" (Hanitzsch 2004, p486).

4. Max Weber places extra emphasis on this, comparing journalistic and scholarly responsibilities: "[I]t is almost never acknowledged that the responsibility of every honourable journalist is, on the average, not a bit lower than that of the scholar, but rather, as the war has shown, higher" (cited in Tumber & Prentoulis 2003, p228). See also Clutterbuck (1981, p160).
5. Howard (2002) made a similar point during a keynote address on the role of media in peace-building, terming conflicts as not routine news but "special" cases, requiring "more than a mechanical response in reporting it" (p2).

Challenging Questions

- What are the major challenges faced by journalists when reporting from war zones?
- A journalist's job is journalism, not peacemaking. Discuss.
- Assess the view that peace journalism draws from naïve realism.

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29 Global News, Global Challenges

Roman Gerodimos

"Important dimensions of journalism are emerging that demand our attention. We need to be creative in identifying new case study sites, concepts, empirical strategies, and relationships that are appropriate to the global era."

Reese (2008: 251)

"I've stopped pretty much making that division in my head between so-called 'foreign news' and UK-based news because, more often than not, one has a direct influence on the other so it's just international news, it's a globalisation in the newsroom if you like."

David Mannion, Editor-in-Chief, ITV News (cited in Padania, Coleman and Georgiou 2007: 10)

Over the last couple of decades globalisation has been transforming journalism profoundly. The emphasis both in academia and within the profession has been on the impact of technology, especially given the meteoric rise of social media and citizen journalism and the complex crisis facing traditional news organisations. New gadgets and applications have been emerging that can be easily used for news gathering and dissemination. The authority and power of major news providers has been challenged e.g. by the appearance of citizen reporters and alternative voices. These trends have perhaps overshadowed some of the other challenges and opportunities facing journalists in the global era.

Globalisation, i.e. increased international integration and interconnectedness, is notoriously hard to define. It's everywhere and nowhere, in the sense that almost all aspects of our life and activity have been affected, yet that impact is rarely physically tangible or material. Globalisation is not an isolated, clearly delineated or evenly distributed phenomenon with neatly distinguished causes and effects. It is both a cause and an effect itself – a messy reality that to various extents permeates all aspects of human activity. The news media have been one of the most fundamental agents – or causes – of global change: they inform us about developments across the global and create a space in which people cross boundaries and interact. At the same time today's global, multiplatform, converged but also fragmented and interest-oriented media landscape is perhaps the single most visible symptom of globalisation: in addition to the concentration of ownership amongst a few global media conglomerates and the development of sophisticated tools of global news coverage, news itself is changing because of globalisation.

The literature on the globalisation of news is a relatively recent one. Two interlinked questions are particularly interesting: (a) whether the emergence of global news merely signifies the extension of news journalism across national borders or whether it signifies a fundamental shift to a different type of news and (b) whether by "global news" we are empirically describing something which is currently produced or putting forward an ideal model that journalists should subscribe to. Reese (2007) notes that news journalism has already become increasingly global in its scope, whereas Berglez (2008) identifies a mismatch between issues which are genuinely global – and should only be interpreted through a global prism – and reportage which is still stubbornly ethnocentric, focusing on our national communities.

This chapter examines some of the key challenges that this global interconnectedness poses for the profession: How do global current affairs differ from familiar news genres? What are the main responsibilities and difficulties facing journalists in the global public sphere? Are audiences engaging with global issues in the news and why is that important? Do these developments mark the emergence of global news as a paradigm of journalism that is distinct from traditional notions of "international news" or "foreign reporting"? Livingston and Asmolov note that "time and space once defined the meaning of foreign correspondence; with the alteration of both, for better or worse, the meaning of the profession has changed. Indeed, the very idea of foreign - not to mention corresponding - has been altered, almost beyond recognition" (2010: 756, emphasis in the original).

The first section outlines the impact of globalisation on news through the transformation of the space and context within journalism operates – the 21st century global public sphere. The concept of global news is defined with reference to recent scholarship and relevant examples. We then outline some of the main challenges – old and new – facing professional journalists within this global environment, including the role of empowered audiences and of the 24/7 news cycle. Finally, the chapter looks forward to tangible measures that can be taken at different levels in order for quality journalism to survive in the global era.

Journalism, interdependence and the emergence of global news

Journalists play a critical role in contemporary democracies which, due to their size, are not founded on direct participation of all citizens, but on the mediation of messages and the public choice of elected representatives. On the one hand the media constitute the most important public sphere – the space within which citizens come together to discuss public affairs; on the other hand, journalists act as the Fourth Estate with the responsibility of scrutinising those in power (the three formal "estates" or contemporary branches of government). This model has traditionally been applied to the mass media within national contexts with the printing press and later radio and television being pivotal tools in the construction of national audiences and publics. Franklin D. Roosevelt's series of radio broadcasts in the 1930s known as the 'fireside chats' and Winston Churchill's speeches during the 2nd World War created a sense of national unity, shared values and common purpose.

Yet, globalisation has been blurring the importance of state boundaries and has extended the reach and power of the media:

- It transforms the spatial framework, i.e. the spaces to which news stories refer as well as the spaces across which the news travels
- It changes the relations and dynamics of power by challenging the authority of traditional political actors, such as elected representatives and favouring power networks

which are much more decentralised and a lot less transparent or accountable

- It challenges set formulations of nation-centric identities; that is to say, individuals are increasingly empowered to create their own global or post-national identities through their own consumer choices, mobility and social or professional networking.

These three aspects of globalisation (space, power, identity) are the core of Berglez's model of global news as they help us understand the full impact of global interdependence on the news:

> *"The national outlook puts the nation-state at the centre of things when framing social reality, while the global outlook instead seeks to understand and explain how economic, political, social and ecological practices, processes and problems in different parts of the world affect each other, are interlocked, or share commonalities."* (2008: 847)

The relevance of space and power may seem somewhat remote when talking about something as supposedly straightforward as news. Yet, both the content of news itself and the process through which it is gathered, packaged and relayed are directly affected by the spatial and political context within which journalists operate. As noted earlier, print media such as newspapers and books were instrumental in creating and maintaining the audience, public sphere and system of governance of the nation-state, as well as in constructing identities and representations of 'us' and 'the other'.

Interestingly, the concept of foreign corresponding implies not only a spatial relationship or distance between us and the foreign, but also a relationship of authority or dependence in which we the audience depend on the correspondent for our information. These features of traditional international journalism are in direct contrast with the reality of the global, dynamic, virtual cyberspace in which we now operate (Livingston and Asmolov 2010: 745).

In an age of global interconnectedness and mobility the boundaries between our local realities and the global level are increasingly blurred, in turn challenging our established categories and genres of news and current affairs. Understanding how that interdependence works, i.e. how global stories have local importance and how local actions can have global implications – is absolutely essential and requires a change in the narratives and practices we use to describe and produce news. The agenda of the 21st century features a series of multifaceted issues of international or global scale that are impossible to tackle at the local or national level. Their complexity and interconnectedness requires a paradigm shift both in terms of global governance or citizenship and in those of journalism. This can be best illustrated through a couple of brief examples.

As journalists have a responsibility to inform citizens about decisions that affect them, the new paradigm of global news must be able to relate the global to the national to the local. Similar examples can be found all over the world, from US politics – the intricacies and complexities of which (separation of powers, checks and balances and even the obscure but key congressional practice of the filibuster) are instrumental in explaining the failure of the US administration to ratify and implement a global treaty on carbon emissions; to ongoing piracy and the kidnapping of hostages in the Somali coast – a regional phenomenon with global implications for trade, ecology, security and diplomacy , due to a multitude of root causes, including failure of governance and global intervention as well as the systematic dumping of toxic waste by Western countries in the 1990s.

Case Study: global crime and security.

One example of interconnectedness is the links between transnational organised crime, international terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). In countries such as Angola, Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, illegal networks are exploiting mineral and other resources (known as "conflict diamonds") in exchange for weapons mainly from countries of the former Soviet Union. These weapons are then used for terrorist purposes (e.g. through Al Qaeda's penetration in Northern Africa) or civil conflicts. Hence, poverty and instability in the global south, the activity of international crime organisations and that of terrorist networks cannot be understood or interpreted in isolation. Educating audiences about these issues requires an in-depth appreciation of the links amongst issues, countries and people, as well as the editorial resources to conduct large-scale investigations.

Similarly, the emergence of cybercrime poses a monumental challenge for governments and citizens alike. Online and offline piracy and transnational crime, such as identity theft, fraud and hacking, have been causing significant damage to the global financial and trust systems (banking, stock markets, credit cards) shaking the foundations of the global economy. Industries as diverse as fashion, pharmaceuticals, computing, finance, entertainment (music, films, TV) and publishing are directly affected. With approximately 20% of the global GDP being produced in the so-called "shadow economy" of (drug, weapon, body, organ) trafficking, in turn funding terrorism and the spread of WMDs (Glenny 2008), it is difficult if not impossible to understand, let alone describe, the global realities of the 21st century through purely national narratives of reportage.

Case Study: The race for the Arctic

Another striking example of the complexity, interdependence and relevance of global issues to various aspects of our daily lives is the race for the Arctic. During the last few years a new race for the North Pole has been taking place amongst countries making territorial claims or having vested interests in the region, including Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States. The Arctic is thought to be a major reserve of energy resources, containing billions of tonnes of oil and an estimated 25% of the world's reserves in natural gas. Highly complex and politically charged issues such as the territorial status of the Lomonosov Ridge and the establishment of 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zones by neighbouring states are at the heart of an ongoing diplomatic battle. In the summer of 2007, Russia launched the Arktika expedition which culminated in the planting of a flag on the seabed of the ocean. One year after that, in August 2008, the United States sent its Coast Guard Cutter Healy to map the area and establish its own territorial claim. While these developments may appear remote from the average news consumer, they will have monumental effects on all aspects of our life in the 21st century.

In addition to energy, there is also a major environmental aspect to this issue. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, global warming and ice-melting will lead to an intense race for diamonds, fish and exploitation of the shipping routes in the Arctic. The unprecedented simultaneous opening of both the North-East and the North-West passages in 2008, due to the melting of the ice, signifies a new era in global trade. In August 2009, the German-owned Beluga Fraternity and Beluga Foresight became the first commercial vessels of the Western world to pass the Northern Sea Route in what Tony Paterson called "a journey that represents both a huge commercial boon and a dark milestone on the route to environmental catastrophe…" (2009). In fact, that catastrophe has already started unfolding due to widespread pollution in the area. The French NGO Robin des Bois found 2,750 areas of pollution in the Arctic, due to the presence of military bases, mines and plants, the energy exploitation expeditions, drilling and fuel storage and the many house-waste collection points in the region.

The ecologic, economic and geostrategic importance of the Arctic means that it is bound to become a more newsworthy region: what happens there will have direct effects on our economy, environment, trade and quality of life.

Global current affairs matter and journalists have a duty to identify and report on such issues informing the public not only about action at the top level of international politics or the reality in remote lands, but also about the relevance of these issues to their own lives and the implications of people's own political, social, cultural, technological and consumer choices. In countries governed by authoritarian regimes across the world, journalists are not just passive reporters of facts, but symbolise fundamental values of freedom of expression, pluralism and democracy. Their reports can be critical in exposing corruption and highlighting human rights abuses, allowing the global public opinion to mobilise and intervene. Yet, for a number of reasons outlined below, and despite the proliferation of media platforms, channels and applications, conducting quality global journalism is not only more important but also, perhaps, harder than ever.

Challenges to global reportage

Covering global current affairs presents a multitude of challenges old and new – obstacles traditionally faced by foreign correspondents as well as emerging issues due to shifts in audiences' interests, media industry structures and the unique nature of the stories covered. One would have thought that, in today's era of greater transparency and visibility due to media and information saturation, being a journalist would be safer and easier. In fact, in his recent report on the protection of journalists from violence, Council of Europe Commission for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg documents the threats facing journalists – including threats to their own physical safety – due to the tight control over the media that many regimes have imposed:

> *"Today, in the 21st century, it is dangerous to be a journalist, a photographer, a member of the media. It is dangerous to be a journalist and to have lunch with your source in a restaurant. It is dangerous to be a friend or neighbour of a journalist. It is dangerous to write about corruption. It is dangerous to investigate stories. In many parts of the world it is dangerous to be a monitor of our times and it is dangerous to be a human being who speaks his or her mind freely."*
> [Hammarberg, 2011: 9]

Covering international developments has never been an easy job. Foreign correspondents and journalists working in regions of war, conflict or repression have always had to negotiate their own safety, welfare and professional practice in order to survive. Yet, despite the recent outbreak of civil uprisings throughout Northern Africa and the Middle East, partly facilitated by the availability of technological applications empowering citizens and journalists, it seems that the pressure against global reporters is only tightening.

According to Reporters Without Borders, crackdown was "the word of the year" in 2011: "Never has freedom of information been so closely associated with democracy. Never have journalists, through their reporting, vexed the enemies of freedom so much. Never have acts of censorship and physical attacks on journalists seemed so numerous" (2012: 1). The organisation's 2011-2012 World Press Freedom Index identifies a series of challenges and threats facing journalists across the globe – from censorship, injunctions, phone taps, judicial harassment and the threat of arrest to outright persecution, injury and death. The recent assassinations of high-profile journalists and human rights activists in Russia, such as Anna Politkovskaya, Stanislav Markelov, Anastasia Baburova and Natalia Estemirova, are only the visible tip of the iceberg in the ongoing global battle for informed news reporting.

Yet, the pressures facing global reporters are not only physical – they can also be mental, emotional and ethical. In addition to experiencing injury or traumatic situations which can have long-term effects (such as anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder / PTSD), journalists may also face professional challenges that can often have an even greater impact upon their work and quality of life. Such "occupational stressors" (Greenberg et al 2007) include the lack of editorial control, the lack of recognition from line managers or the chase for the exclusive and the breaking story in an age of increasing competition and pressure. Secondary traumatic stress (STS) is a stress response to witnessing violent events or receiving graphic descriptions of such events experienced by others. The particular organisational and professional cultures within which journalists operate often make it difficult to report or even acknowledge STS (Keats and Buchanan 2009).

Hence, the production of global news is highly intensive in terms of the resources, energy and skills it requires. In an age of budget cuts and cost savings, investing in international reportage can be perceived as a risky and costly strategy for news organisations. Recent research across the United States and Europe shows a significant decline in the number of foreign correspondents and in the quantity of foreign news coverage across print and electronic media (e.g. Carroll 2007). Altmeppen notes the gradual disappearance of foreign news from TV channels both in Germany and internationally and attributes that to the changing economic structures of the news media industry. The steady reduction of resources (time for investigating, space for broadcasting and staff for producing) means that, under the present circumstances, “there exists no future possibility of an increasing component of foreign news, in particular for global news reporting” (2010: 568).

The decline in foreign reporting does not only affect television. The crisis of (paid) newspapers and the rise of so-called “free press” publications means that robust global reportage is being pushed out of print journalism. The correlation between the decline in circulation of paid newspapers across Europe and the meteoric rise of free publications is contested as the latter may attract readers who would not normally pay for news. However, it has been shown that free newspapers offer less news, are produced in smaller formats, offer lower pagination, employ a smaller number of journalists, invest less in original reportage and depend more on news agencies than paid papers (Bakker 2008: 427).

One of the problems with the current mode of global news production in Britain is that even the coverage of global affairs that is there tends to focus on a narrow and stereotypical angle of foreign countries. A series of reports by the International Broadcasting Trust (IBT) has documented both the decline in foreign affairs coverage and its narrow focus (e.g. Scott 2009). According to one such review of foreign reporting on UK television since 1989 (Scott, Rodriguez Rojas and Jenner 2011), “in 2010 the main UK terrestrial channels broadcast fewer hours of new international factual programming than at any other time since IBT’s quantitative study began”; such programming is migrating towards digital channels which tend to have a smaller and more segmented audience share, and declining on every terrestrial channel except Channel 4, with BBC1 replacing ITV as the channel with the least amount of new factual coverage of the developing world.

These trends paint a picture of decline in the coverage of global current affairs that is in direct contrast to the ubiquity and relevance of global news outlined earlier in this chapter. This tension, a real public knowledge gap, becomes particularly visible when important global stories break. One such example is the civil uprisings across Northern Africa and the Middle East in 2011 – the Arab Spring. Scott et al. (2011) found that countries such as Algeria, Bahrain, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Yemen – which were at the heart of this global phenomenon – were not the main subject of any factual programme on UK television during 2010. Hence, when the events of the Arab Spring unfolded, both journalists and audiences were not familiar with the social, economic, political and technological developments in these countries, which constituted the root causes of the uprisings.

Perhaps at the heart of the problem lies the question of whether contemporary audiences are genuinely interested in learning about global issues. A vicious circle seems to be at play with broadcasters making commercially-oriented assumptions about viewers' preferences and thus opting for formulaic and stereotypical "doom and gloom" coverage of developing countries, which in turn produces very negative perceptions, amongst audiences, of the developing world and the conflict and disaster within it (Philo 2002), including feelings of compassion fatigue.

Yet, repeated studies have shown that people are still keen to understand the world around them. However, this should be done in a way that demonstrates the relevance of these issues to people's own lives in a tangible way; a mode of communication that is emotionally engaging and allows audiences to associate with the people and the issues at the heart of global current affairs. This is particularly true for younger people who tend to be more interested in local and national news and only engage with major global events or when international stories have a clear personal or family connection (Padania, Coleman and Georgiou 2007).

The formulaic coverage of development issues appears to be a primary culprit for youth disengagement with global current affairs. As Scott's (2009) study of audience responses to international programming showed, participants expressed a strong desire to see more coverage of stories which lay in between 'squalor and safari' – stories which they described as 'real life', 'normal' and 'everyday lives'. Similarly, the constant negativity and looming threat of climate change makes young people feel that they cannot do anything to make a difference. This feeling of disempowerment – of being faced with a destructive phenomenon too big to do anything about – ultimately leads to disengagement and denial (Gerodimos 2012a).

In an in-depth examination of television news' long-term prospects, the UK TV regulator Ofcom pinpoints the emerging paradox in global journalism: at a time of unprecedented proliferation of news sources and availability of global stories, "news outlets of all kinds often tell the same stories, from the same perspective, using much the same material" (2007: 3). Thus, it seems that the globalisation of news coverage has so far been quantitative rather than qualitative; that is to say, it has been about speed and volume rather than developing a truly global outlook. In Hafez's terms, while the media may share the same agenda, they still frame it "according to their own home-grown narratives. Today's international exchanges of images and information, it seems, are no guarantee for global intertextuality in news, for growing awareness of 'the other's' stories and perspectives, and for an increased complexity of world views in the mass media and beyond" (2009: 329). Therefore, while the devices and networks through which we communicate are very globalised, the content of media messages is still based on our local and national interpretations of other cultures.

The weakest link in the chain of global news coverage seems to be the lack of context and a narrow focus on the description of events. This may be a by-product of journalists' dedication to core principles of objectivity and impartiality – as well as a direct result of the lack of space and airtime. Yet, the unwillingness to go into more depth about the broader root causes of ongoing stories, and especially the failure to explain or interpret why certain events may be occurring, makes non-specialist audiences struggle and switch off public affairs.

Context is particularly key to global current affairs which tend to be geographically and culturally farther from people's everyday routines and realities. As a result of the declining amount and quality of coverage, as well as its narrow and de-contextual focus, contemporary TV audiences "have in general very little understanding of events in the developing world or of major international institutions or relationships" (Philo 2002: 185).

Case Study: The global food crisis

The issue of the global food crisis is a good example of how important context is in order to understand and cover global events. While the 1996 World Food Summit set a target of halving the number of undernourished people to no more than 420 million by 2015, more than a billion people are currently undernourished worldwide, making this the biggest number since 1970. Hunger forces people to sell assets and spend less on education and health care, posing further humanitarian and security obstacles to development. During the 2006-2008 global crisis, food prices went up by 80% within three years, with the price of dairy products increasing by 80% in 2007 alone.

The root causes of both the 2006-2008 and the 2010-2011 food crises are diverse, interlinked and include, amongst other factors: the use of agricultural fields for biofuel production; the rise in oil prices; the rise of demand for meat in China; extreme weather phenomena such as drought and floods, probably caused by climate change; the role of multinational corporations in the setting of cereal prices; and changes to dietary patterns with the production of 1 kilo of beef requiring 7 kilos of feed grain. According to the estimates of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, hunger is currently directly affecting stability in 36 countries. While people may tolerate corrupt and oppressive regimes, hunger has always been a catalyst for instability. Rising food prices and high unemployment were two of the main factors for the revolution in Tunisia and the civil unrest across much of Northern Africa and the Middle East. Interpreting these events requires an adequate understanding of ongoing global patterns through reportage that is contextually informed and emotionally engaging.

In conclusion, global reportage requires investing in a process of contextualisation and engagement with the audience in order to provide them with vital pieces of information that are key to understanding current affairs. This process requires us to better understand audiences themselves and to acknowledge their changing preferences and media habits within a fragmented and brutally competitive 24/7 news cycle.

Engaging and informing audiences in the age of the fragmented, 24/7, global news cycle

In addition to the challenges affecting the production and dissemination of global news mentioned above, it is also important to consider the broader context within journalists operate, namely changing audience habits and the impact of new media on the news cycle. Since the advent of satellite and digital television and particularly since the emergence of online and mobile applications as embedded – occasionally even embodied - parts of our everyday life, people's media consumption habits have changed dramatically. This is not only true about the amount of time spent on various media, but also about the type of activities carried out with those media, the different gratifications sought and gained, the emergence of new genres and modes of communication that only a few years ago would have been unimaginable, such as the widespread use of Twitter as a tool of social commentary and critique of media programmes as they take place. Citizen reporters using freely accessible platforms and tools have greatly enriched the output of reportage on a global scale, leading to a hybridisation of top-down and bottom-up journalism (Deuze, Bruns and Neuberger 2007).

The central principle of this new age of communication is choice. Today's users/citizens/consumers are faced with a choice of hundreds of TV channels, radio stations, newspapers, magazines, mobile phone or tablet apps and obviously billions of websites, blogs etc. In this environment of seemingly limitless choice (the actual extent and diversity of that choice can be debated) media consumption is driven almost entirely by the individual's own perceptions of needs and interests.

Many studies have confirmed what seems to be intuitive common sense, i.e. that when given the freedom to choose how, where and with whom they will spend their time, people tend to opt for activities and interactions that feel entertaining, familiar and comfortable. Users' natural tendency is to seek convenience and the speedy completion of their set task. Encountering people who are different from us and issues or opinions that challenge us or make us feel uncomfortable is getting increasingly more difficult (Fenyoe 2010).

In fact, major internet companies such as Google and Facebook have been developing sophisticated algorithms in order to further tailor search engine results and news feeds so as to match them to individual users' background and interests, creating what Eli Pariser calls a "filter bubble" (2011) that is increasingly restricting the information and people with whom we interact online. In this "Darwinian environment of the hyper-relevant news feed", vital information on global current affairs – on the common problems facing us – becomes a commodity, a product that needs to be carefully marketed and sold to an information saturated audience, competing against the chaotic noise of reality TV shows, celebrity culture and cute animal videos.

These trends create a very difficult field for quality global journalism and for the organisations, NGOs, charities and other civil society groups working to advance the discussion of global affairs in the public sphere. The dependency on search engines makes it very difficult for such organisations to emerge as established brands, while internet users usually fall in one of two categories: they are either interested in news or they are internet savvy (Fenyoe 2010: 2) – few have both the civic motivation required to seek quality reporting and the digital literacy required to do that online. Subsequently, aid agencies and other non-governmental actors have been forced to invest a lot more resources and effort on becoming more media-savvy in order to gain access to the 24/7 global news cycle, which is vital for their survival. The adoption of global media-oriented practices, such as branding, celebrity endorsement, media events, crisis communications and risk management, is not only indicative of the brutal and fast-paced realities of the global news cycle; it reshapes and challenges the organisations' own ethical conduct and organisational integrity (Cottle and Nolan 2007).

The clash of outlooks between US and UK editors is obviously indicative of fundamentally different journalistic practices across the world, but perhaps it is also indicative of the lack of a common "language" (in journalistic terms) of covering global news. In other words, given the context outlined earlier in the chapter, it is vital to inform news with a global imaginary – a coherent narrative about the global aspects of current affairs and their relevance to the national and the local. That is not to say that news content should be the same across the world or that the regional, national, professional, organisational or other specialist traits of journalism can or should be overlooked.

Case Study: Anderson Cooper in Haiti

Ethical dilemmas and market pressures are also faced by correspondents and editors. Journalism is not immune from broader cultural trends, such as personalisation, emotion and celebrity. In the aftermath of the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the decision of CNN correspondent and celebrity anchor Anderson Cooper to intervene in the scene of a looting in order to rescue a young boy who had been injured by flying debris led to a heated debate about the role and responsibilities of global reporters. Footage of Cooper's intervention was broadcast on his own CNN show (AC 360) and then spread widely online via YouTube and social media.

The ensuing debate highlighted some of the differences in the professional and organisational cultures across American and British newsrooms. It also led to the articulation of important questions about shifting audience attitudes and the need for journalists to adapt: are celebrity correspondents necessary in order to engage audiences with global current affairs? Is this case indicative of a new model of global reportage in which the foreign correspondent's own experiences and emotions become part of the subject matter? Does the showcasing of these emotions add reflexivity and transparency about the news-gathering process or is it an artificial tactic that aims to manipulate viewers' emotions, distracting them from the real issues?

According to Tony Maddox, executive vice president and managing director of CNN international, the Anderson Cooper incident constitutes a watershed moment in TV history: "The audiences are done with straight up and down. They want the entire atmosphere, all the authenticity and humanity from someone out there who can call it right [...] Foreign correspondents are not detached from their humanity. They have a lot of skills, but we don't expect them to forget to be human beings first" (in Marshall 2010). This notion of interventionist global journalism – reporter involvement that views journalists as story-tellers aiming to emotionally engage audiences – comes in direct contrast to traditional principles of reportage, which dictate that the journalist should never be the story: "Our job is to report, inform, investigate, uncover. That is what we do. We are not aid workers, nor are politicians and we certainly not medics" (ITV Editor-in-chief David Mannion in Marshall 2010).

While the coverage of the same event may differ across countries, as Ojala (2011: 676) points out a global event is conceived as part of broader spaces, powers and identities and developing a global imaginary requires drawing transnational connections between those spaces powers and identities (2011: 684). In the same way that newspapers,, radio and TV were instrumental to the creation of national public spheres in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, today's global reporters – whether they are paid by a major news organisation or blogging on their own site – are contributing to the development of debates and identities that will shape the global sphere of the 21st century.

Interestingly, major news organisations such as CNN, Al Jazeera, Sky, Fox News, Bloomberg, Euronews and the BBC have developed markedly different strategies to tackle the challenge of global news. For instance, Bloomberg's news style focuses on facts, official verification and context but avoids culturally specific emotive responses, hence trying to avoid anything that could alienate diverse audiences: "the story does not assume prior knowledge on the part of the reader, even though the target audience is an actual or implied international community of business people and financiers [...] by avoiding qualifiers, adjectives and other emotive devices, the information is delivered simply and concisely in order to cram in as much factual detail as possible in the given space" (Machin and Niblock 2010: 795).

While a factually oriented, "no frills" type of journalism may attract a respectable share of the global audience – especially niche and business audiences – important questions still arise about the capacity of this model of journalism to really fulfil the media's dual role as a fourth estate, scrutinising those in power, and as a public sphere, engaging citizens in pluralistic dialogue. The success of business-oriented global news platforms, which interpret events "only in terms of the interests of making money" (Machin and Niblock 2010: 797) signify a move away from harder or more challenging, socio-culturally specific accounts of news that challenge and stimulate audiences, while also demonstrating their responsibility as citizens.

In conclusion, the aim of a truly global journalism ought to be to shed light on the interconnectedness of social reality – the ties that unite us with people and communities across borders and the impact that our actions have on them and vice versa: "Is the particular news event narrowly defined as a domestic (local/regional/national) matter (a terror act in Madrid, an HIV catastrophe in southern Africa etc.), solely explained by domestic factors, or is the journalist also bringing in transnational and global aspects?" (Berglez 2008)

Towards a truly global outlook?

In this chapter I have argued that, in addition to its many effects and expressions in the media and elsewhere, globalisation has also led to the emergence of a new paradigm of news – global news. This term describes both issues that are global or international in their scope, complexity or interdependence, as well as a genre of current affairs reporting that corresponds to the unique blend of challenges and opportunities created in the global public sphere.

Still, one should be cautious when heralding the arrival of a new paradigm of global news or of a global public sphere. As the case of the European Union demonstrates, even within politically and economically integrated regions, tensions still exist when trying to put forward a transnational narrative of global news or a set of alternative repertoires of reportage. Preston (2009: 127) conducted an in-depth analysis of journalistic and media practices across 11 European countries and found the "persistent absence of any common, post-national public sphere and the fact that EU issues are still largely framed and viewed via a 'national prism'".

Furthermore, the limitations and possible pitfalls of a global approach to journalism should also be considered. Is the aforementioned global outlook actually global, or is it merely Europe's or the West's version of global? Many journalism scholars have argued that despite the historic events of the last few decades and the undeniable impact of globalisation, the dominant paradigm in both journalism practice and scholarship is Anglo-American (Josephi 2005) or Western European (Ojala 2011).

The truth is that, despite the emergence of many isolated cases of great reporting, today's global public sphere does not feature a coherent narrative of global news or a forum for intercultural dialogue that would match and effectively help tackle some of the main challenges facing us, such as climate change, terrorism and organised crime. News narratives are still stubbornly ethnocentric, reflecting the lack of effective political structures and processes for civic participation or governance at the global level. The creation of a transnational public sphere may, indeed, depend upon the development of a new politics that acknowledges geopolitical developments such as the energy crises (Preston 2009).

Still, both journalism education and journalism practice should acknowledge and respond to these challenges by aiming to contextualise global current affairs and encourage a reflective process, for example, regarding the role of journalism students as global citizens (see also Gerodimos 2012b). Quality news should be framed as a public utility; this is also the principle upon which Public Service Broadcasting was founded. Hence, the development of motivation, skills and appropriate literacy for the regular reading of newspapers should be conceptualised as a social – and given the complexity of global affairs facing us – as a global justice issue. As previous studies have shown (e.g. Raeymaeckers et al. 2008) secondary education can also play a vital role in promoting newspaper reading with positive effects on news literacy, especially amongst those who had no or only limited access to newspapers in their home environment, meaning that such projects can also help redistribute access opportunities.

Insofar as journalism practice is concerned, there are plenty of ways in which the challenges outlined above can be tackled. These range from launching training schemes that empower reporters to thrive within a pressing global context (e.g. by helping them deal with trauma or other mental and emotional pressures) to developing new forms of powerful and engaging storytelling that acknowledges audiences' needs and media habits. Building up the quantity and quality of context in global news reports is vital with particular emphasis being placed on the root causes of events, the key relationships explaining these events, as well as how they relate to the audience. As Philo (2002: 186) notes, "these relationships then need to be referred routinely in news accounts, since it cannot be assumed that audiences will have heard and understood them the first time or indeed that they carefully watch each bulletin".

Thinking of the world as a "global village" can be a reductive and simplistic process that misses both marked differences of news coverage across cultures, as well as important inequalities in terms of access to opportunities, resources and the media. While the main argument put forward here – i.e. that emerging global current affairs require a globally informed outlook and that journalists are facing a rapidly changing news cycle and global audience – the salience of traditional divisions should not be underestimated. Yet, global journalism is not about producing a unifying de-nationalised outlook, but about facilitating an informed dialogue across cultures on pressing current affairs that affect the world as a whole.

Challenging Questions

- What are the main responsibilities and challenges facing journalists in the global public sphere?
- Why is the coverage of international news declining in mainstream news outlets?
- How does global news differ from traditional notions of international news or foreign reporting?
- How can we effectively engage audiences with global current affairs?
- What are the key ethical dilemmas and market pressures facing global reporters?

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Journalism: New Challenges

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http://microsites.bournemouth.ac.uk/cjcr/