

Media Change – Majestic and Modest (Guest blog)

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"I do not think I am exaggerating the possibilities of this invention when I tell you that; it is my firm belief that, one day, there will be a telephone in every major town in America."



"Can I get Twitter on this?"

Alexander Graham Bell's words now seem staggering in their understatement.

The history of human interface with technology is fascinating. It is difficult to imagine how people's lives functioned without the innovations that now fulfil an ever-widening range of purposes and applications. Their advent has been met with pronouncements both majestic and modest.

(This article by Polis Summer School student Adam Kirk-Smith)

The context and History

One of these innovations is [networked journalism](#). It is the phenomenon of the journalistic enterprise being spread, dispersed, across a number of different agents. Journalists, the public, and the plethora of different mediators (like facebook and twitter) that link them, both to each other and the

world outside, are bound together in increasingly nuanced and complex ways.

This is critical for the production of co-operative work, embedded in 'the fundamentals of collaboration', that, as [Charlie Beckett](#) emphasises, are comparable with the changes sparked by the inception of printing. These fundamentals have been spread across a much wider area, spreading from the scientific to the journalistic sphere.

Networked Journalism in Practice

The example of the footage of Ian Tomlinson, a London newspaper vendor who was killed by a police officer, is an excellent case study. Journalist [Paul Lewis received a video](#) with footage of his death, after lengthy investigation of the issue. This had not come, however, from any of the sources he had established, but had in fact been sent by an investment fund manager in New York and soon afterwards, it was published online, [on the Guardian's website](#).

The infrastructure of potential collaboration that networked journalism can provide is vast; as this example shows, its framework extends to encompass a similarly wide range of agents and vectors. The different roles that non-journalists and those within the profession have in creating the news, and the creation of its reporting, become apparent in the next example.

The pervasiveness of networked journalism extends far beyond countries like the UK, with established systems of democratic governance. The [death of Neda Agha Soltan](#), captured on film by civilian bystanders during protests against the 2009 Iranian elections, created the news it described, rather than simply drawing attention to an existing story. It became a piece of political communication, advocacy, attempting to stir action through its conveyance of the visceral reality of her death.

As well as transcending the previously discrete boundaries between journalism and the public, it moved beyond a journalistic depiction of a situation. Here was a life that could be seen ending, over and over again, a symbol of

suffering and persecution to which many had been blind. The political dimensions of this situation underline what

Charlie Beckett describes as 'the complicated systems and rules' concomitant with such journalistic practice.



Neda

Analysing Networked Journalism

Gone are the days when the public could only wait for their news to come in the form of the wireless, or a paper brought by an intrepid young deliverer. Now the public sphere, in [Habermas' conception](#), has fundamentally expanded its discourse with, and critical conception of, the news itself. It is no longer the sole preserve of the journalist.

There is one major caveat. It is imperative that the role of "new media", and of networked journalism, is not overstated. To say that the world is a different place now than before its emergence is true, but that continues to be the case with every passing day.

It is important to respond rationally and critically to new technologies and new networked infrastructures, especially for those that influence our interaction with, and consumption of information. This is true for any 'citizen of the world', in the era where the news is becoming produced, consumed, and examined in an increasingly global context.

(This article by Polis Summer School student Adam Kirk-Smith who is studying digital anthropology at UCL next year.)

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