

The Future of Journalism in the Online Public Sphere: When Journalistic Sources Become Mass Media in their Own Right

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ABSTRACT

Citizens, expertise as well as the great media companies, can play a direct role in developing Journalism 2.0. The online public sphere is going to radically alter the concept of communications media, for a source can now become a communications medium in its own right. This article tries to explain how journalism is changing in the new digital era as well as what will happen with its traditional role in present cyber-society.

Keywords: journalistic sources, public opinion, online journalism, scientific journalism

El futuro del Periodismo en la esfera pública online: cuando las fuentes periodísticas se convierten por derecho propio en medios de comunicación

RESUMEN

Los ciudadanos, los expertos y los medios de comunicación pueden desempeñar un papel directo en el desarrollo del Periodismo 2.0. La esfera pública en línea va a modificar radicalmente el concepto de medios de comunicación. Una fuente puede ser hoy un medio de comunicación por derecho propio. Este artículo trata de explicar cómo el periodismo está cambiando en la nueva era digital, así como lo que sucederá con su papel tradicional en la actualidad la cibernsiedad.

Palabras clave: fuentes periodísticas, opinión pública, periodismo online, periodismo científico

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1. Introduction

“Life is more and more about being glued to the screen or being online”. This is how Gilles LIPOVETSKY and Jean SERROY, authors of *La pantalla global* [*The Global Screen*], characterize the extent to which the Internet has altered our way of life. “Journalism Wounded but Not Dead”. “Death to the Leading Journalists! Long live Citizen Journalism!” “The Post-Journalism Era in the Digital Society”. Titles such as these from recent Media Studies conferences could make up this entire article -a sign of the tremendous insecurity the new technologies have triggered in this field-. No one foresaw this great revolution not even a few years ago. One of the very few exceptions, perhaps, was Alvin TOFFLER in his book entitled *The Third Wave* (TOFFLER, 1980) where, for the first time, there is reference to “several-to-several” communication as well as to the progressive “demassification” of media production and the resulting emergence of personalized media communication.

Mass communications, so enjoyed by journalists for the controlling power it afforded them, would no longer exist, and -the book’s most revolutionary concept- newspaper readers and television watchers would be able to have a say in what they were reading and watching. When it was published in the early 1980s, Toffler’s book was viewed by university Communications departments, at least as science fiction akin to the “time traveling” of physicists. In the middle and late 1990s, judging by the bibliography, the book was still garnering credibility more on the basis of its sociological aspects -the disappearance of the traditional family, increasing social isolation, and the “culture of childlessness”- than its speculations on the evolution of the mass communications media.

At the beginning of this century, when what is known today as Web 1.0 was already fully operational, the belief was that the only way to guarantee the quality, objectivity, truth, and credibility of informative content of a journalistic nature on the Internet was to have journalists write this information. Moreover, protocols from the previous era such as “brand prestige” were stressed, and a brand image such as that of *The New York Times*, for example, was considered crucial to guaranteeing the reliability of the information: if it is good on paper, it will be good on the Internet.

In 2005, however, this began to change. An analysis of free newspapers’ Web portals showed that they were competing with subscription media by offering personal communication space and that their best front-page articles were written by readers (FRANCO ÁLVAREZ, 2005). The article selection process, however, remained in the hands of the newspaper’s editorial staff who decided which article was the most interesting and which blog should be blog of the day. In other words, while journalists still had the power to hierarchize the news -one of the profession’s major powers- there were signs of a shift toward citizen-generated information. People began to speak of “citizen journalism”. Newsgathering services -Google itself, for example- began to be seen as communications media in their own right. ouTube -very heavily used in the 2008

Obama electoral campaign- is seen as a television channel comparable to CNN. Early in 2010, the BBC announced a project being undertaken by leading British networks BBC, ITV, and BT Vision along with Channel 4 to launch a single Internet platform called IPTV (Internet Protocol Television) that represents the future of television.

What happened between 2001 and 2005? Basically, the so-called Web 2.0 philosophy burst onto the scene. Web 2.0 is a term that was coined in 2004 by Tim O'REILLY to describe a second stage of Internet history in which user communities interact via social networks, blogs, and the like. The key feature of Web 2.0 is the option to modify both the content and structure of texts and, in addition to easy access, the opportunity to place material online and have personal as well as collective participation. In other words, Web 2.0 enables citizens to play a leading role in the informative process, a role once reserved for journalists alone. The online *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which we can all passively consult (Web 1.0), is not the same as Wikipedia, on which we can all collaborate (Web 2.0). Naturally, the entry for Madonna, the singer, is likely to be more extensive than the entry for Aristotle but, in this new era, knowledge hierarchies are breaking down.

Citizens (which includes journalists, of course), as well as the great media companies, can play a direct role in developing Journalism 2.0. New terminology has appeared: we no longer speak of journalistic genre but rather "the transmedia narrative"; we refer to the old news publishing networks as "corporate hybridization"; and the ever-more antiquated concept of the audience -even the concept of public opinion- has been replaced in Web 2.0 by the concept of "collective intelligence" (Pierre LÉVY, 1997) or "intelligent multitudes" (Howard RHEINGOLD, 2002). We no longer speak of editing journalistic texts (formerly the job of section chiefs or editors-in-chief) but rather "beta reading", a concept in which, on the Internet, readers themselves can rework (edit) a text written by a journalist and claim that they published it.

Sometimes we wonder whether we will even be able to keep using the simplest definitions of the journalism profession, and those are usually the ones that survive longest. "Journalism is reporting to people what's happening to people," as the great journalist Indro MONTANELLI rightly pointed out. But... what reality do you chose for reporting what is happening to people? Which reality do people spend the most time in each day: the real world or Second Life? The concept of MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games), that is, games where thousands of people interact through avatars in a fantasy environment, has given way to the more sophisticated concept of "alternative reality," coined by Jane MCGONIGAL. Those alternative realities interact with the "real" one, so... what to report?

In 2006, we journalists were shocked when Reuters, one of the world's major news agencies, opened its own avatar -"office and its journalist"- in Second Life. Can a journalist report on alternative realities? Can information be exchanged between one

reality and another? Is a journalist required to do that? Is that journalism? When Gaspar Llamazares, leader of the Communist Party in Spain, decided in 2007 to hold a political rally in Second Life, what was remarkable was not the speech he gave, it was the fact that the “real” media gave this rally far more extensive coverage than any other rally happening in the “real” reality. Llamazares was emulating French politicians Nicolas Sarkozy and Ségolène Royal. From my point of view, Second Life has not suffered the repercussions that cybernetic theorists, in particular, had predicted. Reuters closed its Second Life office in 2008, but it had demonstrated that the world is not what it used to be. Thus, we are going through a period of uncertainty where the old seems to be disappearing but we do not yet know what is to come.

2. The convergence culture: a new paradigm

One of the most appealing explanations of what has happened in the communications media with the emergence of the new technologies -Web 2.0, above all- appeared in 2006 when Henry JENKINS, professor of Media Studies at MIT, formulated his so-called “convergence culture paradigm”. This “convergence culture” would be the combination of three sub-processes connected with the Web 2.0 philosophy on different levels: media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence.

We will introduce this phenomenon by describing a case study that is being very closely analyzed (ROSENZWEIG, 2003; JENKINS, 2006; LOZANO 2008). In the fall of 2001, following the September 11 attacks in New York, an ordinary Filipino-American high school student named Dino IGNACIO designed a digital collage using Photoshop. In the utter innocence of youth, he merged the image of Bin Laden, whom the communications media considered the intellectual author of the attacks, with the image of the cantankerous Bert on Sesame Street, Dino’s favorite children’s program, which first aired in 1970 and continues to this day. On his personal website, he posted a series of images entitled “Bert is Evil”. In reality, it was only a joke but, as the blog continued to circulate, its search engine positioning steadily rose. Bert (and his friend Ernie) are icons widely known in the West among those who were born after the mid-1960s, that is, among the majority of Internet users.

This youngster’s small success may explain how a publisher in Bangladesh found and chose the collage when he was searching the Internet for images of Bin Laden to print on anti-American posters and T-shirts to be worn by thousands of Pakistani demonstrators opposed to U.S. policy following the September 11 attacks. While there is a program modeled on Sesame Street that is televised in Pakistan, the Bert and Ernie characters do not appear in it.

The demonstrations were picked up by CNN and broadcast around the world. Representatives of the Children’s Television Workshop, creator of the Sesame Street series, were horrified by the CNN images showing enraged demonstrators carrying posters with the paired images of Bin Laden and Bert. They threatened to take legal

action, but CNN argued that it was only broadcasting newsworthy images of reality, and those demonstrations with the paired images of Bert and Bin Laden were reality.

Right away numerous forums of joker fans connecting terrorists with Sesame Street characters sprang up, and Dino IGNACIO, the joke's involuntary protagonist, became an Internet cult personality. This was news in the traditional media, including some as prestigious as the BBC, and appeared in Wikipedia as a page entitled "Bert is Evil". Publicity swelled to such a point that IGNACIO became worried and took down the website, posting the following message: "I am doing this because I feel this has gotten too close to reality". His personal fantasy had become reality. What had begun as a joke on his website became a news item. Later, it turned into an international and business crisis reported in both the traditional media and, primarily, the digital media. Since 2003, when the prestigious journal *American Historical Review* (ROSENZWEIG, 2003) published the case as a "scientific study," the communications media have also taken a full-scale, scientific approach in publishing it. This is the world of convergence culture where traditional communication schemes such as the JAKOBSON sender-message-receiver model are radically distorted. It is a world where mass culture becomes high culture and high culture -scientific results, for example- becomes mass culture.

Is this an isolated case? I think not, such cases are coming to light more and more often. Gaspar Llamazares, the Communist Party leader in Spain mentioned above, made the news again in January of 2010 when the FBI used his image (filtered by the Internet) to update the robot portrait of Bin Laden. Some ordinary internauts took notice and, once again, it became worldwide news, even sparking a diplomatic clash between Spain and the United States.

What makes this paradigm shift possible? To begin with, one of the elements of the convergence culture, media convergence, would be a factor (JENKINS, 2008). The circuits Bert has traveled are the product of not only globalization but also the convergence and synergy of communications media. Convergence has a new meaning, however; it refers not so much to the convergence of media platforms (as defined at the turn of this century) as to a cultural shift, primarily, spearheaded by the Internet where media consumers search for other information and create new connections between scattered media content and where the end observer-user-receiver becomes the sender. In other words, convergence happens not in the media machinery itself (however technologically sophisticated it may be) but rather in the brains of senders and receivers (JENKINS, 2006), the brain of an FBI agent, for example.

The other new concept essential to understanding the convergence culture paradigm is that of "participatory culture", the opposite of the old "passive media spectator" idea. We can no longer speak of media producers and media consumers as separate entities performing different functions, the audience can be an information producer (via websites or blogs), and the source can even become a mass communications medium.

The last term I would like to describe is “collective intelligence” (LÉVI, 1997). This concept is based on the premise that none of us can know everything, especially in an interconnected world where there is more information than the human brain can handle. Because each of us knows something and knows about something, however, the best option is to exploit Web 2.0’s more advanced social networking and work together to build knowledge, contributing our experiences and joining all the pieces to create new, more precise information. These Internet conversations create a “buzz” that is of ever-increasing importance in the media industry and will define its future in the years ahead. In the convergence culture paradigm, “online buzz” is crucial to an understanding of how communications media function in the Web 2.0 era.

3. Journalistic sources become communications media

The convergence culture model is going to radically alter the concept of communications media, for a source can now become a communications medium in its own right. For example, in 2004, there was cause for celebration among scientists who were studying Martian geology, climate, and geography: NASA’s rovers Spirit and Opportunity landed on Mars to gather extremely valuable scientific data. Nothing unusual was expected or found. Journalism students experienced quite a shock, however: during the 24 hours Spirit had spent on Mars, NASA’s website had 225 million hits. (Every time an internaut accessed any NASA web page -text, photos, or any other content- it was counted as a hit.) Over the course of that 90-day mission, the number of visits to the website reached 6,530 million—a figure NASA was quick to rectify because it was “more than the earth’s total population” of 6,300 million that year. One-fifth of the traffic was from outside the United States, and it was determined via a survey that one-fourth of all visitors were professors or elementary and high school students¹.

A study conducted in 2007 showed that in May of that year -a month when there was no spectacular mission- only 3,952,000 unique individuals visited NASA’s portal, with an average stay of 12 minutes. The number of unique visits to the science and technology portals of traditional communications media was very much lower, however. CNN had the most, at 502,000 visits, almost eight times less. Visits to the science portal at FOX and CBS could not be quantified because the set minimum of 360,000 visits was not reached. Only one website, Space.com, which has nothing to do with the traditional media, came close to NASA’s figure, with 1,178,000 unique visits. (HEDMAN, 2007) This persuaded such media giants as the Boston Globe and CNN to close their science sections in 2008. And where is this leading us? To a disturbing conclusion: journalism, in large measure, now happens at the source.

What is NASA, a media source or a communications medium in its own right? Perhaps it is both. As a communications medium, it has a larger audience than CNN

¹ Information obtained from a NASA press conference and analyzed on the educational portal <http://www.distance-educator.com/> among other media.

(the science section), CBS, and FOX, apparently. NASA is aware of that, in fact, and keeps two avenues of communication open, one with journalists (the traditional of the sources, though it has varied, also) and another with society directly, bolstering its brand image in both directions.

NASA's communication with journalists has been enhanced in that any journalist anywhere in the world, regardless of their medium, can now subscribe to NASA's news service and receive timely email notification of the latest news about space missions, communiques on scientific findings, and videos with statements by and press conferences with the space agency's scientists. In other words, NASA is not dependent upon the major communications media -news agencies, international television networks, and the like -because they all have the same information. This works against journalism, however, because it has made it easy for the media to copy, literally, NASA's communiques, which include feature articles and interviews. In the digital age, young people on scholarship who know how to copy and paste the NASA-supplied content is all that is needed, it seems, and then they fire the old journalists. Here is a case of the source NASA, via its website, being a mass communications medium in its own right, and it infects the traditional communications media, as well.

What is truly novel about the digital society is that information that was once received, evaluated, and published only by the mass media is now also received directly by the whole of society, without the need of a journalist as intermediary. Any ordinary citizen interested in NASA can access its website and find there practically all the same content a journalist would copy. Besides that, however, the technology allows any citizen to subscribe to NASA's news service under the same terms as a journalist would subscribe. That used to be physically impossible, but not now. Any citizen who yearns to be a reporter or to be vindictive, whatever the motive may be, can report NASA news in their blog, copy images, post a video of a press conference or of the astronauts at the International Space Station (ISS).

People truly interested in information about space have more respect for these bloggers than for journalists who work in traditional media. Consequently, these bloggers have a great deal of power and opportunity to generate "online media buzz" which may, in turn, influence NASA's decisions. The buzz that arose from the dismissal of James E. HANSEN, Chief of Service in the Atmospheric Department at NASA's Goddard Institute, is a paradigmatic case. What surfaced in the online buzz was that the Bush administration had forbidden him to hold conferences that would corroborate global warming. This online buzz found its way into the *New York Times* (January 29, 2006). Another very interesting case, which we cannot discuss in depth here, is the Internet buzz being generated to have Pluto declared a planet again. The Internet is capable of conditioning not only political and commercial but also scientific decisions.

There is another angle on this, however: NASA is broadcasting longer and longer video clips of the crew members' daily life at the International Space Station (ISS).

Established in 2001, it is without question one of the major milestones of present-day science -indeed, all of human history- because, in its philosophy, there is the underlying concept of a kind of research city where human beings would always be present. In other words, the idea was to have human beings located somewhere apart from planet Earth at all times, nothing more, nothing less. The ISS is very important from both a scientific and cultural standpoint, which is why all journalists have access to the website where video clips of the crew members' life there are broadcast live. Any citizen can watch them, too, however, as if they were a reality show. What distinguishes those live broadcasts of the ISS crew members' life from Gran Hermano [Big Brother]? Once again, we have a blend of mass culture and high culture.

Professors of Journalism, watching in dismay as their mission to train journalists vanishes in the new order, have registered one commentary: that "journalists will always be needed because someone has to write the feature articles, even at NASA". This is true but, first of all, NASA does not recruit journalists, they recruit people with a degree in science who also have communication skills. Something similar is happening at Nature, as well, but this is quite different from the traditional concept of a journalist with a traditional education in Journalism. These communicators have become the sources, that is, they write feature articles for NASA's website that are literally copied by media around the world. And NASA scientists, who were once the sources, have become the journalists, that is, they comment on the news in their blogs, and some of them have a large following. Their intention is to create "media buzz," but that sometimes becomes a primary source for the traditional media. They have the power to unleash a political storm, even in Economics. When Financial Times blogger Izabella Kaminska labeled Spanish cabinet minister José Blanco as "paranoid", it set off a crisis within the Spanish government: the communications medium is now the source.

NASA takes very good care of the traditional media by giving them an abundance of information. The agency understands perfectly, however, that it is a mass communications medium in its own right and has a brand image, it creates links on its website for parents, teachers, and children, among others. In other words, this is the source speaking directly to society without intermediaries. This strategy is beginning to bear some very interesting fruit: independent institutions such as universities and scientific associations are adopting NASA's approach and transforming themselves into mass communications media. Unlike sources such as NASA, however, that are subject to criticism for being government-supported, these institutions have a free and more influential voice. The most notable among them are Britain's Royal Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which have become communications media with websites visited by millions of users in search of news or documents on climate change, Darwinism, and other scientific issues. Their leadership is beginning to look for ways to dominate the online media buzz.

It is truly intriguing how becoming mass communications media bolstered these sources' brand image, and their media impact. The traditional media now cite them as

sources so much more often that they echo the media buzz more and more every day.

4. Traditional journalism in the digital age

What fate is in store for the old journalism in the digital age? At the moment, that is a mystery. There is no reason, however, why a change in technology should wipe out an essential element of democracy such as the journalism profession. A scenario similar to this one has played out before, when the telegraph appeared in 1845. Being able to get information faster led to the newspapers placing far more emphasis on reporting events immediately than explaining them calmly. That year, James GORDON BENNETT, publisher of the *New York Herald*, came to the conclusion that the telegraph would put many newspapers out of business, but Journalism actually flourished more than ever after 1845.

A key facet of journalism in the digital age is that traditional journalists might no longer be needed or might not be so influential, at least, since providing informative content on the Internet will be their only work. The “professionalism” so carefully cultivated all these years is no longer relevant: the professional journalist is disappearing, and the expert economist, scientist, attorney, or political scientist, skilled in communication, is emerging. In recent worldwide media events -from the Iraq war to the Obama campaign- we have witnessed rigid behavior on the part of the traditional media and the hidden, self-interested agendas that characterize them (KAMIYA, 2009).

Moreover, “professionalism” can be a dubious epithet, as evidenced, for example, in the pathologically close relationships many Washington political journalists have with their government sources. Such “professional” relationships engender bias and false perceptions in these journalists, and they become critical of “amateur” bloggers. It has been shown, however, taking the Iraq war as an example, that the most truthful information and the most interesting and accurate analyses were written by academics specializing in the Middle East. They may never have contacted a White House source, but they had perfect knowledge of the region’s language and history, and that is how they came up with the right diagnosis.

Internet journalism guru Jeff JARVIS maintains that, for the most part, specialization will take control of journalism. No longer will we all be doing the same thing, making the news worthwhile. Instead, we will all be going out to make our mark by providing in-depth coverage on a specific segment (JARVIS, 2008).

In December of 2008, Bree NORDENSON described this other approach in one of Journalism’s leading academic journals, the *Columbia Journalism Review*: “As it turns out, explanatory journalism may have a promising future in the market of news. On May 9, in partnership with NPR News, This American Life dedicated its hour-long program to explaining the housing crisis”. “The Giant Pool of Money” quickly became the most popular episode in the show’s thirteen-year history. Columbia Journalism Review praised the piece as “the most comprehensive and insightful look

at the system that produced the credit crisis”². And NORDENSON added: “Rather than simply contributing to the noise of the unending torrent of headlines, sound bites, and snippets, NPR and This American Life took the time to step back, report the issue in depth, and the explain it in a way that illuminated one of the biggest and most complicated stories of the year”.

In the journalism of the future (which is already here), with massive amounts of information on the Internet but no business model for costly, in-depth journalism, Media Studies graduates can only aspire to working with what NORDENSON calls “the noise of the unending torrent of headlines, sound bites, and snippets”, the very noise busy citizens are trying harder and harder to escape. The experts -the specialized journalists who have some credential beyond a Journalism degree- will be the ones qualified for what Nordenson considers the future of journalism: “Took the time to step back, report the issue in depth, and the explain it”.

As Richard LANHAM explains in *The Economics of Attention*: “Universities have never been simply data-mining and storage operations. They have always taken as their central activity the conversion of data into useful knowledge and into wisdom. They do this by creating attention structures that we call curricula, courses of study” (LANHAM, 2006). This is the role of communication experts, however, not journalists who have no in-depth knowledge in areas such as economics, law, science, and policy.

In 2009, we saw world-renowned icons of journalism lose readership and advertising, *The New York Times*, for example, registered a 16.9% loss of revenues, and its third-quarter profits were 35.6 million dollars less than in the third quarter of 2008. This financial hemorrhaging meant very grave news for traditional journalism: a policy of termination with severance package for Times journalists (100 in 2009) and a 5% reduction in salary for those who remained on staff. Laying off journalists is the worst possible strategy for a newspaper such as the *New York Times* because, obviously, this would undermine the quality that distinguishes it from free newspapers and the Internet. Other exemplary newspapers suffered similar losses: *USA Today* (a 17% loss), *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post*, for example. Among the weekly news magazines, *Time* saw losses of 30% and *Newsweek* 40% in the second quarter of 2009. There is a similar trend in Europe.

Oddly enough, however, there is one sector that is surviving: the specialized newspapers. *The Wall Street Journal* grew by 12,000 copies in 2009 for a total of 2.02 million, and its revenues increased by 10% that year. Its leadership attributes that financial success to the new iPod and Blackberry applications. While the majority of weekly news magazines were in decline, *The Economist* doubled its circulation from 600,000 copies in 2001 and 1,200,000 copies in 2009. What is their secret? Specialized information, they supply trustworthy, specialized information, and yet

² In “Boiler Room” the essay by Dean Starkman, September-October Issue of *CJR*)

they are also open to other subject matter once covered by the generalists. The strategy at *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Economist* has been to snatch a portion of the market from the generalists while maintaining their specialist focus. In the second quarter of 2009, specialized magazines such as the Disney publication Family Fun grew by 16.7%, and the National Rifle Association magazine American Rifleman realized a 20.2% increase in revenues.

The traditional media's response has been to try to specialize, not by areas but by subject matter. It is too soon, however, to speculate on the outcome. One experience along this line was the agreement *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* entered into with Google's "living stories" project in 2009. For the time being, it is in the experimental section (livingstories.googlelabs.com) where stories are grouped by subject, healthcare reform in the United States, or the war in Afghanistan, for example.

One interesting but disturbing observation is that the journalism that survives is the journalism that focuses on very specific disciplines such as economics, politics, science, or armaments, not the journalism of first-class writing that rises to literary excellence. It appears that the good stories will be found on the Internet while the analysis by experts and highly specialized journalists will be found in print. The most striking case is that of the *Atlantic Monthly*, the celebrated periodical where journalists of such renown as Faulkner, Twain, and Hemingway have put their signature on feature articles. In 2007, after a glorious, 150-year history of legendary journalistic reporting, it was forced to discontinue its print edition and move to the Internet. Considering that its website has more visitors than that of its great competitor, *The New Yorker*, this has been a relatively successful move. Such success, however, derives from replacing journalists and journalistic reporting with blogs and editorials by such figures as Joseph STIGLITZ, Nobel Prize winner in Economics, and by professional politicians who are at odds with each other such as Christopher HITCHENS (staunch defender of the Iraq invasion and an avowed atheist) and Andrew SULLIVAN (homosexual, HIV-positive, Roman Catholic, and economically liberal Republican), for this generates the controversy that brings visitors to the website. All of that, however, is a far cry from those feature articles of days gone by that were written with such literary flair that they had power to change the course of history, helping to bring about the abolition of slavery in the United States, for example.

5. Conclusion: freedom of choice is the tyranny that saves journalism

Journalism magnate Rupert MURDOCH, owner of *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, has stated that Internet journalism will survive only if the public is willing to pay for that information. He has also observed, however, that the public is willing to pay for information only if it is highly specialized and very well explained and contextualized, in other words, expert information.

Philip MEYER has calculated that 2043 will be the last year that newspapers are printed in the United States. He arrived at this date by extrapolating the decline in

readership United States newspapers have been seeing for decades until he reached “the last reader” (MEYER, 2006). Obviously, newspapers will disappear long before that, however, because they will not last until there is only one reader left.

Yet MEYER is optimistic: while he believes that newspapers definitely will not continue to enjoy the revenues and readership they have had until now, because readers, primarily, but also revenues are forsaking them for the Internet, they do still have a future, and it lies in selecting the information and providing the analytical and explanatory content that keeps the financial and intellectual elite informed. Those elite are very important because they represent newspaper customers, MEYER argues. This is the role *Le Monde Diplomatique* plays in the realm of European politics, for example, which brings us right back to our original premise, for *Le Monde Diplomatique* has hardly any journalists. The majority of its writers are sharp political, financial, and scientific analysts who belong, primarily, to the elite among intellectuals and university professors. To put it another way, in this model of the future, a generalist education in Journalism Studies is good for nothing.

The alternative would be for the generalist, the traditional Communications Studies graduate, to focus on breaking news. Today’s readers reject the continually updated website news, however. As Barry SCHWARTZ correctly points out, the passivity resulting from a lack of control is known in psychology as “learned helplessness”. Even though logic would suggest that more news available would mean more control for consumers, what happens is just the opposite: having too many options can get to be cumbersome. Instead of feeling that we are in control, we feel unable to cope (SCHWARTZ, 2004). “Freedom of choice eventually becomes a tyranny of choice”, SCHWARTZ writes. The public loses interest and becomes voluntarily uninformed when it comes to that type of brief, breaking news that has always been top priority in journalism. It was suitable for television in the 1960s, for example, because someone who wanted to watch television at a particular time would be forced to see that news. People have no reason to do that now, however, which is why television journalism has drifted into news-entertainment. That will also happen with Web journalism.

Nonetheless, an influential elite does indeed need and value contextualized information, and that information must be created by people with a full, university-level command of the discipline (science, economics, politics, law, and the like) in which they report, for this is how a website earns the “quality” label and the “brand name” guarantee that are essential to being chosen from among hundreds of millions of websites on the Internet.

Approaching it from a different standpoint he described a few months ago on Salon.com, the influential media trends blog, Gary KAMIYA reached the same conclusions. He believes that journalism will survive, what will disappear is the news (KAMIYA, 2009). According to Kamiya, the Internet gives readers what they want and gives the newspapers what they need. The physical layout of a newspaper means that

people read information even if they are not looking for it. A person buys a newspaper to read the science news, for example, and on the front page, there is some international news or a political analysis. He or she was not looking for that news but, in the end, reads it. This does not happen on the Internet because the reader proceeds directly to specific portals. Audiences are split between the Internet and digital television, and that involves specialization, too, but in the opposite sense. Only the intellectual elite are capable of making the effort, financially and mentally, to read content they need but, in principle, have no a priori interest in. That new journalism will be in print and intended for these influential elite, however, so it must be written by journalists among the elite who have university-level and even doctoral-level knowledge in the specific discipline they are reporting, not to mention enough understanding of journalism to write engaging text.

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