
Editorial

Mascha Brichta

Communication and Media Research Institute
University of Westminster

Institute of Communications and Media Culture
Leuphana University of Lüneburg

Sofia Johansson

School of Culture and Communication
Södertörn University College

In a time of rapid technological, social and economic development, news journalism is undergoing some spectacular changes. New communication technologies, a globalizing media and intense commercial pressures are impacting on the way in which news organisations and journalists operate, as well as opening up new ways of disseminating and consuming news. At the same time, news audiences are adjusting to an everyday life permeated by an abundance of media content and formats, with journalists now seeking audience attention in a multi-media, multi-platform environment.

In this context, notable developments concern the advance of new forms of journalism and their potential impact on traditional news media. The era of Web 2.0 bestows upon us new forms of ‘citizen journalism’, user generated content, weblogs and a range of independent Internet news sites. These novel forms of journalism appear to provide increasingly viable alternatives to established news outlets; adding fresh perspectives to current events while supposedly blurring boundaries between news producers and news consumers.

Traditional news media, likewise, face a number of challenges. Converging media technologies mean that news is increasingly a multi-platform venture, and the introduction of 24-hour news channels as well as online and mobile news obviously require new approaches by news organisations. The newspaper, in particular, is facing mounting pressure due to increasingly harsh competition for advertisers and audiences both online and offline, and the offline newspaper is

often considered under threat. On top of this, the proliferation of media outlets contributes to the continuous struggle to keep (especially young) audiences engaged with and willing to pay for journalistic content. News journalism, in short, is in a state of transformation.

Clearly, these developments raise several questions in need of scholarly examination. How, for example, are news organisations and individual journalists around the world adapting to these changing conditions of existence? Are websites such as Wikinews.org and YouTube.com leaving an imprint on more established forms of journalism, and is the rise of blogging having any notable effect on the nature of public discussion? Are traditional quality standards within journalism issues of the past? In which ways do audiences engage with the increased range of journalistic content? And, how can these changes be grasped on a methodological level?

This issue of WPCP sets out to examine some of these queries, by introducing a range of perspectives and research studies on contemporary news journalism. First up is Mark Deuze, who, in asking the question of ‘how journalism is changing, and how it stays the same’, paints a broad picture of international research on the working conditions of journalists. Applying the framework of media sociology to analyse the institutional, technological, organizational and cultural developments surrounding this profession, Deuze finds evidence of notable transformations within the working practices and contexts of news journalists. Yet his analysis also highlights the rather static nature of certain elements within these, and in that sense his contribution emphasises the need for continued analysis which is both balanced and empirically grounded, and which, Deuze suggests, should ‘combine approaches that focus on institutional and cultural reproduction and isomorphism with those that identify and disrupt existing ways of doing things.’

Next, Steve Paulussen and Pieter Ugille provide a focussed empirical case study of two Belgian newspapers and a local community website, investigating if and how user generated content finds its way into professional newsrooms. The authors make the case that despite a growing body of research on citizen journalism as an alternative to mainstream journalism, there is little academic enquiry that focuses on the ‘synergy’ between the two. Paulussen and Ugille discuss significant contextual factors impacting on this, and although they find that professional journalists in many ways are open to including user generated content in the news production process, they come to the conclusion that given newsroom structures and professional working practices seem to hinder its adoption.

The following two articles deal with the pressing question of audiences for news journalism; examining from different perspectives how much influence audiences/users really have – and how much they want. Drawing on large-scale,

cross-national research, Monika Metykova investigates how European media professionals understand the relationship between journalists and audiences. Asking whether this relationship has changed due to recent technological, socio-political and structural conditions, Metykova identifies several aspects that have undergone transformation, in particular emphasising how media professionals perceive an increased distance between journalists and audiences. Her research also sheds additional light on the tendency to over-emphasise the importance of a shift towards more amateur-produced news, as she finds that the interviewed media professionals simply do not appear to see amateur journalism as of particular influence on the relationship between news producer and news consumer. Metykova's analysis can in this respect be compared to Annika Bergström's study on how a general Swedish news audience value and make use of user generated content in the journalistic context. Bergström contends that there is relatively little interest, from an audience point of view, in contributing to content on news sites, or in otherwise participating in the journalistic process via weblogs. She additionally makes the case for studying how such forms of participation in news production adhere to established patterns of how different social groups make their voices heard in the public debate.

Finally, useful to researchers analysing news texts, Robert Kautsky and Andreas Widholm challenge existing online methodologies and introduce a new method for studying online news. The authors grapple with the problem of how to capture the changing nature of online news stories, which are published in several altered versions over time, and suggest a new approach they call Regular Interval Content Capture. Testing this method, Kautsky and Widholm analyse several news items at cnn.com and identify three major stages of news production, thereby telling a story about the way news evolve online as opposed to offline.

Each contribution, then, adds a distinct perspective to the debate about contemporary news journalism. We hope that this issue will serve as a starting-point for further discussion about what news journalism means, what purposes it serves, and how it continues to change.