

THE NEW JOURNALISM, THE NEW JOURNALIST

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Abstract

The New Journalism, The New Journalist addresses the current state and the future of journalism. In a shrinking market of slashed budgets, it will look at who and where the journalists of tomorrow are, how they relate to the public and media organisations and if they can prosper in this 300-million-tweets-a-day world. The use of social media to disseminate stories has revolutionised the art of journalism, affording it both a myriad of new ways to gather information, as well as multiple ways of distributing it to the public. But the threats from citizen journalists and the public's resistance to pay for news are challenges which jeopardise the future of journalism as a career. This paper will attempt to show how these threats can be mitigated and how the judicious use of digital media can help create 'the new journalist'.

Journalism has changed radically over the past 20 years.

Journalists have moved from typewriters and phone bashing to computers and googling. Research that used to involve endless telephone calls and trawling through newspaper cuttings is now achieved at the click of a button.

At the same time the transmission of journalistic content has shifted from physical newspapers and magazines to online, tablets and mobile phones.

And, while apparently being empowered by the possibilities afforded by this new media world, journalists have also, since the digital explosion, been hit hard by free-to-access online content and the accompanying dramatic slump in revenues.

This paper addresses the current state and the future of journalism. In a shrinking market of slashed budgets, it will look at who and where the journalists of tomorrow are, how they relate to the public and media organisations and if they can prosper in this 300-million-tweets-a-day world.

According to the latest Reuters Institute Digital News Report, a significant proportion of 18-24 year olds say the smartphone is their main source of news (Newman, 2013). The survey covered Brazil, Italy, Spain, US, Finland, France and the UK and found that on average over a third of their global sample (37%) is accessing news from a smartphone each week and one in five (20%) from a tablet.

The survey also reveals that in many countries new media brands such as Huffington Post, Yahoo and BuzzFeed are becoming as popular as old, traditional media brands. And Facebook is the most popular social media site for news at 35%, followed by YouTube and Twitter.

Significantly, almost half of news users on Twitter in the UK are following a journalist's account.

These figures are remarkable considering Facebook only launched ten years ago in 2004 and Twitter eight years ago, in 2006.

Meanwhile mobile ad revenue is set to overtake newspaper ad revenue in the UK this year, according to research by eMarketer, and media buying company GroupM found that, while newspapers' digital ad revenues were increasing – by a predicted 10.6% to £6.5bn this year – it's not enough to offset the

print decline. They say that UK national newspaper advertising will fall 10.5% year-on-year to £971m, its lowest ever level.

1. Citizen Journalism

The term citizen journalist has been around, relatively in this fast-moving world, for a long time.

A citizen journalist is anyone who, from some strange reason, likes to tell people what's happening, mainly through Twitter and Facebook and via a blog.

Several websites began life as amateur blogs – Huffington Post, TMZ, Perezhilton, the Drudge Report and Guido Fawkes to name just a few. They've all since become fully-fledged websites with hundreds of thousands of daily views and clicks.

And individual online writers have, accordingly, also moved up the food chain.

In 2007 Karley Sciortino began a blog about sex and relationships. Now she is a columnist for American Vogue, features in a new web TV show and is in the process of writing a feature film. Spencer Ackerman was a defence blogger and he's now National Security Editor at The Guardian.

2. Social media

Through social media, writers are becoming stars in their own right, carving out their niche and creating their own brand, interacting directly, regularly and intimately with the public.

Guardian journalist and author George Monbiot has 96,324 followers on Twitter. Fellow left-wing writer Owen Jones has 201,673. But the BBC economics editor Robert Peston beats them both at 369,490 followers.

But these writers all have big, traditional media companies behind them. Can today's citizen, trainee or budding journalist attain that reputation, reach and prestige all on their own?

Twitter has become a news agency in its own right with hundreds of potential stories being messaged every minute of the day somewhere in the world – although Andy Carvin, senior digital strategist at US National Public Radio, rejected that description calling Twitter more of a “newsroom” (cited in Ingram, 2012).

And journalists are increasingly using social media for sourcing the stories themselves. That could be through Facebook interest lists or petitions or using Twitter apps like Tweetdeck which are used to collect relevant sources on a topic in list form. And Twitter of course is a great tool for journalists to crowdsource information. With this democratisation of news, the public is connected to the news outlets in ways that foster democratic discussion (Cottle, 2006).

With an estimated 300 million tweets a day, and given the number of leads emerging hourly and the increasing use of user participation, it's now the journalist's role to check the veracity of what's been talked about online. This has led to journalists becoming curators of information arriving from multiple sources – keeping track of these news flows and collating them into meaningful messages.

This curation and verification processes have been described as journalists moving from “gatekeeper to gatewatcher” (Bruns, 2005).

However, hasn't that always been the case? The journalist has always had to check, and double-check, if the information they are receiving is gossip, propaganda, hearsay or factually correct. What has changed is simply the transmission format and the amount of information now available.

Furthermore 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” (MacGregor, 2013).

Against this backdrop of free content and reduced media budgets, news agencies have been filling the gap left by the shrinking media market and time- and cash-poor journalists – both freelance and staff.

3. The wires

Thomson Reuters currently has over 55,000 employees in over 100 countries and sells its news to banks and commercial clients, as well of course to the BBC, CNN, Sky, and other media organisations.

Until relatively recently well under the public’s radar, news agencies have encroached into the consumer market, moving away from their traditional business-to-business model, to become news sources with their own social media accounts.

Research commissioned by Nick Davies for his book ‘Flat Earth News’ found that only 12 percent of the news stories in five of the British national newspapers was original content generated by its journalists. The rest came either directly or indirectly from the Press Association or from PR companies (Davies, 2009). And it was estimated in 2010 that Yahoo News was taking over half (57%) of its news from Associated Press (Bui, 2010).

The Mail Online – one of the biggest global newspaper sites – takes Associated Press’ (AP) video feed (APTN). AP has even done a deal with music streaming site Spotify.

And now there’s a new kind of news agency which uses social media to source its stories.

Storyful is a social news agency and verification platform. According to its CEO Mark Little, an Irish journalist for the national RTE broadcaster: “Social media hasn’t killed journalism. It has given it a new lease of life. Storyful is dedicated to helping news and communications professionals everywhere to use social media to make their newsgathering, reporting and storytelling shine.” (Little, 2010)

Storyful has developed tools for monitoring hundreds of lists on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other networks for keywords which may relate to a news event.

In December last year Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp bought Storyful for £25m and in April Facebook partnered with Storyful to launch FB Newswire, which aims to make it easier for journalists and newsrooms to “find, share and embed newsworthy content from Facebook”.

Apart from Facebook’s paranoia over being superseded by another social network platform, it’s tempting to see this development as Facebook moving into the news provision market for consumers. This follows the aforementioned rise of the public-facing news agencies and their increased strength within media organisations.

The rise in popularity of youth magazine and website Vice, which has extended its global news coverage over time, is an example of the continuing power and value of news.

On the one hand, the reliance on agency copy can, potentially, lead to mistakes creeping into copy. On the other hand sites like Storyful could feed newsrooms and freelance journalists with a constant stream of story ideas and information reaped from the kaleidoscopic world of the internet.

So, in this age where anyone can be a journalist and report on what’s happening, the journalist’s role becomes that of a fact-checker, verifier and mediator.

The main movement now is towards journalists becoming self-sustaining individuals harnessing the power of the internet and its global reach to create their own niche and build their career and identity.

4. Web metrics

Web metrics have played their part in elevating the profile of individual journalists, as publishers and media outlets instantly and obsessively measure how many people are reading particular articles online ('Most Read'), pushing popular journalists to the forefront.

US gossip site Gawker has gone one step further and is using web metrics as a way of paying journalists based on story royalties.

This has led to its writers to gaze at the boards showing the popularity of articles "like early hominids in front of a monolith," in the words of Nick Denton, founder of Gawker (quoted in Peters, 2010a).

America Online and Bloomberg are also using web metrics to pay journalists on a royalty or bonus basis. Other sites, such as Jurnid, offer journalists free column inches and allow them to set up their own paywall and US magazine Forbes pays writers for articles that get into its top 10.

According to Forbes' chief operating officer Mike Federle, some of its online contributors are "making over a hundred thousand dollars a year".

San Francisco-based Reddit has 100m unique users and its founders are now millionaires. It features weird and wonderful stories from around the globe in a random manner which has become a familiar hallmark of the internet. It has been called the single dominant force in internet culture today and pays contributors in line with the number of up-votes and hits they get.

The same goes for The News Hub, whose founder William Stoleran says that their ultimate aim is "to pay journalists better than ever before" (Stoleran, 2014).

At the time of writing the site pays writers who get into the top 10% that month \$10 (£6). So, fame and fortune is still a long way off, although Stoleran promises the amount will increase as the site grows.

In a similar vein, after Dutch newspaper De Pers folded last year its editor Jan-Jaap Heij decided to launch an app, DNP, which lets readers subscribe to specific journalists and champions the idea of the journalist as the brand.

Heij says: "What we believe is that people, journalists, matter more now than media brands. Readers follow journalists, not so much newspapers or media anymore. What we are trying to achieve is a channel approach in which we give journalists the possibility to publish for themselves." (quoted in McAthy, 2013)

The journalists are paid 75% of the subscriptions they generate and, for now, the articles are mainly text-based, although there are plans to include video and other media.

Paying journalists according to how many people read their stories is akin to the usual model of paying authors according to how many books they sell or musicians according to how many CDs/MP3 files (or now steamed tracks) they shift. It's long been said within the journalistic fraternity that you're only as good as their last story and that is certainly truer than ever now and in the future where hits will determine if a writer gets paid or not.

While this seems wildly exaggerated, it is in the interest of PR companies that journos get paid better. A journalist who doesn't get paid, or gets paid very little has less incentive to write anything about the brand you are representing. It's a development that can be seen as either healthy competition between journalists where the cream rises to the top, or a race to the bottom with journalists filing populist scandal- and celebrity -led fodder.

Web metrics mean that the news agenda has been skewed even further to what the public wants – often celebrity, scandal, weird stuff, funny stuff and sport – rather than what journalists and editors consider to be important.

Founded in 2006, news and entertainment site BuzzFeed is well known for its ‘listicles’ – the purveying of news and information through a popular, easy-to-digest list form. It creates its highly shareable lists through appealing to emotion, community, humour and controversy and had racked up 130 million unique visitors by the end of last year.

The internet has also given rise to ‘big data’ journalism where writers can extract trends and stories from statistics. That’s nothing new of course but what is new is that amount of information now available to all.

Again, it’s the journalist’s role of source, filter, synthesise and report the newsworthy angles. In this day and age speed is everything and getting the news first can make the career of both journalists and media organisations.

Mobile phones are the first pieces of technology to newsworthy events around the world, they are there before most journalists and certainly before film crews.

5. Geo-location

Storyful's own Heatmap software monitors the "velocity" of words or tweets based on all the thousands of sources the newswire has set up.

"The whole basis for this is to draw news from the noise of social media," says news editor Malachy Browne. "And if you've got a really tight list of gatekeepers for a particular country – or even roving reporters that are trustworthy and reputable – then you've got good quality information coming from a particular location" (quoted in Reed, 2014).

During the terrorist attack on the Westgate shopping mall in Kenya in September last year, "Heatmap lit up with the word ‘attack’, ‘Westgate’ and ‘Nairobi’," Browne explains: "It was a Saturday morning around 10 and most news organisations are light staffed on a Saturday morning. The tech picked it up and we went straight to our Kenya list. We've got reputable sources – a number of whom happened to be at the mall and reporting on it from there – so we were able to get good information that was trustworthy and put a tweet out about it from there."

Checkdesk allows people to collaboratively verify social media and even photo swapping app Instagram, snapped up by Facebook, is getting in on the act. HereFeed is a real-time visual map that groups Instagram photos as big pink bubbles based on where they were geo-tagged. This kind of tool could prove useful as a way to decide where to send field reporters, as well as a way to source visual assets for a particular story. Facebook’s Graph Search is another tool for journalists needing to pinpoint the source of activity.

According to the latest Reuters Institute Digital News Report, as well as Goole+, free messaging service WhatsApp is an increasing global presence on the news landscape (Newman, 2013). WhatsApp processes around 50 billion messages from its 450 million users every day, a figure that led to Facebook acquiring the messaging platform for \$19 billion.

Other apps like WeChat and location-based Foursquare will be crucial to reporting in this new age.

6. Wearable technology

In the not-too-distant future, wearable technology could massively increase the amount of images and video being shared online, with people capturing pictures on smartwatches and transmitting video through Google Glass.

"Is it going to become easier to potentially do a quick geo-location search around a big news event in a certain part of the world and immediately identify the 15 or 20 people that are wearing wearable tech of some description in that exact location," says mobile strategist at BBC Global News, Trushar Barot (quoted in Reed, 2014).

He continues: "You can ping them a message directly and get them on air almost immediately, giving a vivid eye witness account, where its appropriate, or get them to stream live what's going on. Or share their pictures and videos and intelligence directly to our teams on the ground."

The value of news to media outlets of all descriptions cannot be underestimated, as is evident from Facebook's, Yahoo's and Vice's moves into the area.

7. The future

Long considered to be the least appealing formats for online consumption, long-form journalism, which is considered to be hard to read on digital devices, was a dying art.

But arguably the new style of longform journalism – in the form of immersive or multi-media packages – is the most exciting development of them all in the world of the new journalism and the new journalist.

Similarly investigative journalism was under threat due to budget cuts and screen burn. But there are now even crowdsourcing investigative journalism websites such as Help Me Investigate, as well as Bellingcat, which was recently launched by much-lauded citizen journalist Eliot Higgins, aka Brown Moses, who worked in finance and spoke no Arabic, but has used Google Earth, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter to pull together incisive reports from Syria. He is now considered an expert on the war in Syria and on the wider subject of how to use social networks to uncover stories.

There's no doubt that journalists who are innovative, social media-savvy and, most importantly, great writers, will still be able to ply their trade and make money.

And those who can make the best use of all the digital innovation around will be the best placed of all.

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