Journalism and Digital Technologies
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Not so very long ago, when I was working on my dissertation in the mid-1990s, I talked with dozens of journalists about what was then a newsroom novelty: the internet. Few of them had ever actually used it. If they wanted to find something online, they filed a request with the newsroom librarian to conduct a search for them. If they wanted to communicate with a source, they picked up the telephone; if they wanted to communicate with readers ... well, to be honest, they didn't really want to, or see any particular reason why they should. And although a growing number of newspapers – around 1,500 worldwide by 1996, according to stats from trade magazine *Editor & Publisher* – offered some information through a computer in one form or another, my interviewees were highly unlikely to have played any part in putting it there.

Despite this lack of familiarity with the medium, everyone I spoke with had an opinion about it. Many journalists were wary; some were enthusiastic. Most acknowledged the internet's potential, as best they could envision and articulate it at the time, but remained strongly convinced of the fundamental value of their own occupational role as information gatherers and interpreters (Singer, 1997a). And nearly everyone volunteered two disclaimers. The first was "I

am not a geek." Computer technology was a tool, used with varying degrees of skill or relish, but it was emphatically not central to what they did as journalists. And what they did as journalists was what ultimately mattered. "It wasn't the printing press that changed the world, it was good journalism," one editor said. "The same goes for high tech" (Singer, 1997b: 9).

The other common disclaimer was "Newspapers may be doomed, but they won't die on my watch." Journalists at all stages of their careers were certain they would outrun any tidal wave of change, if just barely. "There will always be newspapers – for at least the next 25 years," one journalist said. Print may go away, said another, "but after I'm, I hope, retired on the beach and not worrying about it." A third envisioned that "by the time of, not my kids, but my children's children, newspapers will probably be gone" (Singer, 1997a: 77-78).

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose, as the French say. The intervening years have dramatically expanded the capabilities of communication technology and journalists' use of – indeed, reliance on – their digital tools. The Internet has become integral to their jobs, and those jobs now incorporate technologically enabled practices not yet imagined in the early days of the web, from creating video packages to engaging in online conversations with readers. Yet journalists' attitudes and self-perceptions have proved strikingly resilient.

At the same time, however, the uncertainties of today's news environment introduce new concerns for practitioners. They remain convinced of the fundamental value of journalism and journalists, but many are less confident that a media industry with steadily leaking revenue can stay afloat for the foreseeable future (Pew Research, 2010; Project for Excellence, 2008). And there is a growing recognition that any number of devils may lurk in the details of just how journalists go about doing their work and fulfilling their social roles as the media continue to evolve at breakneck speed.

This chapter highlights some of the seismic shifts in the occupation of journalism in recent years, exploring practitioners' reactions in a media environment that looks less familiar and more precarious than it did only a short time ago. Focusing on cultural norms and practices of journalists, the chapter examines pressures for (and challenges to) change in three interrelated areas: control over information, news production practices, and relationships with audiences.

Shifting control

One of the most profound changes associated with the exponential growth of the Internet since the 1990s has been the creation of a world in which everyone can be a publisher. But that does not mean, journalists are adamant in insisting, that everyone can be a journalist. Technological developments and their accompanying social transformations have pushed journalists to ask the sort of existential questions they did not have to face before: Who is a journalist? What, exactly, does a journalist do that other people do not? Do journalists serve a unique social role, and if so, what is it?

The answers they have come up with highlight occupational roles, discussed further below, but viewed largely from a normative perspective. Journalists see themselves as providing a public service, a hallmark of professionalism (Larson, 1977) that has been news workers' strongest claim to professional status over the past century (Dennis, 1996). If public service is what you believe you are about, and the provision of information is your vehicle for delivering that service, then the quality of the information matters -- and you must identify and express ways of safeguarding it. Ethical guidelines fill that need, providing a framework for distinguishing between high-quality information that is a service to the public and low-quality information that may be a disservice – and, by extension, also distinguishing the providers of the former from the providers of the latter.

High-quality information must be credible, so journalists highlight ethical principles such as truth-telling, normative stances such as independence, and newsroom practices such as verification. The providers of that information also must be credible, requiring journalistic adherence to such normative goals as accuracy – and accountability for inaccuracy (Singer & Ashman, 2009; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2006; Gup, 1999). True, such lofty ethical precepts may too often be closer to the ideal than to the reality, but they nevertheless are fundamental to most journalists' definitions of themselves and their role in democratic society.

Those definitions have taken on something of a defensive tinge over the past decade and more, as the Internet has eroded alternative articulations of who is – and, crucially, who is not – a journalist. A journalist can no longer be defined by access to the means of disseminating information; technology puts that capability at everyone's fingertips. A journalist can no longer be defined by access to sources of data for the same reason. Employment status has always been a dubious criterion, as freelance journalists can attest. The ability to communicate cogently and effectively remains important, but it is an ability shared by a great many people who clearly are not journalists. The normative stances, however, are more useful in setting boundaries around the entity of journalism and the enterprises of those who practice it: Those within the ethical parameters are journalists, or at least are engaged in journalistic work, and those outside them are not. In short, the norms form occupational turf markers for journalists (Lowrey, 2006) -- and those markers are simultaneously less tangible and more durable than the ones the Internet is obliterating.

In particular, journalists have drawn on those normative claims to reconfigure their self-perceptions as gatekeepers in terms of the quality of information reaching the public rather than its quantity, which would be virtually impossible to limit in a global, open network. It is, in a

way, their attempt to assert occupational control over the uncontrollable, to reclaim the authority that vanished in the transition from an environment in which journalists were central to the flow of information to one in which there is no center at all (Robinson, 2007; Singer, 2007; Lowrey & Anderson, 2005). Adapting the perception of exactly what it means to be an information gatekeeper so it rests on normative judgments and ethical enactment of those judgments allows journalists to reshape the definition of their role to fit the new information ecology, as well as to re-establish limits on admission to that role in an unlimited media space.

This attempt to adjust to shifts in control over information can be seen especially clearly in studies documenting journalists' reactions to "user-generated content" (UGC), material contributed to media websites by readers of those sites. As early as 2005, Thurman uncovered widespread concern about the effects of UGC on professional norms and values, including standards of spelling and punctuation, accuracy, and balance. Despite high resource costs for moderation, journalists at the British national media outlets in his study felt they needed to edit user contributions in order to ensure balance and decency (Thurman, 2008).

Subsequent studies have suggested that this perceived need to control not only journalists' own information output but also the output of their audiences is widespread. Journalists at national newspapers throughout Europe and North America moderate public contributions to limit the potential for ethical abuse and legal transgressions (Singer et al., forthcoming). In Britain, where the BBC and several national newspapers have been pioneers in making space available for user material, there are persistent concerns not just about legal liability but also about issues of reputation and trust (Hermida & Thurman, 2008). At the *Guardian*, for example, journalists worried about the potentially detrimental effect of "nasty comments, which can undermine the brand," and they saw what one editor called a crucial role

for "the expert journalist who can interrogate and understand and all of those sorts of things in a way that the citizen reporter just can't" (Singer & Ashman, 2009: 13-14). British journalists at local newspapers also strongly felt the need to oversee the quality of user contributions despite shrinking newsroom resources; for example, one described the value of UGC as "disproportionate to the excessive amount of management time which is taken up with trying to ensure it is accurate, balanced, honest, fair and – mostly importantly – legally safe to publish" (Singer, 2010).

Changes in the ways that online information can (or cannot) be controlled, then, have prompted journalists to differentiate themselves from other social actors largely in normative terms. In doing so, they have reconceptualized the nature of their gatekeeping role and reasserted its social value in a no-holds-barred media environment; they now are in the process of extending that role to oversight not only of their own actions but also those of their audiences. Along the way, they are incorporating new practices into long-standing newsroom work routines.

Shifting practices

Journalists continue to see themselves as "not geeks," but proficiency with computer technology nonetheless has become central to the ability to do their jobs. A few journalists who came of age when the clatter of typewriters (and a lot of cigarette smoke) filled the newsroom are now hunting and pecking their way into retirement; larger numbers who learned to write, file, and perhaps paginate their copy using desktop computers still have a decade or two to go. But as media structures and news-making processes have adapted to the continuous emergence of new technical capabilities (Boczkowski, 2005), life in the 21st century newsroom has become far

more technologically complex. The journalist's job now involves the use of multiple tools to produce multiple types of content for multiple delivery platforms.

The first decade of the 2000s was marked by ongoing evolution in work practices, accompanied by evolution in the jargon describing them. Among the first up was "backpack journalist," greeted largely with fear and loathing when it was bandied about in the early 2000s, as news organizations began to get serious about using their websites as something other than a repository for stories from the newspaper or (less commonly) television news show. The backpack journalist was seen, with considerable trepidation, as a "multiple media multi-tasker capable of operating a video camera, performing a TV stand-up, telling a print story, writing a broadcast script, creating a Flash animation, compiling a photo gallery, grabbing an audio clip and muckraking masterfully" (Stone, 2002). The predicted result: "a mush of mediocrity." Some journalists might be able to effectively juggle such a variety of tasks, Stone warned, but most would continue to be good at some aspects of the job – and bad at others.

The idea of newsrooms filled with people who could produce stories for print, television, and the Internet appealed to many media managers, however, especially those who ran companies that owned all three types of outlets in a single market. "Newsroom convergence" was the next buzzword to spread around the industry in the first half of the 2000s. The converged newsroom looked different in different places, but it involved some combination of news staffs, technologies, products, and geography from previously distinct media. Although its boosters hailed convergence as a sweeping industry phenomenon, and hundreds of U.S. news outlets eventually claimed to have some sort of converged arrangement for producing news (Lowrey, 2005), the reality on the ground was generally underwhelming. "Media convergence is like

teenage sex," one Danish editor remarked in the early 2000s. "Everybody thinks everybody else is doing it. The few who are actually doing it aren't very good at it" (Dailey et al., 2005: 151).

The most widely publicized U.S. example was in Tampa, where Media General built a $40 million "temple of convergence" (Colon, 2000: 26) for its *Tampa Tribune* newspaper, NBC television affiliate, and TBO.com website. Some (though far from all or even most) journalists significantly changed their work practices to accommodate additional outlets – for instance, assignment editors at least tried to coordinate with cross-media counterparts, and a handful of newspaper reporters did TV stand-ups – but many carried on much as they always had. There were reported shifts in self-perceptions (away from a medium-specific identity) and perceptions of colleagues (away from derogatory stereotypes), but by and large, newsroom culture at each media outlet proved stubbornly change-resistant (Dupagne & Garrison, 2006; Singer, 2004; Lawson-Borders, 2003).

Regardless of the medium, however, gathering information and turning it into a story is central to newsroom culture, not just in the normative terms already described but in very practical ones: Those tasks are the day-to-day work of the journalist. Particularly since the mid-2000s, new technological capabilities have made that work simultaneously easier and harder.

It is easier because the tools have become smaller, simpler, and suppler. If the "backpack journalists" were barely visible beneath the staggering array of audio and video equipment they toted, the "MoJos" – yet another buzzword, this time for "mobile journalists" – who succeeded them travel relatively light. Most if not all of the bulky kit has been reduced to a size that fits cosily in a jacket pocket. Mobile and smart phones, digital voice recorders, personal digital assistants, and other similar devices offer compact versatility in capturing, organizing, and transmitting information of various kinds, from text to sounds to images both still and moving.

But a lighter physical load has not translated to a lighter workload for journalists. News practitioners today do, in fact, precisely fit the definition of the backpack journalist above; the only thing missing is the backpack. Telling stories across multiple formats is, put plainly, more and harder work – and with fewer people to do it, as the size of newsroom budgets has shrunk almost as much as the size of video cameras. Meanwhile, the Internet, so peripheral that it was nearly invisible to journalists a generation ago, has become far more central to the news operation and far more voracious in its appetite for fresh information in a multiplying number of formats. Whether the combination adds up to stronger public service or the predicted "mush of mediocrity" remains an open question (Martyn, 2009; Stone, 2002). Indeed, concerns about the ability to maintain standards of accuracy and verifiability seem to be growing along with the pressure to produce rapidly updated information (Pew Research, 2010). In general, it seems undeniable that the journalist's job has become harder because the information that proverbially doesn't grow on trees is no longer disseminated on them, either.

And that's not all. As the backpack journalist has given way to the MoJo, the idea that convergence is primarily about media platforms has been overtaken by the view that it is more about the nature of the stories carried on those platforms. For example, journalists covering a breaking news event can (and increasingly are expected to) produce one version of the story as a continually updated online report, another based on images or quotes from the scene, and a third for the next day's newspaper. There are fewer distinct "online journalists"; aside from a handful of specialized areas, such as database construction, everyone does everything. The view of online content and the people who produce it as "separate and unequal," prevalent in newsrooms in the 1990s, has largely vanished. Converged newsrooms meant they were no longer physically separate; by 2010, "they" simply equalled "us."

But that's still not all. The final, most recent change in journalistic practice associated with technological development is perhaps the most profound cultural shift of the lot. It took journalists more than a decade to adjust their practices to the fact that the Internet is a digital medium and, as such, is endlessly flexible in the formats it can accommodate – again, from text to sound to images of various sorts. They now are adjusting to the fact that it is also a network. The give-and-take of an interactive medium raises issues of control, as discussed above, and of interpersonal relationships, which we'll come to soon. It also has brought about whole new narrative structures for journalistic storytelling.

Consider the "j-blog," the last bit of jargon for now. Beginning around the middle of the decade and rapidly becoming commonplace on media websites (Bivings Group, 2008; Lowrey & Mackay, 2008), blogs have been adopted by journalists as an optimal place to display short-form reporting, short-form analysis, and short-form writing (Robinson, 2006). With the advent of tools such as Twitter, "live blogs" direct from the scene of a story have joined the mix as a way to reduce what was already mini to micro: immediate, informal, even impressionistic information, conveyed in tiny bursts of 140 characters or less and, perhaps, an image or two.

In addition to placing primary value on rapid-fire delivery, these new and evolving story forms also move journalistic writing styles much closer to those of content contributors from outside the newsroom. For example, journalists advised all their working lives to keep their personal views and voice out of their writing suddenly find themselves with a vehicle that encourages them to showcase both, much as other bloggers do. J-blogs are nearly the complete opposite in narrative structure from the traditional "objective" news story. In tone, the best are conversational, candid, even cheeky. They talk about "I" and "you" rather than that other, more distant "third person" who fills the paragraphs of most newspaper stories. They convey what the

journalist thinks – both reflection on the world and self-reflection on the process of turning parts of that world into a news product (Singer, 2010). Journalists, then, have adopted and adapted a narrative voice very different from the one that has been "theirs" since the maintenance of professional distance – call it objectivity – became the norm a century ago (Mindich, 1998). In doing so, they are joining, perhaps belatedly, the shift from a modern to a post-modern view of how reality is constructed and conveyed.

And, crucially, these j-blogs and other more conversational journalistic formats invite input and responses from outside the newsroom – to which journalists, in turn, respond.

Shifting relationships

Along with changes in control over content and in the practice of constructing a news narrative, life in a network brings changes in the nature of the relationship between those inside and outside the newsroom. As suggested above, this shift to an inherently collaborative journalistic culture may be the hardest one of all for journalists.

Almost from the moment the Internet emerged from the scientific community and burst onto the public radar, it was hailed as a democratizing force across all phases of civic life. The potential of a platform enabling people to both obtain and provide information – instantaneous, interconnected, and completely unbounded information – was immediately obvious. The medium was seen as inherently empowering from all sorts of perspectives: political actor, social agent, goods or services consumer ... or, of course, media audience member.

In fact, of all those roles, that of "media audience member" is perhaps the most clearly mutable (Gillmor, 2006; Rosen, 2006). As outlined above, the active role of producer and the more passive one of consumer of information, including the kind we might all agree is "news,"

are interchangeable. In a network open to universal participation, everyone has the potential to be both. Countless media practitioners and observers have pointed out the rules-changing implications for existing and new relationships between those who work in a newsroom and those who do not.

Among the propositions offered over the past decade for what these new relationships might look like:

> "News media organizations are actually story instigators. They track down important stories and relay them to the world. Once they are released, stories transform and can take a life of their own beyond the control of the news organization. The Internet community (and other media) appropriates the stories, retells them, comments on them, adds additional information or overlooked angles, and reworks them as part of a broad-based web of ideas and information. That's not only a good thing, it's essential. If it's not happening, it means your reporting has little value to your audience" (Bowman & Willis, 2003).

> "Tomorrow's news reporting and production will be more of a conversation, or a seminar. The lines will blur between producers and consumers, changing the role of both in ways we're only beginning to grasp now. The communication network itself will be a medium for everyone's voice. ... This evolution – from journalism as lecture to journalism as a conversation or seminar – will oblige the various communities of interest to adapt. Everyone, from journalists to the people we cover, to our sources and the former audience, must change their ways" (Gillmor, 2006: xxiv).

> "Gatewatching complements or, in some cases, entirely supplants traditional journalistic gate*keeping* practices. ... The balance shifts from a publishing of newsworthy information to a *publicizing* of whatever relevant content is available anywhere on the Web (and beyond), and a subsequent evaluation of such material. This limits or eliminates the need for journalistically trained staff and opens the door to direct participation by audience members as information gatherers (that is, as gatewatchers), reporters, and evaluators—users become *produsers*. In effect, therefore, this model can be described as participatory journalism, and -- due to the wide range of views commonly expressed by participating audience members -- may lead to a multifaceted, multiperspectival coverage of news events" (Bruns, 2005: 2; emphases in original)

The journalist as instigator, as conversationalist, maybe even as little more than bystander to "multiperspectival" news coverage – these all diverge radically from traditional concepts of

occupational roles and relationships based on providing information to a more or less passive audience. They affect not only the practice of journalism but its epistemological underpinnings, most notably notions of how truth claims – central to practitioners' self-perception, as discussed above -- are best established and explored (Romano, 2009).

Well before the Internet became so popular, a 20th century modernist outlook that had nurtured the professionalization of newsroom culture and created the "god-terms" of journalism – facts, truth, reality – had already been shaken by newer views of relativity, subjectivity, and construction (Zelizer, 2004). Online, such esoteric notions are translated into an unending stream of plain-spoken, and often outspoken, language by millions of people all over the world. The journalist defines truth as the result of an occupational process: pre-publication verification -- with the journalist doing the verifying. The online zeitgeist flips that idea on its head. Publication is the first, not the last, step in the process of verification because only after an idea is published can it be, collectively, vetted. In other words, truth emerges as a result of discourse rather than as a prerequisite to it (Singer, 2007; Matheson, 2004).

That is a very big shift indeed. In addition to shaking up occupational claims to control over information, as already discussed, it rocks the entire journalistic world view. It also wreaks havoc with such long-standing philosophical frameworks as objectivity, already touched on above. For journalists in the United States in particular, objectivity is the "moral norm" by which they live their professional lives; it is a means of social control and social identity, and the most legitimate grounds for parcelling out both praise and blame. Objective journalists, at least in theory, report something called "news" without commenting on it, slanting it, or otherwise shaping it; the norm separates "real" journalists from both overt and covert partisans (Schudson, 2001: 150, 167).

Essentially, claims of objectivity are claims to trustworthiness. Because in a traditional media system, audience members see only the end result of the journalistic activity – the "truth" as vetted by journalists and presented in the form of a packaged news report -- they cannot know what went into producing it. By professing to have followed a particular procedure in confronting, organizing, and interpreting an invariably messy reality, journalists ask audiences to trust their accounting of that reality. The relationship is built on a request that readers or viewers put their faith in a set of intangibles: the past reputation, current integrity, and future accountability of both the individual practitioner and the news organization. This faith thus is not entirely blind, but the field of vision it offers is limited, defined by the journalist's overt behavior and the expectations it creates.

Objectivity, then, is the stance of someone engaged in a monologue aimed at audience members rather than a dialogue with them (Soffer, 2009); it is about exclusion and professional distance, not inclusion and collaborative news construction (Deuze et al., 2007). In a world in which the pursuit of truth is seen instead as more collaborative enterprise, objectivity loses a considerable portion of its ostensible value. In fact, some observers have suggested, it is being replaced by a relationship norm much better suited to the networked world: transparency. Transparency entails communicating as much as possible about what has gone into a story – a story that is not complete once the journalist has written it but rather is part of an ongoing and more broadly shared process (Karlsson, 2008). Trustworthiness, in this view, is demonstrated rather than simply demanded. Or so goes the theory.

That journalists are even remotely on board with this fundamental shift in what they are about and how they build and maintain relationships is not a little amazing. Yet evidence is emerging that they are – to a point. "The official classical discourse that we were taught in

college is no longer valid," said a Spanish editor. "Today, the receiver is a producer as well, and they may be much wiser than us all. … That is wonderful" (Vujnovic et al., 2010). Nearly 95 percent of the journalists in a study of local British papers agreed with a statement that "facilitating debate about local issues through comments is something we should be doing" (Singer, 2010: 138); their national counterparts at the *Guardian* also valued new relationships, saying public input creates a more balanced website thanks to contributors who are, for the most part, "eloquent, intelligent, and able to add to the debate" (Singer & Ashman, 2009: 16). A broader European study found that nearly two-thirds of the journalists across a range of countries thought the ability to connect with the audience was an important benefit for online journalism (O'Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008).

It would be a major exaggeration, however, to say that in the stark light of overhead fluorescents, the adjustment within the newsroom to new relationships with people outside it is proving anything less than extremely difficult. A raft of research since the mid-2000s, much of it already highlighted above, has indicated that making those relationships work is a struggle for many, if not most, journalists. For every expression of support in principle for the benefits of transparency, open discourse, and "multiperspectival news," there is a chorus of real-life concerns. It turns out that most people are not actually interested in talking about the news, at least not on media websites, and those who are interested too often make contributions that are abusive, inane, or just plain wrong. The mechanisms for optimizing the value of participatory journalism are cumbersome, the time to nurture online relationships is hard to find, and the rules of engagement are being written on the fly, if they are being written at all. More transparency seems, to many, to translate to less authority (Lowrey & Anderson, 2005), which most journalists rather like feeling that they have. In general, what one online journalist described as the "slip

from professional discourse into a more personal discourse" is one for which journalists are generally unprepared and not a little ambivalent (Singer & Ashman, 2009: 17). Yet the transition is happening fast, and cope they must.

Conclusion

Back in the 1990s, when those journalists with whom I began this chapter looked into a future that has now become the past, they saw a world that looked essentially like the one they knew. It was a world in which their role as information providers to a relatively captive and passive audience was something they viewed with a considerable degree of certainty. The role, they felt, would remain central even as the world around it underwent technological change.

Yet the changes that those journalists confidently predicted would have little to do with them have shaken their professional world – and their world view – far more than they envisioned. Multi-faceted new tools and platforms have become integral to their working lives, boundaries between journalists and audiences have been breached, and the future of newspapers themselves is in considerable doubt. Indeed, dealing daily with change and with the uncertainty it introduces has become a core aspect of being a journalist.

The three specific categories of change described here – in the exercise of control, in journalistic practices, and in relationship structures – are, of course, inextricably connected. New relationships mean a reconsideration of how, and whether, to exercise control over information. New narrative structures invite transparency and the give-and-take of idea exchange, but it is unclear how those fit into either practical work routines or overarching normative frameworks. Publication of instantaneous, multimedia information raises concerns about the foundational principle of accuracy; feeding material from outside the newsroom into the mix adds more complications, not least for claims of journalistic authority.

Inside and outside the media industry, many who try to peer into a murky future are pessimistic about the impact of these changes, as well as others described throughout this book, on journalists' ability to carry out their civic role as well as (from practitioners' perspective) or

better than (from the perspective of their critics) they have in the past (Pew Research, 2010; Christians et al., 2009). The prevailing view seems to swing between celebrating the diminished authority of the "mainstream media" and bemoaning the loss of coherence provided by that same once-authoritative entity. For practitioners, the certainty of predicted stability has been replaced by the uncertainty of real-life flux, raising new sorts of existential questions about who journalists are and what they do.

Yet if the contemporary environment has brought such questions to the surface, it has not produced answers that are essentially any different than they were 20, 50, or 100 years ago, from the time when journalists first began to frame their newly defined profession as a public trust and themselves as public trustees (Williams, 1914). Over the years, journalists have done different things, and they have done differently the things they did before. But throughout a century of profound transformation in the implementation of something called "journalism," their underlying conceptions about their role in society have held remarkably steady.

In 1971, journalists responding to a national survey saw a watchdog function – investigating government claims – as their most important social role, followed by analyzing complex problems and getting information to the public quickly. In 2002, those three, along with "avoid stories with unverified content," still were seen by a majority of journalists as extremely important (Weaver et al., 2007). The 40-plus years in between brought the advent of cable television, an explosion in niche magazines, and of course, the meteoric rise of the Internet; indeed, many of the respondents work in those media. Yet across the occupation, the core sense of "what we do" has remained firm.

So, too, have understandings of the appropriate ethical principles undergirding that work. Journalists' concerns about user-generated content, described above, stem in large part from this

adherence to a very deep-seated sense of what journalism *should* be about. Professionals adopt these shared normative understandings as part of their socialization to newsroom work; research dating back to the 1980s shows that newsroom learning is the strongest source of influence on practitioner ethics, consistently cited by more than four of five journalists (Weaver et al., 2007). And as discussed above, the norms that each new journalist absorbs quickly become occupational turf markers (Lowrey, 2006), useful for drawing defining lines around the entity of journalism and the conduct of its practitioners.

Amid all the changes, then, journalists remain relatively certain of their contribution to democratic society and the normative precepts that support and define that contribution. They are, however, far more willing to admit they need to change *how* they do what they do: their work practices and the resulting products. Those are the areas now permeated by uncertainty.

So most journalists remain committed to their central role, but unsure how to go about maintaining its centrality or even its relevance for a society made up of individuals increasingly comfortable constructing their own mediated reality. They remain convinced that only credible information has real value, but unsure how to ascertain credibility in the face of demands for a continuous information flow. They remain attached to their self-perception as public servants but unsure how a "public" that co-produces as well as consumes news – and, moreover, is ambivalent about whether there is any need to be served by media institutions at all – fits into the picture, and even more unsure how to engage with such people.

The questions are difficult indeed, but the biggest obstacle to finding the answers is an unwillingness to look for them. For a decade and more, most journalists metaphorically squeezed their eyes tightly shut and hoped the whole Internet thing would go away. It didn't, and it won't. Ignoring the transformations described in this chapter is no longer an option, even for the most

entrenched of the newsroom curmudgeons (should they happen to remain employed). News organizations around the nation and the world are now actively exploring how they can change, some out of desperation but others, increasingly, out of honest desire. A few have even declared at least limited victories in their newsroom culture wars (Pew Research, 2010; Williams, 2007).

I have no recipe for success to offer. I am intrigued by a variety of recent experiments, including efforts to make journalism more credible through collaboration, more trustworthy through transparency, and more engaging through the effective use of digital storytelling tools. As more "digital natives" enter the newsroom, uniting their knowledge of the medium with older colleagues' knowledge of the craft, answers to the "how" questions that seem so challenging will have more opportunities to emerge.

Questions of "who," "what" and "how," though, do not address the "why." With so much information at our fingertips and so many people willing and able to provide more, why does journalism matter at all?

Journalists take a lot of criticism for failing to meet the expectations and needs of a rapidly changing media world. Some of it comes from observers who point out that the reality too often falls far short of the admittedly glorified self-perception. Fair enough, and even notoriously thin-skinned practitioners would agree with at least some of those charges (particularly if directed at their competitors). Other criticism points to problems in economic and management structures, focusing on issues addressed in other chapters. But much of the "they just don't get it" criticism comes from an assertion that our networked, information rich, and technologically savvy society no longer wants or needs the service of its journalists.

That's just wrong. When everyone can be a publisher, anyone can be a spin merchant; we need the watchdog. When everyone can (and, it seems, does) publicly express an opinion about

the latest bits of information trending on Twitter, someone needs to gather those bits, scrutinize them, and create a coherent narrative from the ones that pass muster; that someone is called a reporter (Downie & Schudson, 2009). When any event anywhere reverberates around the globe in a matter of seconds, we need the trustworthy analyst, the interpreter, the sense-maker – the journalist. We need to know that information is "true" in some sense that corresponds with reality before we act, and we need to know it quickly so that our actions will not come too late.

Of course, journalists should continue to change to accommodate changes in the society they serve. They must adapt to new media technologies, capabilities, and responsibilities, as well as to new participants in the enterprise of both defining and producing news. If they do not make these quite difficult adjustments, to their occupational culture as well as their daily practices, journalists will inevitably lose the ability to be effective in the vital roles they have staked out. As today's practitioners have grown to realize, the roles and norms will hold durable value only as long as journalists remain flexible in enacting them.

Discussion Questions

This chapter has argued that as the Internet has become an increasingly dominant information source, journalists have gone through significant change in at least three areas: their self-perceptions as information gatekeepers, largely because of a loss of control over information; their work practices and newsroom environments; and their relationships with audiences. The occupational tasks and roles of the journalist are fundamentally the same as they were a generation ago, but the way those tasks and roles are enacted has evolved – and must continue to evolve -- along with the technology.

- To what extent do you think technology drives the process of change in the practice of journalism and in the journalistic product? What other factors are important, and how do they interact?

- What will be the next big change affecting journalism, and what adaptations will journalists need to make to accommodate it? What will the challenges be? How might those challenges be overcome?

- This chapter has focused on news workers rather than on other "stakeholders" in the quality of journalism, including but not limited to news sources, media owners, and the public. What are the effects of the three changes discussed here on those outside the newsroom? In what ways do their actions and reactions feed back into what happens in the newsroom? Where are the most fruitful areas for collaboration, and where will different needs or goals create conflict?

- Most journalists are convinced that they continue to have a unique social role and to be uniquely, or at least optimally, capable of filling it. They agree that they need to change their practices and products but remain committed to what they see as their core function. Is that sort of incremental change sufficient? If so, how might they best go about it? Or would you redefine that role to fit today's media environment … and if so, what would your revised definition include?

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