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# Journalism Education

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# Journalism Education

Journalism Education is the journal of the Association for Journalism Education a body representing educators in HE in the UK and Ireland. The aim of the journal is to promote and develop analysis and understanding of journalism education and of journalism, particularly when that is related to journalism education.

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# Volume Nine number One: Contents

---

## Contributors 4

## Articles

Going digital, not dying out: how universities are uniquely placed to teach digital journalism survival skills by Ian Bucknell, University of Leeds 6

Teaching responsible suicide reporting (RSR): using storytelling as a pedagogy to advance media reporting of suicide by Sallyanne Duncan, University of Strathclyde and Ann Luce, Bournemouth University 18

Cover price rises of regional newspapers accentuated decline in sales as digital media grew between 2006-2016 by Richard Bowyer, Derby University 32

Is it possible to get 100 at university? The flaws of the UK grading system and its impacts on Journalism and Media assessments by Ivana Ebel and Alex Ward, Derby University 48

## Comment and Criticism

Kovach and Rosenstiel's Elements of Journalism: a foundational text or a moment in history? by Ivor Gaber, University of Sussex 58

Confessional journalism and podcasting by Kate Williams, University of Northampton 66

The new journalism education - teaching and learning during a pandemic 74

The experience of moving our MA Broadcast News Days online: teaching resourcefulness and creativity by Emma Hemmingway, Nottingham Trent University

MA student newsdays: Doing it for real in Covid's new normal by Jonny Greatrex, Nottingham Trent University

Seven points to consider when teaching journalism practice online by Zahera Harb, City, University of London

Snappers turn to social documentary by Claire Wolfe, University of Worcester

Books - this year's publication 82

# Contributors

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## Ian Bucknell

Ian leads the Journalism programme at the University of Leeds. Before teaching he worked as a producer and video journalist at the BBC. In 2012, he won a Europe-wide award (CIRCOM) for Best Sports Programme for producing Yorkshire Olympic Dreams. Another highlight was filming, producing and directing a behind-the-scenes documentary called “Jessica Ennis: Golden Girl” for BBC One. He is a skilled all-rounder who can film, edit, report and produce factual television and digital journalism to broadcast standard. His role at the university allows him to pass those skills on and prepare students for the varied challenges of working in the media.

## Sallyanne Duncan

Sallyanne is a Senior Lecturer in journalism at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. She researches media reporting of trauma, death, bereavement and suicide, is co-author of *Reporting Bad News*, has published several journal articles and is working on a book on ethics for journalists. Additionally, she revised professional guidelines on media reporting of mental health and suicide for the National Union of Journalists, has submitted evidence to the Leveson Inquiry, and gave evidence to the National Assembly of Wales’ suicide prevention inquiry, with Dr Ann Luce.

## Ivana Ebel

Ivana is a Senior Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Derby working with undergraduate, Masters, and PhD students. She has a broad international experience and holds a PhD in Communication and Media Sciences (Leipzig University - Germany); a Masters in Digital Media (Bremen University - Germany); a Bachelor in Communication Sciences – Journalism (Univali, Itajaí – Brazil), and a Post-Graduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCertHe – University of Derby – UK). Her research is concentrated on media convergence, digital storytelling, visual rhetoric and mobile media consumption. She is multilingual and has more than two decades of international industry experience.

## Ivor Gaber

Ivor is Professor of Political Journalism at the University of Sussex, having previously held chairs in Journalism at City and Bedfordshire universities and Goldsmiths College. Before joining academia he held editorial posts ranging from reporter to programme editor at BBC TV and Radio, ITV News, Channel 4 and Sky News.

## Jonny Greatrex

Jonny is currently course leader for our MA in News Journalism. He teaches practical journalism skills across undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The modules he teaches include Data Journalism, Practical Journalism and Social Media on undergraduate courses, and Newspaper Journalism Skills and Digital Production at postgraduate level. Jonny graduated from Nottingham Trent University with an MA in Newspaper Journalism in 2007, securing a job as a trainee reporter at the Birmingham Post and Mail Group (now BPM Media) immediately after the course. At BPM he progressed to being a senior multimedia reporter, then a multimedia editor and, finally, digital development editor. In 2015, he joined Canterbury Christ Church University as programme director for BA Multimedia Journalism. He is a committee member and web editor for the Association of Journalism Education.

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## Zahera Harb

Zahera is a Senior Lecturer in International Journalism. Her recent publications include an edited collection *Reporting the Middle East: the Practice of News in the 21st Century* (IB Tauris 2017) and a monograph *Channels of Resistance: Liberation Propaganda Hezbollah and the Media* (IB Tauris, 2011). She has published widely on Journalism and Politics in the Arab region and is co-editor of *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*. She has more than 11 years' experience as a journalist in her native country Lebanon working for Lebanese and international media organisations and holds a PhD in Journalism Studies and Political Communications from Cardiff University. She served as member to UK broadcast regulator Ofcom content board and is board member/trustee of Ethical Journalism Network.

## Emma Hemmingway

Emma is a Senior Lecturer and the Course Leader for the MA Broadcast Journalism. She also teaches undergraduate modules on the BA Hons undergraduate degree, including celebrity journalism, research methods, media theory, ethics and documentary production. A bi-media journalist with 12 years' experience with the BBC at regional, national and international levels in TV and radio production, reporting and network TV documentary production. She also worked as a BBC World Service Trainer in Ekaterinburg, Russia. Emma was awarded her PhD in 2007, has published several research articles, book chapters and a research monograph entitled *Into the Newsroom* published by Routledge. She is currently writing a book on Social Media and Actor Network Theory to be published by Global Press in 2021.

## Ann Luce

Ann is an Associate Professor in journalism and communication at Bournemouth University, UK. She researches in the area of suicide and media and is author of *The Bridgend Suicides: Suicide and the Media* and *Ethical Reporting of Sensitive Topics*. She wrote two sets of guidelines for the World Health Organisation on the Reporting of Suicide, and Blogging Guidelines for Save.org as well. She currently is the Research and Media lead for the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group and is a member of the National Suicide Prevention Alliance in the UK.

## Alex Ward

Alex is a Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Derby, teaching predominantly on the Football Journalism and Specialist Sports Journalism courses. His main expertise is video and before joining the University of Derby he was the Video Manager in the Communications Department at Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club. Alex Ward has also experience as a broadcast journalist in local radio. He has a MA in Broadcast Journalism (Staffordshire University), a PGCert in Higher Education (University of Derby) and is a fellow of Advance HE.

## Kate Williams

Kate is Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Science & Technology at the University of Northampton and an award-winning broadcast journalist with wide experience in both radio and television. During her 22 years at the BBC she presented on BBC Radio's 4 and 5live and the World service. She was also the BBC's first national radio journalist based in East Anglia. As a member of the 5live management team she undertook project management, talent management, and programme commissioning. As a journalism trainer she helped devise and set up the BBC's in-house journalism training scheme all BBC journalists now undertake through the Corporation's College of Journalism and recruited new BBC trainee journalists. She continues to freelance as a news presenter with the BBC.

## Claire Wolfe

Claire is Principal Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Worcester and has a strong background in news journalism. After completing a postgraduate National Council for the Training of Journalists course at Cardiff, Claire worked at the *Birmingham Post and Mail*. She subsequently worked as Women's Page Editor, News Editor and Night Editor on the *Daily News* along with stints at the *Sunday Mirror* and *Central News*. Her published research is on work-based learning, women in journalism and the impact of trolls on journalism and democracy. She is a Senior Fellow of the HEA and an Expert Fellow for the Sprite Plus Network. She was an Executive Committee member of the Association for Journalism Education for six years.

# Articles

All papers in the Articles section are peer reviewed and discuss the latest research in journalism and journalism education. These are intended to inform, educate and spark debate and discussion. Please join in this debate by going to [www.journalism-education.org](http://www.journalism-education.org) to have your say and find out what others think.

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## **Going digital, not dying out: how universities are uniquely placed to teach digital journalism survival skills**

**Ian Bucknell, University of Leeds**

### **Abstract**

With people showing a preference for accessing news via websites, social media platforms and mobile applications, news organisations have increased their focus on digital production. This has led to calls for journalism programmes in universities to keep pace or face obsolescence. But whilst there is agreement over the need to embed digital journalism in the curriculum, there is little guidance on how this should be done in an environment

where news providers have widely different and ever-evolving digital strategies. How can journalism schools meet the needs of industry, when industry itself has not settled on what those needs are? This study addresses that question by considering the views of digital editors from a range of the UK's leading broadcasters and publishers. The interviewees identify digital practices they have in common, but also emphasise the importance of teaching the fundamentals of journalism and that the critical thinking skills fostered in universities, help students thrive as digital journalists.

KEYWORDS: digital journalism, news, social media, education and universities.

## Introduction

**Digital journalism was defined in the early years of this century as ‘the use of digital technologies to research, produce, and deliver (or make accessible) news and information to an increasingly computer-literate audience’ (Kawamoto, 2003, p.4).**

It was acknowledged that this definition was a ‘moving target’, as changes in technology and the conceptualisation of journalism would lead to changes in how we understand the term. A study by Columbia University into the commercial challenges associated with digital journalism, showed this to be the case, as they asserted that ‘hand-held devices and tablets’ (Grueskin et al, 2011, p.4) should be included in the definition, to make clear that we are not limiting ourselves to journalism published online and viewed via a desktop computer. This is a worthwhile clarification given that in the UK, mobile phones surpassed computers as the primary device for accessing digital news in 2017 (Newman et al, 2019, p.68). Any contemporary definition of digital journalism must also acknowledge the significance of social media networks as a major gateway to news. In the USA, 46% of the population use social media as a news source, whilst in the UK the figure has levelled out at 40% (ibid, p.69). In both countries, digital access to news (online and social media combined) is now more popular than any legacy medium (TV, radio or print).

The impact of digital technologies on the work of journalists has been quantified by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. In their survey of around 700 UK journalists, 98% said that social media had changed the way they work (Thurman et al, 2016, p.36). In some cases, this has led to print, TV and radio journalists adding new approaches to the ways they have traditionally gone about their jobs. But it has also led to the rise of new roles focused on creating stories for websites, mobile applications and social networks. Gradually, production focus is moving away from legacy media to digital platforms: ‘Social media teams are increasingly viewed as (1) the first stage in the customer acquisition funnel and (2) a means of creating a culture that puts audience impact and digital optimisation first. Their role has grown from simply ensuring content is optimised for specific platforms to originating content tailored for those destinations’ (Kueng, 2017, p.26).

This has implications not only for news organisations, but those who shape the minds of future newsmakers: ‘A shared sense of urgency in the industry and the academy is essential to ensure that today’s and tomorrow’s journalists have the skills to create journalism that is both meaningful and economically successful’ (Finberg and Klinger, 2014, p.2). Jonathan Baker, the former Director of the BBC College of Journalism, agrees. In his provocative essay ‘Get digital or die’, he calls on university teachers to furnish journalism students with skills relevant to the digital world, or risk their programmes becoming obsolete (Baker, 2016).



But whilst there is agreement over the need for journalism programmes in universities to embrace digital practices, there is little guidance available on how this should be done. News providers themselves have divergent and ever-evolving digital strategies, often forced upon them by rapid technological change and the dominance of third-party platforms. How can journalism schools meet the needs of industry, when industry itself is not sure what those needs are?

The problem was encapsulated by Piet Bakker (2014), who identified four growing areas of digital journalism activity (technical, community, content and commercial) in an article on how the skills journalists need and the tasks they perform have changed fundamentally in recent years. In his conclusion, he acknowledges the challenge this creates for journalism educators: ‘What is striking in the technical qualifications required of new employees is the diversity and the depth of the skills requested. It is, however, impossible for any journalist to master them all, let alone for any J-school to teach all these skills in depth’ (ibid, p.603).

A further challenge is that existing studies on the impact digital media has had on the work of journalists are of limited assistance. Many concentrate on theory (Steensen and Ahva, 2015), asking whether the normative values of journalism are the same in a digital environment. Others focus on how social media and other forms of digital production and dissemination have changed the way reporters experience their role (Nielson, 2016). Research that does assess the impact on practice, and that is therefore of particular use to those teaching practice in higher education, often deals with the specific use of a certain digital platform or process by a narrowly defined group of journalists, such as foreign correspondents use of Twitter (Cozma and Chen, 2013) or the pivot to vertical video in local TV newsrooms in the USA (Canella, 2017). These studies are insightful but focus on a thin sliver of the digital production spectrum, whilst educators need a comprehensive overview.

## Research Questions and Methods

The main aim of my research is to address the question of how journalism educators can teach digital practices, despite the many obstacles in their way. The objective is to help journalism schools develop curricula that meet the needs of modern newsrooms by working towards a typology of digital news skills; identifying and categorising new practices that are common to newsrooms in the UK, whatever their legacy medium, demographics or geographical scope. The research also seeks out any other factors in industry or the academy, outside a typology, that might aid educators in their digital endeavours. The following research questions are derived from these considerations:

For students intending to become digital journalists, what are the factors considered most important in terms of developing their practice, as identified by those working in the industry?

What might a typology of digital journalism practices look like, based on the insights gained from disparate UK news organisations?

Can approaches to teaching digital journalism be identified that are not susceptible to the caprices of technological change and the algorithms of third-party platforms? What are the fundamentals valued by industry?

This is a qualitative study that has the aim of identifying common digital journalism practices amongst UK news providers. The findings are based on seven semi-structured, in-depth interviews with digital editors from a cross-section of the news media; broadcast, print and online. The participating organisations are vice.com (UK), BBC Yorkshire, Financial Times, Sky News, JPI Media (formerly Johnston Press), ITV News and Bauer Media. Between them, these organisations represent commercial and public service broadcasters, digital natives and newspapers. Some interviewees work for individual titles, whilst others are employed by media groups. The sample covers national, regional and local production, whilst reflecting a wide range of regulatory models (see Table 1).

| Organisation  | Media of origin | Geographical coverage | Finance model                             | Governance model |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|------------------|
| Vice.com (UK) | Online          | National              | Commercially owned and funded, for-profit | Self-regulation  |



|                        |                        |                              |   |   |
|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>BBC Yorkshire</b>   | TV and radio           | Regional and local           | Publically owned and funded, non-profit                   | Public service broadcaster, Ofcom regulations     |
| <b>Financial Times</b> | Newspaper              | National                     | Commercially owned and funded, for-profit                 | Self-regulation                                   |
| <b>Sky News</b>        | TV                     | National                     | Commercially owned and funded subscription TV, for-profit | Non-public service, Ofcom regulations             |
| <b>JPI Media</b>       | Newspaper group        | National, regional and local | Commercially owned and funded, for-profit                 | Voluntary regulation with IPSO                    |
| <b>ITV News</b>        | TV                     | National and regional        | Commercially owned and funded, for-profit                 | Public service broadcaster, Ofcom regulations     |
| <b>Bauer Media</b>     | Commercial radio group | National and local           | Commercially owned and funded, for-profit                 | Non-public service broadcaster, Ofcom regulations |

**Table 1: Key characteristics of participating news organisations**

The aim is to reveal what varied representatives of the industry have in common and where they diverge, to gain an understanding of the sector as a whole. As the number of interviews conducted is small, the findings are not generalisable. However, as the research questions suggest, this can be seen as an exploratory study, examining how a better understanding of professional practice can inform the teaching of digital journalism in higher education.

Digital editors were selected for interview because they are ideally placed to understand both the strategies and aspirations of their employers, as well as having daily, first-hand experience of how digital journalism is produced on the newsroom floor. The detail of how journalists work, and with what tools, is important to this study and is the kind of information that an executive might not possess, as their focus is on policy rather than implementation. This notion was reinforced as I discovered in the process of pursuing suitable contacts that some digital executives in news are from marketing or commercial backgrounds, rather than journalism.

Themes were identified through the systematic analysis of the interview transcripts and guided by the research questions, applying Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis (2006) approach. First, I searched for anything interesting and relevant in the responses of the digital editors. Repeated, contradictory and unique points were identified and categorised, using the emergent coding approach. I then organised the categories I had discovered into the topics that are highlighted below in the findings and discussion sections. I first present findings related to the perceptions of different digital platforms and their affordances; I then turn to my suggestive typology of digital journalism skills.

## Findings

### Digital platforms used by the news organisations

There is a large degree of conformity in the digital platforms utilised by the broadcasters and publishers who took part in the study. They all have their own websites and a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Despite a small dip in usage from its highpoint four years ago, the Reuters Institute says that in 2019 Facebook 'remains by far the most important social network for news' (Newman et al 2019, p.10), both globally and in the UK (p.69). This is reflected in the perceptions and actions of the digital editors, who all make their Facebook accounts a priority:

*'Facebook is the big one, absolutely the big one, where most of the audience comes from.'*

*(JPI Media)*

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*'There's an old saying, which does hold relatively true at the moment which is Facebook is for audience, Twitter is for influence; and they do two very different things.'*

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(BBC Yorkshire)

Reuters Institute research also shows that whilst usage of Instagram is growing in the UK, it's had relatively little impact on the population's journalism consumption habits, with only 4% of those surveyed saying that they regularly use the social network for news (Newman et al 2019, p.69). This perhaps explains the ambivalence towards Instagram from the interviewees. The Financial Times is encouraged by its initial experimentation with the platform:

*Instagram is actually the one that I think is most interesting and unique for us, in that it had in the past three years the highest percentage of growth in terms of followers and engagement. And it is one for which we also probably create the most bespoke content. It's also the one which we're beginning to actually be able to drive traffic back to the FT.com.*

Yet others, such as *Sky News*, reported that re-direction to its own website and therefore its own revenue streams, was precisely the problem: 'it's quite difficult to drive volume and referral traffic from Instagram.'

Which leads us onto SnapChat, which has similar limitations to Instagram when it comes to referrals and persuading its users to engage with journalism (Newman et al 2019, p.18). This seems to be the most divisive platform. The conformity seen elsewhere does not apply to SnapChat, with *vice.com* and *Sky News* being the only organisations from our seven to routinely publish on the network. Access to a younger audience is the chief attraction: 'Snapchat is actually something we're putting a big focus on just because it's growing such a huge audience that we didn't have before which is the sort of 13 – 19 age range' (*vice.com*). For *Sky News*, there are also the seeds of commercial success:

*Tech platforms, to varying degrees of success, are out to make some money for themselves and for us as well. So that's another reason we're on Snapchat, you'll find advertising in our new Snapchat shows, when appropriate. Obviously some of the subject matter is not appropriate. So I understand why those publishers are not on there. We're on there to experiment, to reach a new audience, and make some money really.*

Messaging services were hardly mentioned by participants, with BBC Yorkshire alone pointing to some experimentation with WhatsApp. It is a similar story with aggregators, though both *Sky News* and *vice.com* have associations with Apple News and Sky also provide content for Flipboard.

As the aim of this report is to help journalism teachers navigate the uncertainties of digital production, it seems that one thing we can hang our hats on is that some platforms are particularly highly valued by disparate news producers in the UK. Other social networks are experimented with, but it seems that Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube have primacy when it comes to producing and disseminating stories.

## Towards a typology of digital journalism skills

Having established the platforms utilised by the interviewees, we discussed the story formats that they create for their digital outputs and the associated skills required by practitioners. I wanted to know, what do digital journalists have to be able to do and what do they need to understand that differs from the competencies familiar to reporters working in TV, radio or print? Is it possible to create a typology of digital journalism practices that apply to news organisations that vary considerably in origin and character? This would help guide journalism educators towards a focused, manageable and durable approach to teaching digital journalism practice. The contributors came up with a wide range of answers, but a number of activities recurred. In this section, I will highlight and elaborate on the practices that were referenced by three or more of the seven participants, to give an indication of the most widely used approaches and therefore work towards a digital journalism typology.

### 1. digital video production

Representatives from the majority (six) of the participating news producers volunteered that making digital videos is a key ability. These 'short form videos', as they were also called, are familiar to mobile users who generally watch but do not listen to video content (Patel, 2016), and follow the story aided by captions. *Sky News* described some of the key differences between producing videos for digital platforms and traditional TV production:

*Our video strategy, which is born out of metrics and insight, is that your mobile phone isn't just a smaller screen for television, and audience behaviour is different, they want to consume in square or vertical, they want to consume with the sound off and so they need subtitles and captions. And they don't consume for as long a period of time, so when a typical TV VT might be three to four minutes, a digital video will be 60 to 90 seconds. We often invert the storytelling so that you don't get the reporter leading like you do in a TV VT, you get the real human element of the story straight at the top and then we might revisit it later. So that's where*

The FT adds that from their experiences, the best performing digital videos are ‘on one specific story or one specific topic’. Overall, it was clear from the participants that they have learnt a lot about digital video production in recent years, with the differences in story structure, aesthetic appeal and an understanding of the expectations of the audiences being key factors.

## 2. social listening

In varying ways, the FT, BBC Yorkshire, ITV News, vice.com and JPI Media, described the importance of social listening. Through different approaches, they tap into comments and social media communications as a way of developing story ideas and editorial strategy, as well as forming a closer relationship with their audience. The FT employs what it calls a ‘community manager’ whose specific role is to build engagement through comments:

*We consider commenting, and the conversations that take place in comments, as being part of our journalism and increasingly most news publishers are. And there are ways in which we can even use those communities to feed our journalism. This is a whole subgenre of journalism which didn't exist before comments.*

This echoes a study by Chen and Pain that describes how journalists have warmed to the idea of interacting with online comments as a way of ‘fostering mutually beneficial connections with the audience’ (2017, p.876).

BBC Yorkshire describes a similar practice for harnessing views and experiences shared on social networks:

*We do lots about social listening, which you could say is harvesting content from social media so we don't have to get off our arses. I'd say it's different; I'd say it's harder to get to the pub these days and due to the smoking ban they're slightly emptier so those conversations don't happen there anymore. In local news groups, people do speak freely and tell amazing stories without even knowing it.*

This digital editor goes on to give an account of a story developed from a Facebook group called Leeds Face, where someone posted about their dad passing his driving test for the first time at the age of 79, so he could drive his wife, who had cancer, to hospital appointments. As ITV News put it: ‘we often do pick up stories that are making waves on social media but haven't yet crossed over into news’. Embracing digital audience interaction and then responding to it in a way that informs your editorial output, is one clear addition to the reporter's tool bag.

## 3. repurposing legacy media for social media.

As with social listening, five interviewees (JPI Media, BBC Yorkshire, ITV News, Sky and Bauer) cited the ability to repurpose legacy media output for digital platforms as a key competence. Participants explained that in the early days of digital production, materials would more-or-less be copied and pasted verbatim from their native platform into a digital posting. So, for instance, whatever words might have been written as the cue for a story that appeared in a TV news bulletin, would be the same words used in a Facebook post that also incorporated a made-for-TV video of the same story. Now, that same TV content is deconstructed and rebuilt with social media and mobile sensibilities in mind.

At Sky News, this is a specialist job; they employ seven people whose principal role is to repurpose TV footage for digital videos. At the JPI Media, the conversion process requires collaboration: ‘The print team will start the basics of creating the story for the web based on what they've written for the paper and changing it slightly. Then the digital team take it to another level and hopefully use it in the right way at the right time on the right platform.’ It seems that at the moment, a large proportion of digital output, not least video, is based on material originally captured for a legacy medium. BBC Yorkshire estimates the following in terms of the source of video uploaded to its digital platforms: ‘I'd say at the minute 70% TV, 20% self-shot and 10% UGC (user-generated content).’ That could change, as newsrooms increase their understanding of the differing demands of a social media audience. ITV News are looking to do more of their own filming and where possible, ask TV colleagues to pick up shots that specifically meet the needs of digital production.

## 4. explainers.

Four interviewees (JPI Media, FT, ITV News and BBC Yorkshire) extolled the popularity of ‘explainers’; video or textual articles that supply the audience with key background information that places a developing news story in context. It is the signature format of USA digital native Vox (The Economist, 2014) and its success has been noted across the Atlantic. JPI Media sees this as a revival of public information journalism that is ‘being brought into the digital age more and more’. ITV News have developed a similar approach to Vox:

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*Recently we've been doing fronted explainers, as we call them, where we have a presenter down the barrel talking and leading the audience through. And then experimenting with graphics and overlays and archive and so on. And hopefully engage them and take them through the story. We call it Evergreen Content. So a Brexit explainer...we can reshare that and repost that most likely for some time to come.*

The *FT* reports that such explainers 'tend to do very well on social'. Again, it seems that this is a format that is here to stay and therefore an approach to news journalism that university students should study and practise.

### 5. analytics

The representatives of *vice.com*, *JPI Media*, *FT* and *BBC Yorkshire* highlighted the need for their staff to be aware of audience metrics and how to use analytical tools. The *FT* argues that the essence of analytics is 'being able to understand the degree to which a story only gets better when it's informed by an understanding of an audience and audience impact.' The *BBC Yorkshire* view on analytics is similarly positive:

*We are no longer throwing our line in the river and seeing what hits it; we can to a certain extent, not predict, but we can see where we performed and didn't, and improve that performance. That's not to say the story changes; it may be that our method of telling the story changes.*

The influence of audience metrics on editorial judgements seen here is in line with the findings of many previous studies, such as Tandoc's work on analytics and the journalist's role as gatekeeper (2014).

### 6. social storytelling

The final category captures a range of activities and skills that recognise the need to tell stories in different ways for a social media based audience. Three interviewees (*vice.com*, *FT* and *JPI Media*) talked about social storytelling specifically, though *BBC Yorkshire*, *ITV News* and *Sky News* had already commented on the way in which digital videos are created in a way that takes into account how and why people use social networks. For *vice.com*, the text that's written to accompany the post is key:

*There's a huge skill to being able to sell a story basically on Twitter or Facebook because people are inundated with stories, so [the aim is] to really stand out from that. We always try to avoid clickbait because that's the worst but you have to do something that's going to pull people in and it is a real skill...So it could be going through just having an eye for what is either the most shareable piece of information in the article or the most enticing something where you read just a snippet of it and go, 'Oh I want to find out more about that.'*

As well as writing in a way that will entice readers to look at your post and perhaps click on a link to your website, the *FT* has created a new visual format to attract attention on social networks. They publish what they call a 'social card' across all of their social media accounts:

*It is a graphic made for social media that will have some kind of designed piece of information that flags up the value of the story and has some call to action to actually click on that story. So it is really designed for social, it's meant to have all the information in one card, hence the reason it's called a social card, and so either tell a story or deliver a piece of information within that card. So it's often a graphic or a chart. If it's a graphic it will be some striking image with a bit of text, and if it's a chart it'll have essentially a self-contained story within that chart.*

Whether using words, pictures or both, digital platforms demand that journalists think in new ways about their audience and the social environments in which they meet them.

### 7. the rest and the (currently) disregarded

The following practices were each mentioned twice; live streaming, developing a social media following, data journalism and podcasting. However, the audience's appetite for the latter is clearly increasing according to the latest Reuters Institute research:

*In the UK, younger age groups, who spend much of their lives plugged into smartphones, are four times more likely to listen to podcasts than over 55s – and much less likely to listen to traditional speech radio. Under 35s consume half of all podcasts despite making up around a third of the total adult population.*

(Newman et al 2019, p. 29)

Other competencies identified by only a single interviewee were creating listicles, live blogging and gamifying stories through quizzes. It was also interesting to hear many of the digital editors explain how they have experimented with VR and 360 degree storytelling, but none of their organisations have taken it forward as an on-going format. *JPI Media* explained that it is, 'not really in the core of the business at the moment'. It's a similar story at *BBC Yorkshire*, whose digital editor suggests that not every form of digital media is going to work for journalism:

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*I think, when there is a new tool out such as 360-degrees we rush to all use it, and then what you see after two months is a real recession in the use of it and then it comes back intermittently. And the reason for that is we like new things as journalists, and we can use them. However what we don't do is identify what advantage they give us or what's good for the audience.*

But *ITV News* said that they have 'done a few 360 videos, as in crowd shots, where it's lent itself to that', and might find more uses for it and VR in the future.

## Awareness rather than mastery

Linking into the final point above about VR and 360 degree production, it was stated by the majority of interviewees (*BBC Yorkshire*, *ITV News*, *vice.com* and *FT*) that they expected employees and prospective employees to have an 'awareness' of the very latest developments in digital media. But they do not require reporters to be able to produce work in every conceivable format, nor to have mastered every skill relating to digital production. Comments made about Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) techniques exemplify this:

*There is an expectation of at least basic understanding of how to tag your articles, relevant keywords in the title or the subtitle, but yeah I'd say that's kind of a minor concern, that's more handled by, at least in our company, by social media department and the marketing department rather than the journalists themselves.*

(*vice.com*)

Likewise, *BBC Yorkshire* did not see SEO as a core skill for digital journalists: 'They need to know that SEO exists and a basic ten-point SEO list, and they might spend five hours doing it but I'm not convinced they need to know the bells and whistles of SEO to be honest with you.'

That thought is echoed by the *FT* whose digital editor does not expect students to become polyvalent: 'we are asking [for] an awareness, if nothing else, of not how to produce everything, but of how to translate journalism into being relevant to whatever publications, platforms are necessary.' This is a key point that speaks directly to the central question explored in this study; it seems that one of the secrets to teaching digital is that we do not need to cover every facet of practice in depth, so long as students have a wide-ranging knowledge of what is happening in the industry, along with a willingness and capacity to learn.

## Journalism fundamentals still valued

It was notable that many interviewees chose to go back to journalism basics when asked what they wanted from graduates, despite the preceding conversation focusing on digital production. Some of the editors made the point that new digital practices can be taught pretty readily on the job, whereas the essentials of journalism cannot. What is more, as *JPI Media* summed up, the widely shared view was that whilst the platforms have changed, in many respects, the fundamentals of the job have not:

*People have this kind of misconception that when digital journalists are hired, or when people go work in digital, that means they don't need to do any proper reporting anymore, you're just digital, all you do is BuzzFeed style listicles, you don't have to do any journalism. Which is not true. In fact, we still do a lot of journalism where we need to interview people, we need to make sure it's legally safe, we need to check with police statements, verify people who have tweeted something and check it's true, stand things up. So there's still a lot of the traditional journalism even in the production of digital articles on the web.*

A variety of traditional journalism skills that underpin all forms of reporting, including digital practices, came to the fore through the interviews. I have detailed below the four skills that were most frequently mentioned (at least four times) to give an indication of the editors' priorities and to explain why these aspects of a journalist's role are still held in such high regard.

### 1. News sense

All seven digital editors identified the need for journalists to be curious about the world around them and to follow-up on that curiosity by judging whether an event or circumstance should be reported on. No matter what the medium or what their role might be, journalists have to know a story when they see one:

*Because no matter how digitally first and whizzbang-ly data driven and visually driven and mobile driven and socially driven our journalism is going to become, or indeed our audience will become, at the heart of a successful piece of journalism is always a great story.*

(*Financial Times*)

The digital-native *vice.com* agrees, saying that 'story is key still' and that it will always take precedence over 'whether it's written or a 360 live video'. It was noticeable throughout the interviews that the editors felt that a reporter's ability to capture the essence of a story was demonstrated in their headline writing and the wording of social network updates.



## 2. Writing

The importance of this skill was also unanimously agreed upon and something that the contributors were clearly passionate about. They stressed again that no matter the medium, platform or format, being able to write is essential:

*Writing is number one for me. I'm probably biased because of my background [in newspapers] but I feel it feeds into everything else...when we were recently recruiting we had a lot of very talented people in video but struggling with the writing and it's a unique skillset now we're after. We're after strong writers. And I think that goes on to video because if you can write well you can write good scripts, you can write the article to accompany the video. You can sell it the best way you possibly can on social platforms. So we definitely still need strong writers.*

(ITV News)

*The written word is really important. Whether you work in TV, radio, print or digital, the written word is still the way that stories are built. Writing to script is a skill. Writing a proper news story is a skill... So learn the principles of writing and be able to demonstrate that you can use those principles.*

(Sky News)

## 3. Filming

Six of the interviewees volunteered that they believed it is important that journalists know how to film. This is hardly surprising coming from our broadcasters, but it was interesting to see that representatives from organisations with a publishing background agreed. *JPI Media* touched on the fact that whilst the recording devices in use vary greatly within the industry, other aspects of the video producer's role do not: 'If you understand shooting, whether you're using a broadcast camera or a mobile phone, the principles remain the same.'

## 4. Interviewing

*Sky News* want journalists who can follow up on their curiosity by having 'an ability to ask questions based on that curiosity and have the confidence to do it in person or on the phone.' Confidence is an issue because of the particular challenges associated with interviewing:

*If you're going to be a journalist in news you are going to have to ask some awkward questions of people who don't want to answer your questions, and that might be people who are bereaved, or it might be slippery politicians, or it might be criminals. But your job is to ask those questions and so you need to develop a persona which will enable you to do that.*

(Sky News)

Having the confidence to carry out interviews is clearly an issue, particularly for early career journalists. As BBC Yorkshire puts it: "They need to be not scared to leave the office. I know this sounds stupid but we see journalists increasingly who work in the office". Altogether, four of the seven digital editors talked about the importance of interviewing and the social skills that enable a reporter to secure contributions and make the most of their opportunities.

## 5. The rest

The following attributes were cited a couple of times each: a knowledge of media law; ability to submit Freedom Of Information requests and an understanding of providing balance through counterpoints in reporting. Single mentions were given to following a style guide, working a beat, learning how to pitch ideas, fact checking and shorthand.

## Coping with constant change

An observation shared by the majority of interviewees (*JPI Media*, *ITV News*, *Financial Times* and *BBC Yorkshire*), was that a major challenge they face as digital journalism leaders is keeping up with the pace of change. They echoed previous research findings outlined in the introduction to this article by explaining that technological advances and the power of third party platforms were the leading drivers behind this constant state of flux. *ITV News* explained how the velocity of evolution within digital journalism is unprecedented in the industry:

*It's a blessing and a curse really working in digital in that it's forever changing. With TV formats, if you'd have watched a bulletin from 50 years ago to now you wouldn't see a massive difference. Maybe one's black and white and one's colour but you wouldn't see a massive shift, whereas digital in the last couple of years we've shifted considerably and I think we continue to and every time we bring something new in or try a new format we know at the back of our mind we'll be changing this again in a few months' time. So it's great and exciting in that way and we have to keep developing and moving to try and stay ahead of the curve but*

*sometimes it's hard to keep up.*

*JPI Media* gives us an insight into how the pressure is experienced on the newsroom floor:

*We have emails going out constantly to our staff saying this has been changed now, would you do it this way. This has been changed. This is changing from next week, etc. Constant adapting. It can be quite tiring in a way, constantly changing to the way social media platforms are changing.*

Newsroom managers, such as our digital editors, not only have to cope with the stress that they feel as a consequence of ever-changing strategies, skills and practices, but have to bring their teams along with them. The head of digital news at the *FT* suggests that one approach that seems to work is to recruit reporters who bring with them the ability to adapt: 'we are asking [of candidates] that there be evidence of awareness and a willingness to be able to be a quick study or a good student of whatever a newsroom's need is.' The desirability of being a good learner and somebody who can handle or even thrive on change, suggests that graduates of journalism schools in universities are well-placed to succeed as digital journalists.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The core skills of journalism (nose for a story, ability to research and verify information, interviewing, ability to write/shoot/audio record a report etc.) remain the same in the digital age. In fact they seem to be particularly highly valued because they are fundamental to the role and transcend medium, platform or format, whilst many aspects of digital production seem ephemeral. As *BBC Yorkshire* put it: 'as we move forward I think we need to equip people to do the old things better.'

But it is also clear that a series of new practices have emerged that are being sustained by a wide range of news producers from varied backgrounds. As a representative sample, the experiences of seven news organisations are inconclusive. However, to see them adopting the same methods despite their great differences in origin, audience and financial structure, suggests it is possible to identify what could be considered some fundamentals of digital journalism practice. The beginnings of a typology has been identified. Conversely, with other production approaches infrequently mentioned or completely overlooked, there may be scope to lighten what can seem like an overwhelming digital workload on both journalists and journalism educators.

Further solutions to the problem of how journalism programmes cover a vast and volatile breadth of digital activity, can be distilled from what our editors had to say. Many emphasised the desirability of raising students' awareness of new practices, formats and genres, rather than filling their time and brains with specific processes, software and skills that they may never use or could acquire on the job. They instead highlighted the importance of being a willing learner who can master change. The majority of our interviewees volunteered that a willingness to learn new practices and acquire new skills was key to success as a digital journalist.

This last item points to the innate advantage that higher education has over other environments for teaching journalism: 'an educator's role is to facilitate the learning process and encourage students to become active agents and the drivers of their own educational experiences' (Larrondo-Ureta and Fernández, 2017, p.10). Our graduates have been taught how to teach themselves and find solutions independently. They have the mental agility and experience to be open and responsive to new ideas and innovation. What the university sector does as a matter of course, seems perfectly in sync with the key underlying characteristic of a successful digital journalist.

Some scholars go further in their depiction of the role journalism teachers in higher education can play in meeting the challenges presented by digital media:

*Academics, so often external spectators, need to be offered a seat at the table in order to provide the insight and experience that comes from studying these issues in a deeper context and over a longer period.*

(Rottwilm 2014, p.20)

This approach is already in evidence through the work, for example, of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in the UK and the Poynter Institute in the USA. Furthermore, in 2017, the JournalismKX website was launched with the express purpose of bringing together journalists in the UK and academics researching journalism, to encourage collaboration on shared areas of interest and innovation. How these joint ventures feed into journalism education is something that could be further explored.

So the task now is to not only get on top of teaching digital journalism, but to stay ahead by being a part of its evolution. Universities are already well-placed to help the next generation of practitioners cope with



the pace and relentlessness of technologically-driven change. If they can also participate in future developments, journalism schools will understand what is happening from the inside, rather than relying on occasional studies based on short-term, small scale and temporary relationships with news organisations. An appetite for exploration, innovation and continuous study, is shared by the higher education and digital journalism producers. This seems like a solid basis for a close working relationship.

## Further research

By identifying common practices, approaches and viewpoints amongst disparate news organisations in the UK, and recognising the special role that higher education has to play in the teaching and development of digital journalism, this study has contributed to a pressing debate for media practice educators. But clearly more can be done to cement, qualify or advance the findings made here. Areas for potential further research include:

A comprehensive survey of digital journalism practices in the UK, to provide a statistically significant gauge of activities and a complete typology;

A study of what it is that journalism educators are teaching, to see where the differences exist between industry and the academy;

Newsroom based ethnographic research, looking at what impact the practices identified have on journalism culture and internal politics.

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# Teaching responsible suicide reporting (RSR): using storytelling as a pedagogy to advance media reporting of suicide

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## Abstract

Reporting suicide is an important but challenging area of journalism practice. Learning how to report this complex, distressing subject is vital for journalists if they are to avoid contributing to the 800,000 annual suicidal deaths worldwide (WHO, 2019). Tuition on suicide reporting in higher education tends to be didactic and theoretical, focussing on media guidelines and codes of conduct. Thereafter, journalists' ability to implement this guidance is mixed. To address this, the authors devised the Responsible Suicide Reporting Model (RSR) which is grounded in news-work and embeds media guidelines within journalistic storytelling, consisting of a typology of suicide narratives and 'othering', ethical rules and a standard of moderation. This study tests the effectiveness of teaching the RSR Model using storytelling-as-pedagogy

and problem-based learning. Firstly, we investigated students' perspectives on current educational offerings on suicide reporting through a survey of 229 students in the UK and Ireland who had no exposure to the RSR model. We then ran workshops with 80 students in the UK, teaching them the RSR model. The results showed that students with no exposure to the model—while they seemed to be aware of the theory of responsible suicide reporting—did not know how to implement it. Students who participated in workshops, where the RSR model was used, reported a greater understanding of responsible suicide reporting, believing they became better critically reflective practitioners.

**Keywords:** storytelling, ethics, media guidelines, responsible suicide reporting, suicide, problem-based learning

## Introduction

**Reporting suicide can be daunting for journalists, and even more so for journalism students who can stumble at the first stages of tackling this highly sensitive topic. Suicide is a global public health problem with one death occurring every 40 seconds, a rate set to increase to one every 20 seconds (WHO, 2017; Befrienders, 2020).**

In the UK the number of people taking their own lives is rising – 6,507 people killed themselves in 2018 an 11.8 percent rise over 2017 (ONS, 2019). Suicide deaths are news. Research shows that 41.5 percent of suicide stories in UK regional and national news outlets were based on coverage of coroners' inquests and other legal proceedings; 34.6 percent were event driven i.e. the first report of the suicide; 15.1 percent were tributes to the deceased; 7.5 percent were stories about positive actions in memory of the deceased e.g. fund-raising, and 1.3 percent were stories that marked the anniversary of the death (Duncan & Luce, forthcoming). Frequent coverage of sensitive topics, such as suicide, suggests proper training for journalism students is important, as mindful reporting can positively impact on public understanding of suicide (Hawton & Williams, 2001; Luce, 2019; Skehan et al, 2009). Enabling students to form early opinions about the relevance and importance of learning about suicide reporting can influence their journalism practices when they enter the industry (Hawton & Williams, 2002; Pirkis et al, 2009; Scherr et al., 2017). However, understanding advice from media reporting guidelines supplied by Samaritans, the World Health Organisation and the National Union of Journalists, amongst others, as well as regulatory bodies like the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) and OFCOM is potentially overwhelming, especially for those whose awareness—with good reason—may be no more than an academic lecture presented as part of their undergraduate programme. Journalism educators rightly raise issues of a crowded curriculum when asked to include suicide in their courses despite the momentous risks from uneducated reporting (Baines & Kennedy, 2010; Mills et al, 2019; Skehan et al., 2009). Whilst whole modules dedicated to trauma may be unrealistic (Seely, 2019), there is even less opportunity for dedicated classes on suicide reporting in journalism syllabi

(Melki et al, 2013). But failing to cover this important public health problem in a manner students will recall and apply in the workplace has serious consequences. Poor reporting by ill-equipped journalists could harm vulnerable people so these ‘high-stakes decisions’ by journalists require informed ethical management (Duncan & Newton, 2017; Duncan & Luce, forthcoming; Luce, 2019).

Whilst lectures are a resource-efficient method for teaching journalism students about ethical issues like suicide reporting, their efficacy in this regard is questionable (Dalton, 2015; Lowe & Jones, 2015). Any knowledge gained can seem abstract and detached from the actual reporting students might undertake once they enter the industry. Consequently, some students may struggle to connect the application of media guidelines to the act of reporting a suicide responsibly. Some media outlets also fail to engage effectively with key advice from guidelines, leading to irresponsible reporting (Bohanna & Wang, 2012; Pitman & Stevenson, 2014; Tatum et al, 2010) so it is imperative journalism students learn how to report suicide responsibly *in practice* in order to overcome these deficiencies. Giving students practical experience of reporting suicide stories within the classroom could reinforce their understanding of how to write an ethical suicide story. It can expose them to tensions and conflicts around their professional, commercial and ethical obligations to potentially influence their reporting of suicide and mental health (Crane et al, 2005; Hazell et al, 2001; Skehan et al, 2009). Presenting them with actual problems to solve in practice builds their competence and confidence (Charles & Luce, 2016). Burns (1999) observes by valuing process over product and learning over teaching, this form of instruction aims to develop life-long learning skills so students can apply their understanding to new situations.

Recognising the difficulties journalists encounter through their news-work that can affect their ability to fully engage with suicide reporting guidelines, e.g. the 24/7 news cycle, working across platforms, persistent social media engagement, fluctuating employment terms and conditions, burnout and stress, we devised the Responsible Suicide Reporting (RSR) model (Duncan & Luce, forthcoming), which has ethical storytelling at its core. It embeds media reporting guidelines within journalistic practices, thus enabling journalists/journalism students to make ethical decisions as they produce content. Hence, we combine storytelling and ethical reporting functions within one model.

There is little support for journalism educators on teaching their students about how best to report suicide. This research helps fill that gap by integrating learning about suicide into the journalism practice. This means suicide reporting can be taught as a story form, similar to other specialisms like crime or court reporting, within practical journalism classes. Reporting stories and creating content is familiar ground for journalism educators and students, and treating suicide reporting as a practical task replaces the need for a specific didactic-style suicide or trauma class.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, a qualitative/quantitative survey determined journalism students’ perceptions and experiences of learning about suicide reporting on their courses, while problem-based learning (PBL) workshops (Burns, 1999; Meadows, 1997; Wright, 2012) were used as an instructional method, alongside storytelling-as-pedagogy to engage students with ethical storytelling using the RSR model. Data from two groups of students was analysed: those who had not been exposed to the RSR model and those who had been exposed to it. The intention was to test whether students’ active involvement in producing a suicide story using the RSR model would increase their understanding of this real-world problem. We will explain the RSR model (Duncan & Luce, forthcoming) later in this article, but first, we introduce storytelling as a pedagogical approach to teach the model, alongside problem-based learning.

## Storytelling as pedagogy

This article draws on concepts of storytelling-as-pedagogy (Andrews et al, 2009; Conle, 2003; Coulter et al, 2007) to actively engage students and journalism educators in addressing recognised concerns in reporting suicide. These include excessive details of the method, precise information on the location, use of inappropriate and gratuitous language, concentration on sensational circumstances like murder-suicide, and stigmatising those affected by the death. The semantic structures and sequential ordering of information in a story, (e.g. the angle and news publication’s style), act as attention-focussing mechanisms (Gerrig, 1993), that aid inquiry decision-making and learning (Andrews et al, 2009). Given storytelling’s heuristic nature, this pedagogical approach also seeks to encourage students to reflect on the process, rules and consequences of their active reporting, thus opening the topic up for experiential discussion in class.

## Why use storytelling

Conle (2003, p.3) notes the use of narrative—or stories—as curricula ‘encompasses not only what is explicitly learned but also what is learned practically, at a more tacit level, touching not only on the intellect, but the moral, practical, imaginative realm’. Journalism is grounded in storytelling and generally, but not exclusively, this results in journalists acting as a conduit to report stories that are not their own but which they shape through their telling (Duncan & Newton, 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen & Schmidt, 2020), the ‘means by which social change is enacted’ (Coulter et al, 2007: 105). Thus, when storytelling is used to teach responsible suicide reporting, students participate in two story forms. Firstly, they *write* or *report* the story of others’ experiences, i.e. the news story of a suicide; and secondly, they *tell* the story of their own experience, i.e. they personally describe their own experience producing the suicide story and how that connects with them personally.

## How using stories works in the classroom

There are two approaches to using storytelling as a teaching tool. The first is didactic and tends to be led by the educator where stories are introduced to make moral points from which students are expected to learn (Costa et al, 2007; Savery, 2006). This didactic form can place students in docile roles and although they may recall information more readily because they have heard a story from their lecturer, it does not necessarily involve them in that story. Given journalism is a participatory experience (Deuze, 2005; Singer et.al, 2011) it seems appropriate students learn about suicide reporting collectively.

The second approach is more exploratory i.e. one that involves students and lecturers in finding out together. Through this collaborative process, they can tell, deconstruct and learn from their own personal stories [of journalism] (Coulter et al, 2007) and those of others that they write as news articles. Students need an opportunity to create collective text where they realize they are not alone and that their new experiences are not isolated (Christensen, 2000). It should be noted they are drawing on their suicide *reporting* experience and not their *personal* experience of suicide. They should be advised at the lesson’s start that even though their personal experience may inform their journalistic approach, they do not need to reveal intimate experiences as part of their reflective storytelling.

Therefore, when journalism students report a suicide story and make decisions about what to include they critically reflect on their own and fellow students’ understanding and experiences of not only journalism, but of media reporting of suicide itself. Namely, they share each other’s stories. As Coulter et al. (2007) note, story sharing allows them to clarify further their own personal understandings. People learn through persuasive discourse that allows them to see different perspectives rather than via an authoritative transmission of the facts (Bakhtin, 1991) and as part of this process educators can encourage reflection by carefully framing questions so answers lead to more questions (Alexander, 2001).

Phillips (2012) identified three motifs within storytelling pedagogy that could inform teaching practice and be useful to journalism educators. The motifs could also assist students in understanding their own learning by providing them with an interpretative structure. Firstly, she advises students *walk in the shoes of others* to enable them to experience others’ lives. Whilst maintaining a distance from sources is expected in some types of news story, those involving trauma need a more empathetic approach and emotional connection because of the nature of the source’s lived experience (Duncan & Newton, 2017). The questions on truth, tone and language and avoiding stigma in the standard of moderation in the RSR model (see below) speak directly to this empathetic approach as they focus on the human interaction between journalists and the people in their stories. Secondly, Phillips (2012) suggests *story-tailoring* which underlines the need for responsiveness in storytelling to build a community and meaning with an audience. This requires the educator, as facilitator rather than tutor, to engage in deep-listening of students’ interests, experiences and temperaments in order to tailor subsequent storytelling to students’ needs. Within suicide reporting this reflective process would encourage students to respond to their audience’s moods regarding what is and what is not acceptable. The third motif, *spinning and weaving*, maps connections between stories and what students learn from them to form meaning. The stories can be either those written by journalism students or existing stories they critique. This motif is concerned with ongoing critical reflection of how stories are told and of what they contain. The journalist, like a storyteller, ‘spins and weaves a tale by leading listeners from one element to the next’, making the interrelationship between them visible through the way they tell the story (Phillips, 2012, p.119). For responsible suicide reporting, students would *spin* out what they already know from writing general news stories, mapping connections between core news writing techniques and the suicide story they are constructing. Additionally, they would *weave* in those elements that are specific to suicide coverage, like attention to sensitive language. The ethical quality of these specific elements would be tested using the three-step RSR model (below). Thus, they turn back through their story, checking its veracity and accountability, creating ‘an intertwined loop of connections’ (Phillips, 2012, p.115). By reflecting



on (Schon, 1987) this interconnected process students are positioned to form new understanding for future suicide stories they may write.

## Problem-based instruction in storytelling

Whilst the characteristics noted above signal useful teaching approaches, a recognised instructional method can provide a suitable framework to teach the RSR model through storytelling. Problem-based learning is a versatile method suited to the process of reporting suicide stories. It is a flexible technique in that the problem is structured fluidly with no preformed solution parameters and no single correct answer (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Savery, 2006). The problem is deliberately ill-structured because ‘problems in the real world are ill-structured (or they wouldn’t be problems)’ (Savery, 2006, p.12). PBL is concentrated experiential learning arranged around students’ investigation and resolution of messy, real-world problems where they are engaged problem solvers who become self-directed learners through determining the key problem and the criteria needed to solve it (Torp and Sage, 2002). Thus, the student drives this method as the director of any learning activities (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980). The problem is used as a tool to understand abstract knowledge (Wood, 2003) in order to improve putting that knowledge into practice (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980). Thus, what students learn through self-directed study should be applied back to the problem so they can reanalyse it and find solutions (ibid; Savery, 2006). This method favours a collaborative team approach (Hmelo-Silver, 2004) involving both students and lecturer. That said, once set the problem, students can work independently then bring their contributions back to the group to form collective ideas (Wood, 2003). Additionally, the lecturer should adopt the role of facilitator but without providing declarative knowledge so that students’ learning is exploratory and so they take responsibility for their own solutions and learning (Newman, 2005; Savery & Duffy, 1995). As part of this role, it is essential the educator directs an extensive debriefing at the end of the learning session (Savery, 2006).

Problem-based instruction is a recognisable storytelling method for journalism academics. When they ask their students to report a news story, a feature, online or broadcast content they set them a problem the students have to solve. Because students are often given free rein to interpret the problem there are no set solutions other than to produce an effective piece of journalism within loosely defined parameters. Covering suicide presents distinct problems and to assist in solving them we offer the Responsible Suicide Reporting model.

## Teaching the Responsible Suicide Reporting model

We devised the RSR model (Duncan & Luce, forthcoming) to enable journalists—and journalism students—to make ethical decisions about their storytelling whilst under pressure from various news processes (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Hanusch, 2017).

It embeds reporting guidelines within journalism practice and functions within the storytelling process so they question their choices as they produce content and do not have to go elsewhere for guidance. This pragmatic, internal model addresses hindrances to journalists’ use of guidelines like lack of awareness, reluctance to consult them, tight deadlines and pressures from staff shortages. It goes beyond adherence to codes of conduct that concentrate on explicit details of the method to understand other potential harms, like stigmatising content. The model consists of three parts: a typology of suicide narratives and ‘othering’; a set of ethical rules, and a standard of moderation.

### How does it work?

For teaching purposes, the model can be perceived as a three-step graduated process (see Figure 1). Each step must be achieved before students move onto the next.

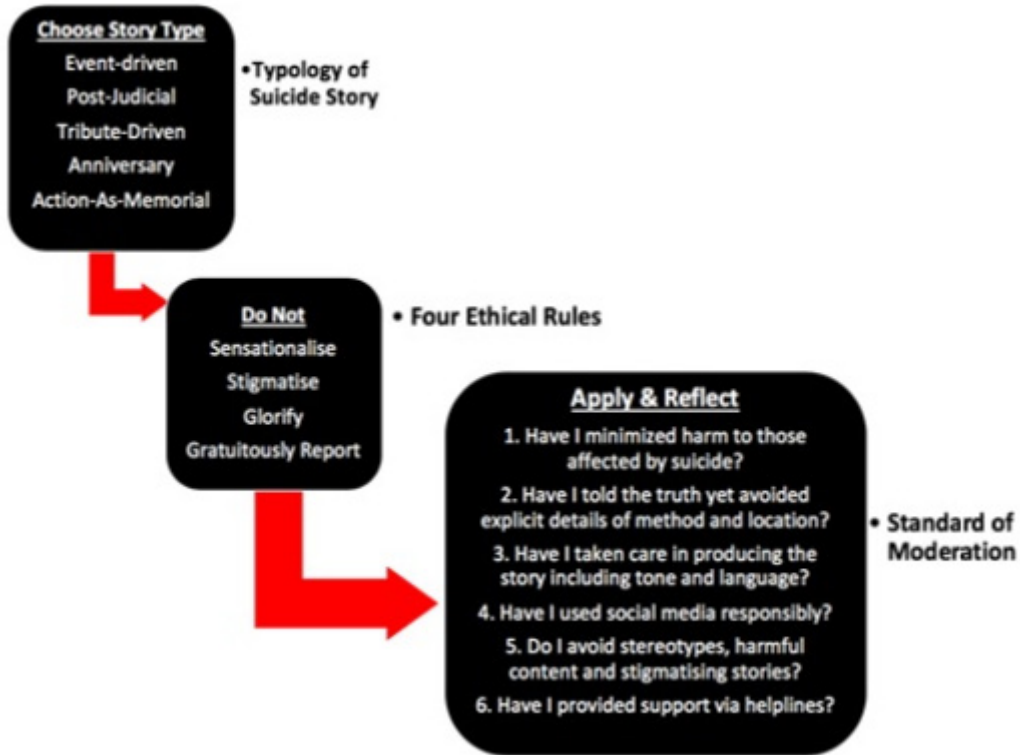
### Step 1. Typology of Suicide Narratives

Students start by determining what type of story they are writing. The familiar ground of constructing a story gives them a framework to assess potentially harmful content. There are five suicide story types:

Event-driven stories, the media’s first recognition that a newsworthy suicide has occurred, a common story type. Students should be wary of being too explicit when describing the method and location, whether they should place ‘suicide’ in the headline, sub-headings or intro, and concerning web analytics, how often they use the word ‘suicide’ in the text.

Post-judicial stories, the type journalists write most frequently, are reports of inquests, and more rarely





**Figure 1. The Responsible Suicide Reporting Model (Duncan & Luce, forthcoming)**

other legal proceedings. Given explicit details are often presented as evidence, journalists may be tempted to include extensive detail, resulting in gratuitous, sensational and stigmatising reporting. Students should be aware of the need to balance accurate, full disclosure with potentially harmful content.

Tribute-driven stories focus on the grieving family and friends who pay tribute to the deceased.

Anniversary stories normally mark the death's first anniversary but can cover later ones, and revisit the circumstances of the death alongside describing how the bereaved are coping.

Action-as-memorial stories are about the bereaved family and friends undertaking a campaign, fundraising or setting up a charity in memory of their loved one.

These last three narratives emphasise the people affected by the suicide rather than explicit details of method, location, language and tone. The exception is where the death becomes a 'suicide event', usually celebrity suicides or where a death or several deaths are framed from a dramatic news angle; here the duration of coverage is the problem.

## Step 2: Apply Four Ethical Rules

Once students identify the story type they consider whether it stigmatises or 'others' anyone. Stigma consists of labelling, e.g. defining someone by their mental health symptoms instead of seeing the person; stereotyping, where they are defined by recognised undesirable characteristics in the minds of others or themselves; and separating, where people think in terms of 'us' and 'them') leading to perceived differences and inferiorities (Link & Phelan, 2001; Campbell & Deacon, 2006). Journalists can ethically test their stories as they construct them by applying four simple responsible reporting rules:

**Do not sensationalise:** Sensationalised reporting is when journalists use the word 'suicide' in a headline, or use quotes e.g. 'heaven has a new angel' or 'RIP Babes'.

**Do not stigmatise:** Stigmatised reporting can occur through labelling, e.g. describing someone as a 'victim of bullying', 'autistic', or labelling them based on their religion or nationality.

**Do not glorify:** Glorification can occur when suicide is presented as a life choice in a story, or the story explicitly describes a method.

**Do not gratuitously report:** Gratuitous reporting can occur when the reason for the suicide is overly emphasised, alongside the specific location of the death, e.g. Golden Gate Bridge or Beachy Head.

### Step 3: Apply Standard of Moderation

Next students move to Step 3 and apply the standard of moderation. It embeds ethical principles, e.g. minimizing harm, truth-telling, with key advice from suicide reporting guidelines, e.g. using social media responsibly and providing helpline information within a story (NUJ, 2015; Samaritans, 2013; WHO, 2017a). It is a moderate or middle way between excessive, irresponsible reporting and timid, sanitized reporting.

Students should ask themselves six questions:

Have I minimized harm to those affected by suicide?

Have I told the truth, yet avoided explicit details of method and location?

Have I taken care in producing the story including tone and language?

Have I used social media responsibly?

Do I avoid stereotypes, harmful content and stigmatising stories?

Have I provided support via helplines?

By asking these questions as the story is created, they become integral to the reporting process. Whilst this is the model's third stage, it can also stand alone, so if a journalist can do nothing else they can apply these six questions as they report. Thus, they check their reporting is moderate in content, tone and language.

Recognising that active involvement increases students' understanding of real-world problems, we wished to test the effectiveness of teaching the RSR model using storytelling-as-pedagogy and problem-based learning. We also wanted to gain insight into students' current educational experiences and perceptions of suicide reporting. Consequently, we applied a mixed-methods approach by firstly surveying students who had no knowledge of the RSR model. Secondly, we hosted workshops with students in which they engaged with the RSR model using storytelling-as-pedagogy and problem-based learning. Thereafter, they completed a questionnaire on their views of our approach.

## Study 1: Student perspectives of suicide reporting without exposure to the RSR model

### Methodology

A total of 229 respondents on journalism, media and communication degrees from 25 universities in the UK and Ireland completed our survey in 2018 which was disseminated through programme leaders and Twitter. The survey was a mix of fixed-response questions eliciting quantitative data and open questions for qualitative data. Most respondents identified as journalism students (91%) and 20% were international students. Females made up 66% of respondents and 81% were aged 18-23. They were asked specifically about the inclusion of suicide reporting in their curricula and their understanding of reporting suicide responsibly.

### Results: Assessing the relevance of suicide reporting to students' studies

Respondents were asked how many times they recalled suicide being raised during their studies. Regarding lectures, almost 40% said it was never mentioned and 28% said it was raised two or three times only. Similarly in tutorials and seminars: 70% said it was never discussed in tutorials and 8% said only two or three times; around 60% said it was not raised in seminars and 16% said only two or three times. In terms of practical teaching situations, almost 75% reported it was never raised during workshops and 10% said only two or three times. A similar result occurred during news days (72.7% and 9.6% respectively), although news days are dependent on unpredictable news agendas. Despite an apparent lack of suicide forming part

of the curricula, students were aware of the value of learning about reporting suicide. Almost all students thought it was somewhat important, important or very important (24.8%, 32.4% and 41.8% respectively) for universities to include suicide reporting in their journalism/media courses. Additionally, more than 86% thought it would be relevant to their future careers, with 41.3% stating it was somewhat important, 29% stating it was important and 16% saying it was very important.

## **Results: Student perspectives on learning how to report suicide responsibly**

We were keen to establish what students already knew about reporting suicide so we asked them how they would report a suicide story. Despite the limited number of times suicide reporting was addressed in learning activities, students appeared to have a broad grasp of the key issues (135 responses). They recognised the importance of reporting the facts rather than speculation, being truthful, honest and impartial and the need to report in the public interest. One student said they would report ‘with facts and compassion, seeking to inform and with the hope to spread awareness’. Another said they would report with ‘compassion and cold hard facts’. Avoiding harm also appeared to be uppermost in their thoughts. They consistently described the need to report ‘sensitively’, ‘respectfully’, ‘compassionately’ and to do so ‘empathetically and informative[ly]’ with ‘severe caution’. They stressed the significance of avoiding details of the method, seeking advice from guidelines and the need to include helplines. They were also clear on avoiding sensationalism and stigma. One student said they would ‘report in a non-glamorised, realistic and helpful way’.

Referencing the IPSO Editors’ Code of Practice we asked them what they understood by ‘excessive detail of the method used’ (Clause 5, Suicide) and ‘inquiries and approaches should be made with sympathy and discretion’ (Clause 4, Intrusion into grief or shock) (IPSO, 2018). Most of the 135 students who responded knew the dangers of including explicit details. One said: ‘The story should not look like a tutorial on how to commit suicide.’ Students acknowledged doing so could have serious repercussions, especially for the bereaved and vulnerable. One student said: ‘We don’t want to normalise it, we don’t want to encourage it.’ Another said: ‘It’s journalism, not a horror movie. Show some respect.’ However, although they understood the need for restraint around method no-one referred to it as part of a code of practice. They seemed less clear about what was meant by sympathy and discretion with responses ranging from ‘don’t ask for too many details’ and ‘respect people’s privacy’ to ‘it means the family’s wishes take place above the editor’s desires’. Whilst they recognised this was about sensitivity towards the bereaved their responses were mostly generalisations about being respectful, compassionate and empathetic. There was little indication they actually knew *how* to report with sympathy and discretion. Equally, when asked what they understood by responsible reporting their responses (154 in total) were broad, similar to the question on how to report suicide, and were a mix of ethical concepts like fairness, respect and minimizing harm and journalism processes like accuracy, use of language and being cautious. Many conflated reporting responsibly: having an obligation to behave according to professional standards, and reporting sensitively: having a considerate appreciation of others’ feelings.

Students seemed to have greater awareness than projected from the limited exposure intimated by the data on their learning activities. However, 30-40% of them did not answer these questions, possibly because they lacked sufficient knowledge. Of those that did, the general vagueness of their responses gave a sense they are aware of the theory without knowing how to implement it. Although it is encouraging most surveyed students recognised key issues, we posit that exposing students to our RSR model would familiarise them with the practical actions for responsible reporting.

## **Study 2: Student perspectives of suicide reporting with exposure to the RSR model**

### **Methodology**

A total of 80 journalism students (50 undergraduates and 30 Masters) on UK degree programmes participated in three workshops during 2019-20 on Responsible Suicide Reporting. Students were introduced to the RSR model and told it was grounded on what they already knew—how to write stories based on news values and making decisions about content. They were asked to view themselves as storytellers, who in

striving to report responsibly should put themselves in the shoes of the people affected by their stories (Phillips, 2012); the intention here is not to compromise journalistic impartiality but to encourage them to be empathetic, a concept that is important to reporting traumatic events.

In order to do this they were given two tasks:

to critique two suicide stories, and

to write a suicide story using the RSR model.

Afterwards, students completed a questionnaire to collect mostly qualitative data on their attitudes to the RSR model and using real-world, storytelling problems to learn about it. Inductive thematic analysis was used to establish common themes relating to students' experiences of the RSR model and storytelling/PBL.

## **Task 1 – Investigating real-world problems: deconstructing suicide reporting**

Students were asked to critique published suicide news stories to gauge their reaction to the content e.g. whether they thought the reporting was harmful, stigmatising etc. They considered how they would report them: what would they include/leave out, what they found offensive and why, what they thought was potentially harmful to their audience. The two selected stories both breached, or came close to breaching, media reporting guidelines and advice from regulatory bodies like IPSO. In groups, students collaborated, discussed and noted what they considered were the problems with the stories. The lecturer, as facilitator, assisted their learning by prompting them to explore certain issues more deeply. This was achieved by asking students questions about an issue they had identified and encouraging them to determine the answer for themselves. Applying the RSR model's standard of moderation provided students with a tool to decipher excessive, gratuitous reporting and determine what they would do to tell a more restrained, judicious story.

## **Task 2 – Putting self-directed learning into practice: writing a suicide story**

The second task asked students to write a suicide story using the RSR model that was based on information provided by the lecturer and gleaned from an actual suicide article published in 2019. They were told they were writing a news story about *an event* (Step 1: Typology of narratives) under deadline without access to guidelines or advice from colleagues. Thus, as they produced their stories they were advised to reflect on the elements to report in an event story; then consider the rules around stigmatising, sensationalising, glorifying and gratuitously reporting (Step 2: Apply four ethical rules), and lastly apply the six moderation questions to their decision making (Step 3: Apply standard of moderation). The lecturer-as-facilitator adopted an enquiry-based approach to encourage students to make their own ethical decisions. The problem they were presented with was deliberately ill-structured to reflect messy, real-world problems with no single, correct answer (Savery, 2006; Torp & Sage, 2002). Students were encouraged to work collaboratively to decide on the content they felt they should include. The problem was used to understand the abstract concepts of reporting suicide through practical application, enabling students to apply the knowledge they had gained through exploratory, self-directed study back to the problem so they reanalysed it and found suitable solutions.

## **Results: Assessing the effectiveness of the RSR model for teaching students about suicide reporting**

Students were asked in the questionnaire about two areas where the RSR model could influence their decision making. These were stigma and reporting grey areas, common dilemmas but opaque and complex (Duncan & Newton, 2017).

Addressing stigma makes up a significant part of the RSR model, given it is the driving force behind the four ethical rules. It also appears in the fifth question in the standard of moderation. The questionnaire asked students how exploring stigma as part of the RSR model helped them to understand the effect labelling someone as different in their stories could have on public perceptions. It also asked how the RSR model helped them to make decisions about grey areas in ethical decision making e.g. whether to include a suicide note in their reporting or not. Samaritans guidelines on suicide (2013) advise against inclusion because of the potential harm to vulnerable people. However, last messages, particularly from social media, are appearing more frequently in suicide stories. Some notes from social media are used without the family's approval but increasingly these are included with their consent in apparent contravention of guidelines. This leaves

journalists with the dilemma of either adhering to prevention organisations' advice or ignoring it to include the note according to the family's wishes.

Using Phillips' storytelling motifs, several students demonstrated the motif, *walking in the shoes of others*. One said: '[It] helps to put yourself in their shoes and understand how you can harm a specific group by stereotyping.' Other comments included, 'I never knew about the extent to which suicide affects people. I never thought [t] labelling was harmful before' and 'It [the RSR model] made me consider the feelings of the victim's family.' Students also reflected on the outcomes of what they wrote and how it could be interpreted. One student said: 'It helped me understand that what I write about can have consequences', while another said: '[It] Makes you consider the terms you use more and how people could interpret them/be affected by them.' Another student commented on the dangerous notion of providing a step-by-step guide to the method: 'It helped me understand that I shouldn't write down roadmaps in articles.'

There was also evidence of *story tailoring*, in their questionnaire comments. Students responded to their perceived audience's moods by being aware of the need to tailor their reporting to acceptable practices. One student said: 'It was helpful to have that [the RSR model, advice on stigma] in the back of your mind and to consider it when working on a story.' Several reflected on the importance of appropriate content and language choices: 'It [the RSR model] helped identify the language and story details that we should use.' Another said: '[It] made me think about including facts but making sure not to dramatize the facts.'

The last motif, *spinning and weaving* was also present within students' comments. Students created new understanding by making connections between their storytelling and their learning: 'It makes you realise that stigma is a huge problem that should not be highlighted in the article.' Another added: 'It gave me a more detailed view on stigma and how big an impact it can have.' One student said the RSR model made him 'consider things I may not have beforehand' and another said the RSR process reaffirmed his thoughts, suggesting on-going reflection was present throughout the learning process. On-going reflection was also evident in these statements. 'It helped to understand that what you write can cause harm and add to the stigma. We have to make sure we don't add to the problem and be more understanding.' Another said: 'It made me recognise the responsibility of a journalist and how they must weigh up a range of factors.'

## Results: Determining the usefulness of the Standard of Moderation as a guide to reporting suicide responsibly

Despite no prior knowledge of the standard of moderation our workshop students rapidly adapted to using it in their storytelling. In the questionnaire they were asked how the six moderation questions helped them to solve some of the problems of suicide reporting. Their responses predominantly fell into two categories: usefulness and reflection on their learning.

Regarding usefulness one student commented the standard gave far more detail about reporting suicide than the IPSO code, whilst another said it was an 'easy step-by-step [guide] to understand how to successfully report suicide'. Generally, students thought it provided them with a better understanding of how to produce an ethical suicide story. They described the six questions as helpful in framing the story, in keeping them on track, and in better understanding what to write, because they outlined the core factors. One student said: 'They helped by giving a structure of thought that can be referred to when needed.' Another said: 'Vital, they are a solid guideline that I will keep in mind going forward.'

It was evident students reflected on the new learning they acquired through using the standard of moderation. It gave them 'insight into how to carefully report' and made them think through the issues before they included something in their stories. Students also seemed to gain greater awareness of responsible reporting by applying the six questions. One said: 'With all the questions, I never deeply thought of how damaging these stories could be.' Another said: 'Makes you consider everything like social media etc. Makes you consider your language more. Number 2 [telling the truth whilst avoiding explicit details of method and location] helps you judge when to report the facts but not to go into detail.' One student reflected on the effect of their reporting on vulnerable people. They said: 'It helped me to take a perspective on how my article would make other people feel. It's an easier guideline.'

## Results: Assessing the effectiveness of using storytelling as a pedagogical approach to teaching students about suicide reporting

An aim of this study was to gain insight into students' perceptions of using storytelling as a means to understand the RSR model and its application. We posited that placing students within a familiar environment i.e. reporting stories, would enable them to grasp the unfamiliar and more complex task of reporting suicide.



Therefore, it was important to determine whether students shared this premise.

Using Phillip's (2012) storytelling motifs, it was evident students judged the effectiveness of working on real-world suicide storytelling problems on the new understanding they had gained and the potential for ongoing reflection to reinforce their learning (Burns, 1999; Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Savery 2006). They *walked in the shoes of others*. By crafting stories of real-world problems they could empathise with those affected by suicide stories. Commenting on undertaking Task 2, one student said: 'I think that it is useful and good practice. Using real stories can show how it will affect those when putting yourself in the families' position.' Another student echoed this: 'Put yourself in the families' shoes. [It] makes it more real, take it more seriously.' Another reflected it 'helps to prepare you to become more understanding'.

*Spinning and weaving* dominated their responses. This is not surprising given it is concerned with learning and reflection. Students recognised the enriched learning that came from producing their own stories based on real-world problems. One said: '[It] Really helped to see how bad at reporting people are. And how easy it is to correct it.' Another said they found using storytelling to learn about suicide reporting 'very useful as it gave us a taste of how to go about it'. Another said: 'It helps to use real situations because it can be hard to decipher what details we should/shouldn't use. Makes it more relevant.' Many students commented on the value of problem-based learning and being able to practise in the safe environment of the classroom. They described it as the best way to learn, that it was useful, beneficial and more interactive. One student said: '[It] Allows you to make mistakes before you properly report one [a suicide story]. Makes you realise how difficult it is to report.' Another said: 'I think it's essential to practise this if there's a chance that you will be publishing stories like [that] in the industry soon.'

## Conclusion

It is evident that journalism students see the benefits of actively practising suicide reporting in the classroom. It enables them to unpick the moral dilemmas of reporting such a traumatic experience, allows them to empathise with those who are affected by suicide, and importantly permits them to make mistakes before they have to report a real death by suicide. Problem-based learning offers them the opportunity to prepare for ill-structured, real-world challenges, making them active learners who can transfer the skills they have mastered in the journalism lab to the professional newsroom or freelance situation. Using storytelling as a pedagogical approach anchors them in the familiar ground of producing a news story, feature or broadcast content so that they can concentrate on ensuring their coverage stands up to the ethical scrutiny outlined in our Responsible Suicide Reporting model. We designed it to be part of the news process, internal to the production of news rather than distracting journalists from their stories in search of the correct advice. The aim is to ease the reporting process rather than hinder it. Based on our findings, we posit that exposing students to our RSR model will familiarise them with the practical actions for responsible reporting. We recognise that further testing and evaluation of the RSR model is needed worldwide. We also acknowledge that journalism educators may need support to teach this challenging topic so we have developed further resources for them at: [www.suicidereportingtoolkit.com](http://www.suicidereportingtoolkit.com). Teaching the RSR model through storytelling and problem-based learning is a pragmatic way forward to educate tomorrow's journalists about their responsibilities to be truthful, respectful and to prevent further deaths by suicide.

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# Cover price rises of regional newspapers accentuated decline in sales as digital media grew between 2006-2016

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## Abstract

The decline in the regional press, traditional wisdom asserts, has been firmly placed on the rise in the number of people moving from newspapers and reading news online for free. While this is not disputed, this paper will show that cover price increases have in recent years been higher than in previous years and that a correlation exists between these larger than usual increases in cover price and the acceleration of decline in newspaper sales. The findings indicate that a vicious circle has been created in which budget shortfalls have prompted higher and faster price rises, which have driven down sales, leading to further shortfalls as falling circulation also leads to falling advertising revenue. Historically, newspapers put their cover price up by 1p to 3p a year or held the price in an attempt to keep sales high, an obsession of regional newspapers. For example, the Sheffield Star cost 32p in 2000 and did not increase in cost until 2005. In 2011, with the battle to keep readers a lost cause, regional newspapers decided to use cover price to help finance its business and the same newspaper which cost 47p rose in price to

60p by 2012, a percentage rise of 28.2 percent. The smaller increases often led to a sales decline, but the policy of bigger cover price increases had a far greater detrimental effect on sales, accentuating a larger decline in sales than previously experienced. Using data from the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), this paper maps the increasing price rises to the increase in declining sales.

**Keywords:** newspapers, regional, decline, circulation, online, cover price, press, sales

## Introduction

**Traditionally it is thought that blame for the demise in the sales of regional newspapers has been firmly based on the rise of online news, according to (Nielsen, 2015). He identifies that the transformation of the media environment is largely driven by the rise of digital media but adds that there are also other factors.**

Some of these factors included a change in the way people live, a redefining of boundaries over what is local and the centralisation of regional newspaper operations making the businesses less local (Ibid.). It is too easy to point the finger at online news as the sole reason for the dramatic fall in sales. Whilst digital is the root cause, the reaction of the industry to this technological development accentuated the decline. This study uses circulation data collated by the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) to highlight a specific area, in this instance regional daily newspapers, to show that the number and scale of the increases in cover price have speeded up the decline in newspaper sales. It shows how newspaper groups decided to increase the price to make-up for a shortfall in revenues, but that this policy did not protect newspapers sale and hastened the decline. According to Wadbring and Bergström, (2015) with the increase in internet usage and transformation of the media eco-system, the problems for the newspaper industry have rapidly increased with circulation, readership and advertising declines. This is highlighted by the now defunct Northcliffe Media group, which comprised of around 80 regional newspapers, and reported in 2011 that the previous five months a six percent decline in advertising revenues to £59m, the loss of 317 jobs and circulation revenues down by 3 percent (Sweney, 2011).

According to Hill (2016), newspapers were obsessed with large sales so the price was kept low. Hill (Ibid.) added that 80 percent of income came from advertising and 20 percent from copy sales and it was the dependence on advertising that made the industry vulnerable. It is interesting to note that figures revealed in February 2020 show that print revenue for Reach PLC (formerly Trinity Mirror), from cover price made up for 61.2 percent of total revenue, highlighting the obvious decline in advertising income but also showing the importance of higher cover price to maximise income (Reach PLC, 2019). Going back to the original business model, based on 80 percent of revenue from advertising, this structure left the door open to new companies such as Facebook and Google to take advertising income and send regional daily newspapers into a decline. According to (Chamberlain, 2018) advertising income which had once kept newspapers in cities, suburbs and market towns going 'now bolsters the coffers of California's two tech titans which, between them, take over half of all UK advertising.' As sales and advertising income dipped, (ABC, Dec 2006-12; Mayhew, 2018a) it was clear that newspapers needed to make up for a shortfall in income and started to use cover price to fill the void, in other words shifting the funding for the regional daily newspaper business from advertisers to readers. However, with the decline in readers, this model looks fragile and this paper briefly looks at other models. This includes the *London Standard*, which went free in 2009, and was making a profit until recent investment saw a slump in profits (Sweney, 2018). The big difference between the *Standard* and other newspapers is the sheer volume of commuters providing a ready-made audience (Luft, 2009). Similarly, the free *Metro* has continued to make profits and is now the biggest circulation of any newspaper in the country (Business Matters, 2018). What this study has found is that the problem for

the regional press was that by insisting cover prices should rise steeply, the decline accentuated, but whether a free/part-free newspaper model is the way forward is debateable.

## Methodology:

The research method used was stratified sampling because a controlled sample of newspapers was selected. According to Neuman (2007), this form of research guarantees representativeness or fixes the proportion of different strata within a sample. Stratified sampling produces samples that are more representative than simple random sampling if the stratum information is accurate. This study generated data from 10 regional newspapers from six different newspaper groups from different parts of England to reflect diversity across the sample. The places chosen vary in size from Blackpool, which is a seaside town and has a population of about 144,000 to a major cosmopolitan city such as Sheffield, with a population of around 542,000 (Office for National Statistics, 2018). There are two other towns in the group, Bournemouth (pop: 198,000) and Ipswich (pop: 149,000), one a seaside town and the other a rural town. The other cosmopolitan cities in the sample are Bristol (pop: 449,000) and Newcastle-upon-Tyne (pop: 280,000). The remaining places include former industrial cities such as Stoke-on-Trent (pop: 276,000), and Wolverhampton (pop: 244,000). That leaves two more rural cities, Norwich (pop: 196,000) and Carlisle (75,000).

The data concerned:

The average circulation of the 10 daily regional newspapers at the end of five, two-year periods from 2006-2016 Monday to Friday;

The increase/decrease in the number of newspapers sold;

The increase/decrease in the number of newspapers sold in percentage terms;

The cover price rises;

The cover price rises as a percentage.

The initial sample group is n=10. They are daily regional newspapers which focus on a particular town or city. To ensure there was a broad view of how different regional newspaper companies behaved with regards to price rises, the sample includes six different companies. Also, in an attempt to embrace regional variations, the newspapers are from across England, north, south, east and west.

| Newspaper name         | Newspaper Group  | Founded | Cover price (6/2017) | Sales figure (6/2017)     | Sales figures (12/2018) | Reduction y-o-y |
|------------------------|------------------|---------|----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Bournemouth Echo       | Newsquest        | 1900    | 68p (M-F)            | 12,795                    | 12,289                  | -10%            |
| Bristol Post           | Reach PLC        | 1932    | 70p (M-F)            | 17,148                    | 15,271                  | -12%            |
| Carlisle News and Star | CN Group         | 1967    | 80p (M-S)            | 8,654 (combined editions) | 7,107                   | -17%            |
| Express and Star       | Midland News Ass | 1880s   | 65p (M-F)            | 51,722                    | 47,669                  | -14%            |
| The Gazette, Blackpool | JPI              | 1873    | 75p (M-S)            | 9537 *(Dec '16)           | 8,187                   | -14%            |
| Ipswich Star           | Archant          | 1893    | 75p (M-F)            | 9,513                     | 8,620                   | -15%            |

|                              |           |      |           |        |               |      |
|------------------------------|-----------|------|-----------|--------|---------------|------|
| Newcastle Chronicle          | Reach PLC | 1885 | 70p (M-S) | 25,056 | <b>22,401</b> | -16% |
| Norwich Evening News         | Archant   | 1882 | 75p (M-F) | 8,117  | <b>7,507</b>  | -18% |
| Sheffield Star               | JPI       | 1887 | 70p (M-F) | 15,858 | <b>14,716</b> | -12% |
| The Sentinel, Stoke-on-Trent | Reach PLC | 1873 | 65p (M-F) | 25,181 | <b>23,249</b> | -13% |

*\*Note: Not all newspapers are declaring their sales figures every six months, some newspapers now declare their figures on an annual basis.*

**Table 1: Selected newspapers, n=10, figures are for June 2017 and sales figures for December 2018.**

The sample period looks across 10-years from 2006-2016. The reason for the start date of 2006 is that it is during this period that classified advertising disappeared from newspapers, which was a key factor in the loss of revenue for regional newspapers (Perch, 2016). However, it was only when the sales started to decline that the larger price increases came in to make up in the shortfall of cash, according to the author.

The research question asks whether larger than the normal rises in cover price correlate to larger sales decline. Of course, there were other factors, such as the audience moving to receive their news from online and often for free. As an example, in 2018, 74 percent of UK adults said they looked at news online each week, increasing to 91 percent of 16-24-year-olds, with only one in 10 people reading a regional newspaper each week, according to the Reuters Institute (cited in Cairncross, 2019). The data used for this research comes from the Audience Bureau of Circulation (ABC) which “sets industry-agreed standards for media brand measurement across print, digital and events. We also verify data, processes and good practice to industry-agreed standards” (ABC, 2017). The data put together by the ABC includes average sales during six-month periods. For consistency, this research is based on the average sales figure at the end of a two-year period and is taken from the sales reports compiled in December for the days Monday to Friday. The days have to be specific because a lot of newspapers charge a different price for their Saturday newspapers. However, there is a slight alteration in the six-monthly reporting which is highlighted in (Table 1), where the *Blackpool Gazette* does not have such up-to-date sales figures. This is because a number of regional titles have opted in recent months for annual reporting of their sales. This means the *Gazette* did not produce new figures for 2017 until December 2018 and this will be for the whole year. So in (Table 1) the figures are for December 2016. However, the change does not alter this work, which involved reporting of sales figures every two years until the end of 2016.

## Background

The rise of the internet led to the shift with classified advertising disappearing online creating a financial crisis within the business. However, as Hill (2016) states the industry had been in decline for 40 years. For 150 years newspapers were accepted as essential because they had no competition. However, first radio, then television and latterly the web provided competition and each accelerated the pace of decline in readership (Hill, 2016). Cover price revenue is a key income source for newspapers. As supported by (Hill, 2016) regional newspapers wanted to keep cover prices low to ensure large sales, but with sales and advertising in decline, companies have used cover prices to fill the vacuum in income. As an example, the *Wolverhampton Express & Star* did not increase its price from 2000-2004. In 2004 it eventually went up 2p to 32p, a 0.6 percent rise. However, more recently, the newspaper has increased more rapidly in an attempt to make up for shortfall in advertising revenues, with the cost in 2015 being 55p going up to 60p in 2016, a 33 percent rise; from 60p to 65p in 2017, a 39 percent rise and from 65p to 80p in 2018, a 52 percent rise (ABC, 2020). This study highlights the fact that the bigger the rise, the heavier the decrease in readership (Ponsford, 2013). Ponsford (2013) also noted that the worse newspaper performer in terms of sale was the paper with the biggest price increase, Newsquest’s Brighton Argus, which increased from 45p to 65p in September



2012, a 44 percent rise in cover price.

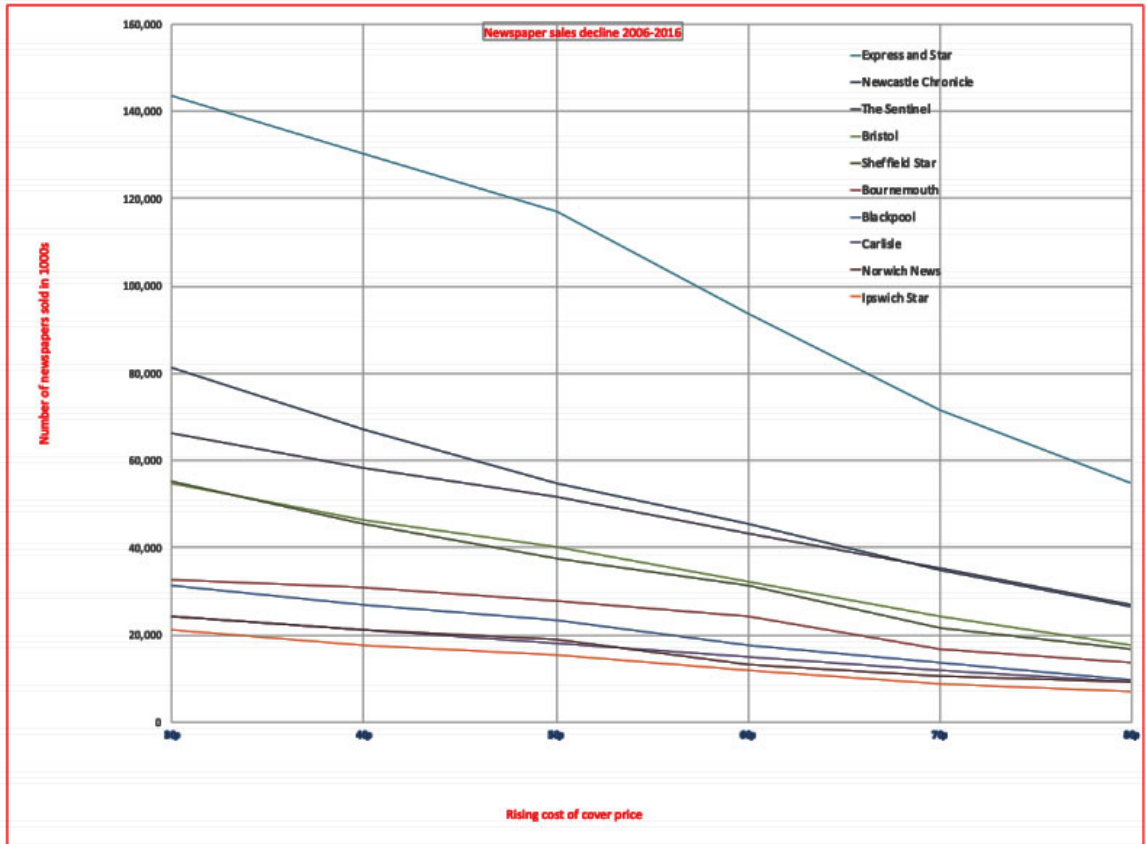
The regional newspaper industry has suffered massive upheaval. The key trend during the last 20 years has been a series of cost-cutting measures to maintain finances and alter the structure of the newsroom, to embrace a digital-first culture. According to the Cairncross Review (Cairncross, 2019) more than 300 local newspapers have closed and the number of frontline print journalists has dropped by 6,000 in the past decade from 23,000 to 17,000. The report also revealed print advertising revenues have dropped by more than half over the last 10 years, from nearly £7 billion to just over £3 billion. Job losses and restructuring have been major features of stories within the industry since around 2006-2007. Many of the closures of newspapers and job losses were highlighted in a report by the National Union of Journalists in a report (NUJ, 2015). Newspaper groups such as Reach PLC, formerly Trinity Mirror, have reported job cutbacks including the creation of centralised subbing hubs in 2017 with the loss of 78 jobs (Mayhew, 2017) and as far back as 2008 Midland News Association revealed it was cutting 120 editorial jobs (The Guardian, 2008). Other areas of the business have also suffered cutbacks such as the closures of presses with a move to centralisation of printing including the press at Stoke-on-Trent being closed with the loss of 90 jobs (Press Gazette, 2012). Reductions in paginations has also created redundancies, this was highlighted by JPI Media, formerly Johnston Press, which shed jobs as fewer pages were to be produced (Walker, 2019). Another consequence of cost-cutting has been industrial unrest at a number of titles across England over pay and job losses. Concerns have been raised by NUJ members in Carlisle over the loss of jobs, increasing workloads and failure by Newsquest to offer pay rises (Sharman, 2018). Job cuts, understaffing and changing roles to newsrooms has also led to threats of action at the *Daily Post* in North Wales (Mayhew, 2018b). Some newspapers have tried to find a different business model to keep a large readership with sales in decline such as the *Manchester Evening News*. In 2006 the newspaper's average daily sale was 95,727 copies (ABC, 2016a) and it moved to giving away 50,000 copies a week free of charge (Campaign, 2006) to attract a new audience to the newspaper. This strategy changed in 2009 when the newspaper decided to be paid for Monday to Wednesday only, but give away 90,000 copies a week copies in the city centre (Guardian, 2009). According to (ABC, 2016), just 56 percent of the Manchester Evening News was actively purchase. However, this model is based on advertising revenues remaining steady or growing and the income being at a good level to maintain profitability. Referring back to (Hill, 2016) the regional newspaper model was based on 80 percent of its revenue coming from advertising and 20 percent from cover price. However, recent performance figures from Reach PLC indicate the decline in income from advertising and the importance of cover price which made up more than 61.2 percent of the income (Reach PLC, 2019). This shows the decline in advertising and brings into question the future prosperity of a free newspaper based on one sole provider of revenue, advertising.

The decline in print is not unique to the UK. In America, the industry was described as being in the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression (Kirchhoff, 2009). Also, according to Lepore (2019) 500 dailies had closed in America between 1970-2016 and that between January 2017 and April, 2018, a third of the nation's largest newspapers, including the *Denver Post* and the *San Jose Mercury News*, reported layoffs. In Canada the government announced a package of funding for journalism to allow non-profit news organisations to receive charitable donations and introduce a new refundable tax credit to support original news content creation (Government of Canada, 2018). The Government has decided to fund aspects of journalism on the back of statistics which show that 250 community newspapers in the country have closed between 2008-2018 (Watson, 2018). Across Europe there has also been a decline in print. In Spain newspaper circulations has continued to decline almost 10% of the sale lost in 2017. Daily copies fell below two million – less than half the number sold just a decade ago (Reuters 2017). The report adds that leading titles, *El País* (-14%), *El Mundo* (-18.5%), and *ABC* (-14%), suffered the biggest year-on-year declines and for the first time in almost six decades, no single newspaper sold more than 200,000 daily copies overall.

## Circulation decline and digitalisation

Research has been undertaken concerning the rise of the internet and its effect on the regional press (Ramsey, G, Moore M, 2016; *The Economist*, 2006), but little analysis have been conducted concerning cover price rises. According to (Snoddy, cited Mair et al., 2016) after serving local communities for 300 years, the life of local newspapers could be coming to an end with the loss of advertising revenue and sales decline. With readership and income falling, the industry set about on a series of cost-cutting exercises. In an effort to shore up and maintain income, regional newspapers also decided to increase the cost of their products.





**Figure one: circulation decline as newspaper prices rise.**

Cost-cutting measures such as the move to single editions printed overnight and not live, a decline in pagination and stories have turned readers away (Oakley, 2012).

The emphasis of the newsroom has also changed dramatically from newspaper first to digital first. Reach PLC, formerly Trinity Mirror, the biggest newspaper group in Britain with 240 regional titles, introduced the 3.1 newsroom in 2014. It was then described by Neil Benson, editorial director of Trinity Mirror Regionals, as ‘crossing the Rubicon’ (Reid, 2014) because it was not just a move to a multi-media newsroom, but to a digital first operation.

## Empirical investigation into regional newspapers

### Results/findings

This section looks in detail at the 10 newspapers used for this research. It looks briefly at the history of each newspaper and then charts the price rises and its effect on the sale of the newspapers, also describing any anomalies which may have affected individual titles.

#### Newsquest publication: The *Bournemouth Daily Echo*

The *Bournemouth Daily Echo* was established in 1900, with its first issue published on August 20, 1900, (Bournemouth Daily Echo, 2017). Today it is part of the Newsquest Group, which describes itself as having more than 165 news brands and 40 magazines in print and digital. Its parent company is Gannett, which is the largest news publisher in the US (Newsquest, 2017). Between 2006 and 2016 the Echo lost 19,073

newspaper sales at an average of 1,907 copies per year. In 2016 it sold a daily average of 13,579, in December 2006 this figure was 32,652. The cost of the paper went from 35p to 68p, a 33p rise in 10 years or 21.76 percent increase (ABC, 2017). By way of comparison, the cost of milk from 2006-2016 rose by 35 percent, from 31p to 42p per pint, even though there is more fluctuation in this market (Statistic, 2003-2015). There are two large price rises. Between 2006-08 the price went up 5p to 40p, a 14 percent increase and the sales decreased at a modest 1,898, 5.8 percent. This was low compared with the previous year, which is not in this sample, but as a comparison was a loss of 4,126 in 2005. After 2006-2008, there is an increasing sales decline each year with 2008-2010 showing a loss of 2,890 copies, a 2p price rise to 42p, 5 percent increase and 2010-2012, a loss of 3,742, a 3p price rise to 45p, or 7 percent rise. The most dramatic fall is between 2012-2014 when the price went up 20p over the two years, from 45p to 65p or a 44.44 percent increase and the paper's decline is 7,204, effectively almost double the previous two-year figure. This is a sales decline of 29.86 percent on the back of a 44.44 percent price rise (ABC, 2017). The final period 2014-2016 shows a 3p price rise, 4.61 percent increase, a smaller decline, with the loss standing at 3,339, 19.7 percent sales decline.

Newsquest has had the same problems as other groups in the industry in the UK. In 2006 parent company Gannett blamed its decline in revenue firmly at the foot of the Newsquest arm (FT.com, 2006). It has also gone down the cost-cutting route of creating production hubs in Newport and Weymouth and getting rid of locally produced newspapers (BBC News, 2017). In 2018, the newspaper was selling on average of 11,521 and cost 70p (Mon-Fri), 2p higher than in 2016, or 2.8 percent price rise, having lost 2,058 copies, 15.1 percent down.

### **CN Group publication: *Carlisle News and Star* (now part of Newsquest)**

The *Carlisle News and Star* was part of the CN Group which has a history dating back to 1815 with the *News and Star* being opened in 1967 (Cumbria Newspapers Group, 2017). However, it was sold in 2018 to Newsquest (BBC News, 2018). The newspaper increased in price between 2006-2016 from 40p to 75p, a 35p rise or 87.5 percent. In the 10 years surveyed, the newspaper lost 14,688 copies, from 24,053 to 9,365. These figures were collated by joining together two separate editions of the newspaper, east and west (ABC, 2017). The difference with the decline with this newspaper and others in this sample is how evenly spread the decline is, there are no large decreases based on substantial price rises. The 10p price rise between 2012-2014 from 50p to 60p, a 20 percent rise in price, delivered a 22.26% decline in sales, 3,358 copies. However, if you look at the decline for all the years based on price rises of 2p in 2006-2008, from 40p-42p, a 5 percent price rise; 3p in 2008-2010, from 45p-48p, a 7.1 percent price rise; 5p in 2010-2012, from 45p-50p, a 11.11 per price rise; 10p in 2012-2014, from 50p-60p, a 20 percent price rise; and 15p in 2014-2016, from 50p to 75p, a 25 percent price rise, the loss of sales is reasonably even. So 2p equated to a sales loss of 2,877; 3p to 3,310, 5p to 2,783, 10p to 3,358 and 15p to 2,361. The newspaper also suffered job losses and industrial unrest during the last decade. In 2007 there was a threat of industrial action after CN scrapped the firm's final salary pension scheme (Press Gazette, 2007). A year later there were plans to lose around 30 jobs announced by the CN Group across its titles and a possible pay freeze (Ponsford, 2008). In 2014 it was announced that the paper would go to overnight printing. This transition period from a daily to a morning newspaper from 2014-2016 (Turvill, 2014) brought the second largest percentage sales decline, 20 percent, 2,361 copies, but this also included the biggest rise in the cost of the newspaper from 15p to 75p. In 2018, the newspaper was selling on average of 7,476 and cost 85p (Mon-Fri), 10p higher than in 2016 having lost- 1,889 copies, 20.1% down.

### **Reach PLC, *The Bristol Post*, *Newcastle Chronicle*, *Stoke Sentinel***

The *Bristol Post* and *The Sentinel* were part of the Northcliffe Newspaper group which was sold to a new company, Local World, in 2012 (BBC News, 2012). Three years later, in 2015, Local World was sold in a £220m deal to Trinity Mirror, now Reach PLC, to make TM the biggest newspaper group in the country (Sweeney, 2015). The *Newcastle Chronicle* was already part of the Mirror group. All three newspapers are now part of the newly-named TM Group, Reach PLC (Tobitt, 2018).

The *Post* is a daily newspaper and website covering Bristol, South Gloucestershire, and parts of Somerset (Bristol Post, 2017). **It was founded in 1932. In 2009, like many regional newspapers, it became a daily newspaper with a single edition** (Dearlove, 2012). **This article also reveals that in April 2012 the newspaper stopped producing a Saturday edition with the loss of 20 jobs. Between 2006 and 2016 the *Post* lost 37,288 newspaper sales, or an average of 3,728 copies a year** (ABC, 2006; 2016). In 2006 the paper cost 35p, by 2008 this was 37p, a 5.1 percent price rise and the sales fell by 14.9 percent, 8,147 copies, across the two years or on average 7.7 percent or 4,073 copies a year (ABC, 2006; 2016).

Between 2008 and 2010 there was a 1p rise in cost, 0.5p per year, 2.7 percent price rise, but the decline was 14.1 percent, less than the 14.9 percent from the previous two years, perhaps reflecting the effect of a smaller price increase. The figures show that between 2008 and 2010 the paper lost 6,578 copies, an average of 3,289 per year, close to the 10-year average. Between 2010-2016, the Post went from 39,944 copies a day to 17,381, a loss on average of 3,760 per year, with price increases of 7p, 15p and 10p across three two-year periods. In 2012, the newspaper cost 45p, a 7p increase from 2010, a 18.42% cost rise. The paper lost 19.35% of its sale or 7,730 copies. In 2014 the paper cost 60p, an increase of 15p from 2012, a 33.33% cost rise. Sales declined by 25.1% or 8,087 copies. Finally, in 2016 the paper cost 70p, a 10p rise on 2014, a 16.66% rise. The decline in sale was 27.96% or 6,746 copies.

It is clear from this that the two-year period with the biggest percentage sales decline was between 2012-2014 and this matches the biggest rise in cost, 15p. There were bigger sales losses for the newspaper, between 2008 and 2010 when 8,147 copies disappeared, but this could have been partly to do with the move to printing one edition overnight, a decision taken in 2009. In June 2012, the newspaper took the step of going to five days a week and getting rid of its Saturday edition. It was claimed that the move saw an 8,000 rise in Friday's sales (Lambourne, 2012). However, the figures compiled for this report look at Monday to Friday editions only and the rise for Fridays is not noticeable with a decline between 2012 and 2014 of 25.1 percent or just over 12.5 percent per year. In 2018, the newspaper was selling on average of 13,102 and cost 85p (Mon-Fri), 15p higher than in 2016 having lost 4,279 copies, 24.6% down.

The first edition of the *Evening Chronicle* newspaper was in November 1885. In 10 years, the *Chronicle* increased its price by 23p, from 42p to 65p and the circulation fell from 81,139 to 26,578, a loss of 54,561 sales, a 67 percent drop over 10 years (ABC, 2017). In percentage terms, the biggest decline happened when the newspaper went up 7p to 55p, a 14.5 percent cover price rise, in 2012-2014, when the decline in sales was 22.7 percent, from 45,225 a day average sale to 34,954, a 10,271 sales decline and between 2014-2016 when the price went up 10p to 65p and the decline was 23.9 percent from 34,954 to 26,578 copies per day, a loss of 8,376. However, the biggest loss of physical sales happened between 2006-2008 when 14,036 sales disappeared, 17.29 percent decline, when the price rose just 2p to 44p. Outside influences during this period include a number of restructuring plans for the newsroom, job losses and the closure of district offices. Also, in the north-east the building society Northern Rock collapsed in 2007 sending shock waves through the area (O'Connell, 2017) and this was followed by the world financial collapse in 2008 which caused economic problems across the world (Mathiason, 2008). Perhaps, this was a factor in 23 journalists losing their jobs at the *Chronicle* in 2008 (Ponsford, 2008). These changes happened during the period highlighted in this research when there was the biggest physical drop in sales. In 2011 the newspaper started printing overnight (Press Gazette, 2011) and the press was closed in Newcastle (Linford, 2015). Finally, in 2014, it was revealed that the *Chronicle* newsroom would become a digitally-led news operation (Reid, 2014b). In 2018, the newspaper was selling on average of 19,259 and cost 75p (Mon-Fri), 10p higher than in 2016, 7,319 copies down on 2016, or 27.5% down.

*The Sentinel*, Stoke-on-Trent became an evening newspaper covering the Potteries and south Cheshire in April, 1873. Its circulation grew rapidly and went from 1,800 a day to 125,000 in 1973. *The Sentinel*, like other newspapers, showed a large decline between 2006-2008, a period of austerity, which saw a 1p price rise, a 3.1 percent increase, bring about a 7,972 decline, an average of 3,986 per year, from 66,021 to 58,049, a 12 percent decline in sale. The larger price rises between 2012-2016 did bring bigger decreases in sale and there is a consistency in an average of more than 4,000 sales decline per year. From 2010-2012 the paper rose in price by 5p to 40p, a rise of 14.3 percent, with a sales fall of 8,546, from 51,730 average daily sale to 43,184; 2012-2014, a 10p rise to 50p, a 25 percent price rise, brought a sales decline of 8,072, from 43,184 to 35,112 average copy sale a day; in 2014-2016, *The Sentinel* increased again by 10p to 60p, a 20 percent price rise, the sales decline was 8,455, from 35,112 average copy sale per day to 26,657. The largest percentage sales decrease was between 2014-2016, 24 percent, from 35,112 to 26,657 (ABC, 2017). It is worth noting that *The Sentinel* was the cheapest newspaper in the group at the start of the period studied in 2006 at 32p and the cheapest in 2016 with the *Wolverhampton Express and Star* at 60p. Despite this, like other newspapers, there has been a consistency in decline. Like the *Bristol Post*, *The Sentinel* was affected by Northcliffe's cost-cutting Aim Higher initiative which looked to make £45m savings by September 2007 (holdthefrontpagestaff, 2007). This led to job reductions, reduction in newspaper paginations and the move towards large subbing hubs. In 2012, the central subbing hub was dismantled but this led to further job cuts (Pugh, 2012). In 2009 *The Sentinel* also moved to printing overnight and its editions disappeared in 2014 (*The Sentinel*, 2014). In 2018, the newspaper was selling on average of 20,682 and cost 70p (Mon-Fri), 10p higher than in 2016, 7,319 copies down on 2016, or 27.5% down.

## Midland News Association: *The Wolverhampton Express & Star*

The paper was founded in the city in the 1880s by the Scottish-American millionaire Andrew Carnegie and a group of radical Liberal Party members, including Thomas Graham. The *Express & Star* has steadily overtaken its rivals to become the biggest-selling regional evening newspaper in Britain outside London (Express & Star, 2017). MNA owns more than 20 newspapers and a handful of radio stations. During the last decade it has been involved in major restructuring such as the loss of 120 jobs in 2008 (The Guardian, 2008). It has also, like many other titles moved to overnight printing (Linford, 2014). In 2006, the Express and Star was the biggest selling regional newspaper outside of London, selling 146,000 papers a night. From 2006 to 2016 the newspaper increased in price by 25p from 35p to 60p, while sales dropped from 143,571 to 54,890, a loss of 88,681, or on average 8,868 copies a year, a 61.7 percent decline (ABC, 2017). The biggest decline in sales came out of the blue between 2010-2012 when the newspaper lost 23,193 copies on the back of a 2p, from 40p-42p, or a 5 per rise over two years, a decline of 19.82 or 9.9 percent a year (ABC, 2017). There is no direct reason for this sudden decline, but with the announcement the closure of the newspaper's sports edition and some of its Saturday editions, this may have provided a backdrop to accentuate the fall with the price rise (Birmingham Post, 2009). The following four years, with a price increase of 8p, from 42p-50p, a 19 percent rise, between 2012-2014 and 10p, from 50p-60p, a 20 percent rise, between 2014-2016 this also heralded big sales losses and larger percentage sales decline. Between 2012-2014 the newspaper lost 22,214 copies, 23.68 percent, from 93,799 to 71,585 average daily sale; between 2014-2016 it lost 16,695 copies, 23.32 percent of its sale from 71,585 to 54,890, once again showing that the cost of the paper going up from 42p to 50p, a 19 percent rise, 50p to 60p, a 20 percent rise, may have been a reason for sales being hit hard. In 2018, the newspaper was selling on average of 38,690 and cost 70p (Mon-Fri), 16,200 copies down on 2016, or 29.5% down.

## JPIMedia, *The Gazette*, *Blackpool*, *Sheffield Star*

Both newspapers are now owned by the newly created JPIMedia, which bought the newspapers from Johnston Press after agreeing to wipe out £135m of the company's debts in return for control of the business (Linford, 2018). *The Gazette* first started publishing on April 3, 1873 (Rhodes, 2013). It was sold to Johnston Press (holdthefrontpage, 2007) in a £560m deal from Regional Independent Media (RIM) before being sold on again, like the Star in 2017. In 2006, *The Gazette* sold 31,509 daily, but this dropped to 9,537 in the 10-year period, a loss of 21,972. What is striking about the *Blackpool Gazette* is the consistency of sales loss, from 2008 to 2016, but this could reflect similar price rises; the number of copies lost in every two-year period is close, 4,541, 3,683, 5,607, 4,111, 4,030. The largest slump in sales was between 2010-2012 when the paper lost 5,607 on the back of its first 10p rise, which took the paper's price to 60p, a 20 percent rise, one of three 10p rises (2008-2010; 2010-2012; 2012-2014) which saw the newspaper also lose 4,111 and 4,030 copies.

This paper is another example of one which lost sales heavily between 2006-2008, the start of a period of austerity, sales dropped 4,541 on the back of a 3p rise, from 37p-40p, a 8.1 percent increase. After the three 10p rises on the bounce, the newspaper increased in price by 5p between 2014-2016, but even this failed to halt the slide with a decrease in sale of 4,030. By 2016, the newspaper cost 75p and was selling 9,537 a day (ABC, 2017). Both the *Gazette* and *Star* have a similar history in terms of cost-cutting and staff reductions. As far back as 2004 there were industrial problems with strike action in a dispute over pay (Press Gazette, 2004). The theme of industrial unrest continued with a petition set-up in 2008 over staff cuts (Press Gazette, 2008). There were also been a number of job losses at the *Gazette* with the loss of production jobs (Ponsford, 2010) and a work to rule over the introduction of a new production system, Atex. In 2018, the *Gazette* was selling on average of 7,010 and cost 85p (Mon-Fri), 2,527 copies down on 2016, or 26.5% down.

Before the *Sheffield Star* became *The Star*, it was originally the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* which was first published on June 7, 1887, by W. C. Leng and Company (British Newspaper Archive, 2017). *The Star* has increased its price by 32p in 10 years, from 38p to 70p. In 2006 the paper sold 55,285 copies, but by 2016 this had fallen to 16,708, a loss of 38,577. The newspaper's sale was hardest hit between 2010-2012 on the back of a 15p, a 33.33 percent price rise, from 45p in 2010 to 60p in 2012 as the sale dropped from 37,354 to 31,304 average sale per day, 16 percent decrease in sale. The average daily sale dropped in 2012 from 31,303 to 21,437 in 2014, a loss of 9,867 (ABC, 2015) or a 31.5 percent decline. One of the cost-cutting measures of Johnston Press was to close publications and this included in 2013 the shutting down of the newspaper's sports paper, the *Green 'Un* after 106 years (Hollander, 2013). The research highlighted that the sales of the *Green 'Un* were wrapped into the sale of the main newspaper, prior to closure. The additional sales from the *Green 'Un* were removed from the figures for this research. In the final sales figures for the *Sheffield Star* 2008-2010, 1,609 *Green 'Un* sales were taken out, 2010-2012, 1,426 and 2012-2014,



688 copies. In 2018 *The Star* average daily sale was 12,609, 4,099 copies a day on 2016, or a decline of 24 percent. It costs 78p, an 8p rise since 2018, or a 11 percent increase in cover price.

## Archant, the *Ipswich Star*, *Norwich News*

Both newspapers are part of the group Archant Group. They were in the Eastern Counties Newspapers Group but the group changed its name to Archant to have broader appeal around the country in 2002 (Archant, 2017). *The Star* started publishing between 1885-93 (British Newspaper Archive, 2017). The newspaper has gone up 31p in 10 years, from 44p to 75p, an 83 percent rise, and its circulation has declined from 21,115 to 6,884, a loss of 14,231 copies during the decade (ABC, 2017). What is interesting about *The Star* is that there were several strategies to halt the decline of the newspaper, which included reducing the cost of the newspaper between 2010-2012 and then adding free delivery copies to its sales figure. Due to this, it would have been difficult to calculate the impact of the price on the number of copies sold. A decision was taken to remove the free copies from the figure to give a more accurate picture of what was going on with the newspaper with regards to being actively purchased. The newspaper went up 1p, from 44p to 45p, or a rise of 2.7 percent, between 2006-2008 and lost 3,567 in copies or 16.89 percent of the sale. Between 2008-2010 it reduced its price by 5p, from 45p to 40p, or 11%, the only newspaper in this sample to do this, and the sales fell by 2,140 or 12.19%, so this strategy did stem the tide of decline to an extent and points the finger at cover price as being a cause for accentuated or decelerated decline. In the next two years, 2010-2012, the newspaper then increased its cover price by 20p from 40p to 60p, a 50 percent rise, and the sale went down by 3,395 or 22.03%. Also between 2010-2012, the newspaper started delivering free copies through letterboxes, a total of 4,770 (ABC, 2017; ABC 2006-2012; 2006; Pugh, 2012b).

During the following four-year period the newspaper continued to distribute free copies, 3,773 during 2012-2014 and 3,254 copies during 2014-2016. Intriguingly, after the 20p price rise in 2010-2012, the newspaper then had a price freeze between 2012-2014, but this saw a decline of 3,352 or 27.9%, its biggest percentage decline during the whole period, but not the largest loss of copy sale. Effectively, the idea to freeze the price, possibly in an attempt to stop the decline, failed as sales went down heavily. There are two possible reasons for this, it was the previous 20p price rise ripple effect with more readers deciding to turn their back on the newspaper in terms of actively purchasing it, or the free distribution having an effect, the figures for the decline and the free delivery are similar with 3,254 fewer distributed free compared with a decline of 3,352, people stopped buying the paper because they were getting it for free. The price freeze policy changed between 2014-2016 with a large 15p increase, from 60p to 75p, a 25 percent increase, which saw sales losses of 1,777 or 20.51%. The sale of *The Star* in 2016 was 6,884 with the free deliveries taken off. In 2018, the *Star* was selling on average of 5,423 and cost 80p (Mon-Fri), a 6.6 percent rise, 1,461 copies down on 2016, or 21.2% down.

The price of the *Norwich News* between 2006-2016 rose by 37p, from 38p to 75p, a 102 percent increase, and the sale fell from 24,322 to 9,172 in 2016, 15,150 copies, a 62 percent decline. The newspaper price rises during that period are consistently higher than the average, going up 4p, 6p, 7p, 5p and 15p, compared with smaller rises of others in the sample group. The 7p rise between 2010-2012, from 48p to 55p, a 14 percent rise in cover price, saw the biggest decline in sales, 5,601 or 29.59 percent, from 18,923 to 13,322 average daily sale. The 5p rise between 2012-2014, from 55p to 60p, an increase of 9 percent, also hit sale, with a reduction of 2,719 or 20.4 percent. The biggest sales loss outside these dates is when 4p was put on the price between 2006-2008, from 38p to 42p, an increase of 10.5 percent, and the paper lost 3,292 copies or 13.57 percent of the sale. The 15p price rise between 2014-2016, from 60p to 75p, a 25 percent increase, saw a slowing up of the decline with 1,431 copies lost, 13.49 of the sale. Looking across the other newspapers, there is an argument to say that decline starts to plateau in the last period with a number of newspapers showing a drop in the percentage of decline such as the *Ipswich Star*, *Norwich Evening News*, *Bournemouth Echo*, *Carlisle News and Star* and *Sheffield Star*, but it is not consistent across the whole group of newspapers (ABC, 2017).

Similar to other newspapers in this sample, both papers had a lot of upheaval during the period of this research. In 2006 Archant Norfolk had 197 editorial staff across its newsrooms (Lagan, 2006). After that there were a number of job cuts including a planned 54 in 2009 (McNally, 2009) which was later reduced to 34. Further job losses included 20 in 2011 (Pugh, 2011) and 24 in 2013 (Pugh, 2013). The *Norwich* paper moved to print overnight in February 2011 (Norwich News, 2017). Interestingly, Archant admitted in 2015 that it had off-set revenue decline by raising the price of the newspaper (Sharman, 2015), but as pointed out by (Ponsford, 2013) the worse performing newspapers in 2013 were those with the biggest price increases. In 2018, *The News* was selling on average of 6,351 and cost 80p (Mon-Fri), 2,821 copies down on 2016, or 30.7% down.



How steep cover price rises increased the speed of the slow death of regional newspapers

This research shows that there is a direct correlation between price increases and newspaper sales decline. Whenever the price of a newspaper rose substantially in price, the sales of newspapers generally declined in greater numbers. Traditional wisdom asserts that the decline of print has always been blamed on the rise of the web. However, this research shows it was the reaction of regional daily newspapers to the web, in attempting to maintain income by increasing the cover price, which helped speed up declining sales. As far as can be ascertained, no-one else has done this kind of research, drilling down into the cost of the newspaper as being a cause for sales decline. This research is limited, it only looks at 10 regional newspapers in England. This research could be expanded with a bigger sample group and compare it with more detailed experiences across the world. The implications for this research are that regional daily newspapers need to look at their pricing strategies in a bid to slow the decline down. In 10 years these newspapers lost an average around two thirds of their sale (average 64.5 percent).

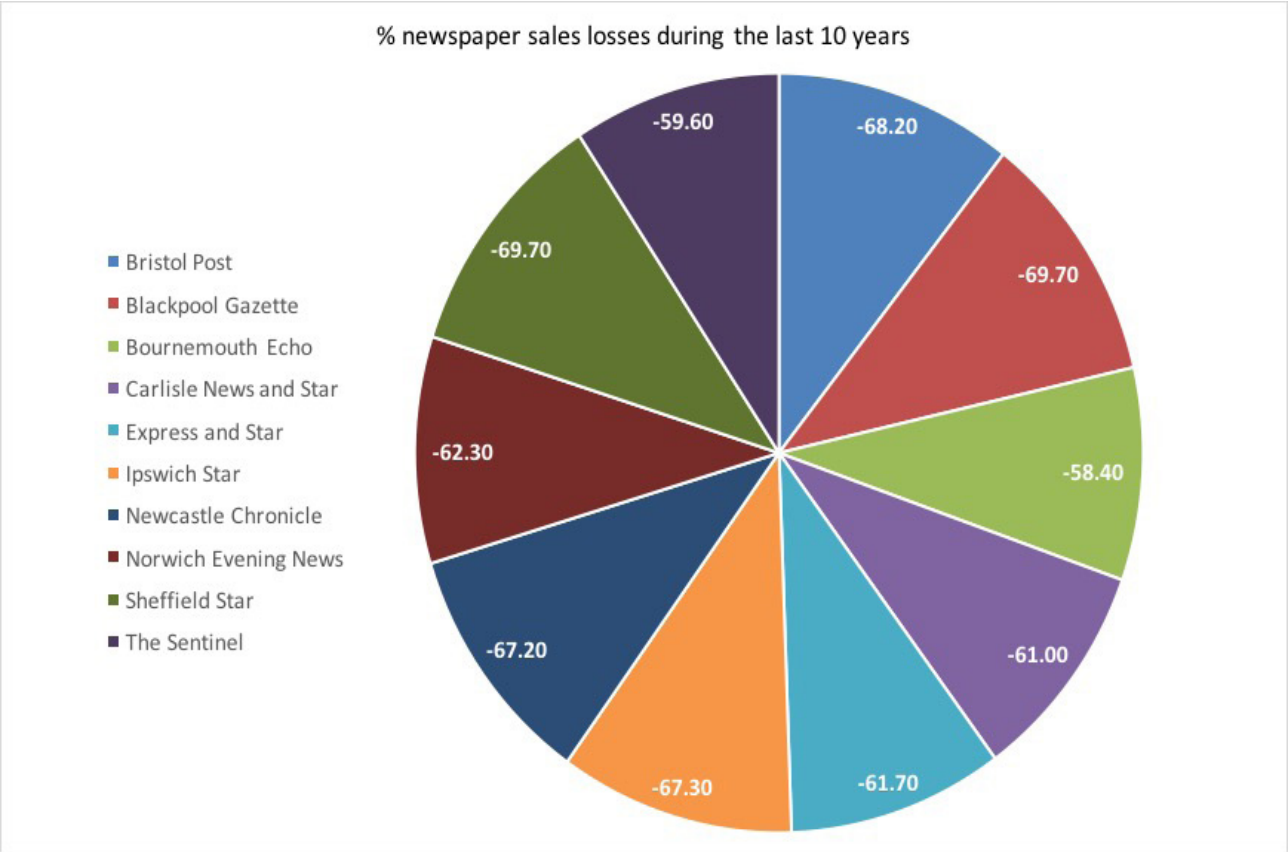


Figure 2: The overall percentage loss of sales for all newspapers in this study during a 10-year period 2006-2016.

## Conclusion

At this rate of decline, the future of paid-for regional newspapers is bleak.

This paper has looked at a possible solution in terms of newspapers becoming different models similar to the *London Standard*, the *Metro* and the part-paid for and part-free model of the *Manchester Evening News*. As discussed, the *Standard* was making money until recently when profits slumped (Sweney, 2018). The concern is that these formats are based on advertising income being maintained and in the regional newspaper industry this has seen a dramatic decline with a 69 percent drop in advertising revenue in a decade (Cairncross, 2019). Little has been written about the decline of regional newspapers in terms of discussing whether cover price has had an impact on sales decline. An article in the *UK Press Gazette* (Turvill, 2014) did look at the decline of national newspapers in relation to cover price, but nothing that focuses on the re-

gional daily press. The idea of this research was to show that while the web 'stole' readers from the regional daily newspapers, it was the reaction of these newspapers which added to the decline. There are a lot of external factors which affected the decline in sales and sometimes skew the figures such as the economy, printing overnight, loss of editions and loss of staff. However, it was desperation which led to steep cover price rises and the fall in sales. Newspapers simply did not know how to deal with the situation as they leaked money both from advertising and loss of newspaper sales. Traditionally, cover price was kept low to ensure high readership. However, this paper shows that with readership and advertising income in terminal decline, cover price has been used to provide vital income for daily regional newspapers and there is a correlation between increasing cost of regional daily newspapers and the accentuation of the decline in those reading the publications.

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# Is it possible to get 100% at university? The flaws of the UK grading system and their impacts on media assessments

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## Abstract

There are two marking scales running in parallel in the UK higher education system: one is the honours-class, and the other, the percentages from zero to 100. The consequence of this double standard is the adoption of a hybrid scale that impairs the performance assessment, as students' marks rarely break the range of 80 in Humanities and other soft-sciences. The problem is accentuated in Journalism and Media areas, where the assessment criteria are often subjective. This article uses a mixed-methods approach based on the critical incident technique to discuss why this flaw exists. This study also offers a cross-cultural analysis to understand the consequences of using a deformed grading scale. It also critically approaches the subjectivity of evaluations and the international portability of the degrees based on the British honours systems.

**Keywords:** Assessment, internationalisation, degree portability, criterion-referencing, constructive alignment

# Introduction

**Among the hardest academic duties is the need to measure students' achievements and translate their performances into a number to represent the achievements of the learning outcomes in a coursework, a module or a programme. It is even harder if the marking criteria is subjective, as is common in Journalism and Media related subjects.**

In the UK, this process is especially difficult as two different grading systems coexist with distinct rules, not always interchangeable. Firstly, the country follows its traditional honour-class system, broadly recognised by the industry in the UK. The system ranks the successful students' performance in four different categories: third-class honours (40 to 49%), second-lower class (50 to 59%), second-upper class (60 to 69%), and first-class honours (above 70%). The second grading system running in parallel is more refined and internationally recognisable, offering a percentage range that, officially, progresses arithmetically from 0 to 100. However, this full range of marks is not commonly used in Humanities and other *soft-sciences* (Cole, 2003), and it is often limited by the application of the honours scale.

This article focuses on Journalism undergraduate programmes and uses a combination of methods to explore the impacts of this shortened scale and the flaws of presenting the students with subjective marking criteria. This critical approach (Muncle, 2006) considers a cross-cultural debate and uses the incident technique to 'create a functional description of an activity' (Borgen et al., 2008, p. 158). In this case, it refers to the observation of the marking process and its undisclosed rules in journalism education.

As a starting point, this study found evidence of these unwritten rules. It used a combination of observations and students' testimonials posted to a public digital forum - The Student Room - that defines itself as 'the largest student community in the world' (TSR). In this specific forum, 106 answers were posted in response to the question 'Is it possible to get 100% at uni?' (TSR, 2010), as it will be detailed.

This critical reflection also discusses the subjective language used to describe the marking criteria and the lack of a constructive alignment in some Journalism assessments. To conclude, it offers a cross-cultural analysis to illustrate the consequences of using a flawed grading scale.

## Assessment and marking disarray

Assessment is a critical component of the educational process, as it 'tells students what is valued and what they need to achieve to be successful in their studies' (Carless, 2015, p. 9). Diagnosis, feedback and standards are the main reasons to assess the students in order to verify their progress, reinforce learning, certify achievement, maintain quality, and predict future performance, among other functions (Reece et al., 2006) and it is intrinsically connected to marking. Postman (2011) suggests that the use of numbers or symbols to quantify someone's behaviours is embedded in the modern society in a way that its essence shapes educators and other practitioners' behaviour. It is exactly this mathematical understanding that puts the assessment in a difficult situation: to stick to its essence, as a derivation of a pure science, it implies the necessity of clear and objective criteria and, overall, the ability of being reproduced within a clear mathematical scale. However, more subjective approaches are frequently adopted to measure the students' performance (Kolen and Brennan, 2004).

Ideally, criterion-referenced assessment should determine what students know and can do in relation to a well-defined domain of knowledge and skills, rather than in relation to other students (Hambleton and Li, 2005). Scores must be interpreted in relation to a set of performance standards. Biggs and Tang (2011, p. 108) highlight the importance of constructively aligning the learning outcomes of modules with teaching and assessment in order to provide a 'supportive learning system' for students. This process of constructive alignment, however, is more challenging when the learning outcomes in many journalism modules ask for the learners to accomplish tasks to *professional*, *publishable* or *industry standards*.

The highlighted terms are vague and can be ambiguous, as journalistic content that is professionally published can vary greatly in composition, content, format and quality. Using such terminology to describe the learning outcomes of practice-based modules and assignments is not always in the best interest of the students but rather a shortcut to maintain the validated programme's documentation aligned to the quickly evolving media landscape. It transfers the interpretation of what *professional*, *publishable* or to *industry standards* mean to the tutor, leaving an opening to justify any subjective marking.

It shows that constructive alignment and criterion-referencing (Jervis and Jervis, 2005) have advantages but the reliability can be compromised by personal judgements if the marking criteria uses subjective language. In theory, true criterion-referencing would only allow for specific understandings but Sadler (2005) believes that, even where detailed criteria are used 'the fundamental judgments teachers make about the quality of student work remain subjective and substantially hidden from the students' view'. His belief echoes the thoughts of Delandshere (2001, p. 121) who claims that the perspectives of assessors are 'rarely explicit or public, and hence, not open for scrutiny or discussion'. In short, objectivity in grading is almost a fallacy and it gets worse if the marking criteria is subjective.

## Managing the subjectivity

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education sets frameworks that, in theory, enable the 'comparability of academic standards, especially in the European context; support international competitiveness; and facilitate student and graduate mobility' (QAA, 2014, p. 5). The descriptors define different standards for each level (Moon, 2003). They are not directly connected to professional standards but to the developmental process at a specific educational level. As levels are hierarchical, the work of a level 4 student should demand a lower level of complexity than the requirements for a level 5 student within the same programme. For that reason, describing the outcomes as *professional*, *publishable* or to *industry standards* is clearly imprecise.

According to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the process of assessment 'must be designed and carried out in such a way that it is effective in enabling students to demonstrate their achievement of the intended learning outcomes (or the extent of that achievement)' (QAA, 2014). To comply with it, one can assume that a full achievement needs to be demonstrated within the expectations for a specific level, not compared to a standard that is outside the scope and abilities of an ongoing learning process.

In theory, marking criteria could bring clarity to subjective terms used on official documentation, but as Knight (2002, p. 280) argues, marking criteria are commonly created to assess the demonstration of 'fuzzy learning outcomes', and only have a meaning in local communities of practice. Sadler (2005) suggests that the focus in higher education should be on standards rather than criteria but it only opens the debate about the set of standards the students should follow, as the range of practices in the industry differ broadly.

Universities across the UK try to avoid discrepancies in assessments by hiring external examiners to verify the reliability of the marking. However, marking is not consistent and assessment criteria has multiple limitations (Bloxham et al., 2016), and 'the virtues of double-marking as a check on standards are not as clear-cut as some believe' (Yorke, 2011, p. 256). The widespread unspoken rules of using a shorter range of scores are commonly reproduced by the external examiners as they use it in their own home institutions, perpetuating the practice in a vicious circle. At the end, what happens in Media and Journalism schools, in reality, is not as straightforward as the academics would like to believe, because the measurement of performances 'is not a matter of counting marks but of making holistic judgments' (Biggs, 2003, p. 6).

## Uninterchangeable systems

There is a second complicator to Journalism and Media students in the UK on top of not having a precise definition of assessment standards. Most universities in the country adopt the official marking range from 0 to 100, with 40 being the minimum pass mark at undergraduate level. In addition to this scale, in the UK, 'successful candidates in honours degree examinations are placed in different classes according to their performance, first class being the highest' – ranked with 70 or above, followed by Class II - Division 1 (60 to 69); Class II - Division 2 (50 to 59); Class III (40 – 49) (Kogan, 2015, p. 34). In theory, each one of the honours classes would represent an alternative grade description: Class 1 for A; Class II – Division 1, popularly named as 2:1, for B; Class II – Division 2, the 2:2, for C; and Class III for D (Ellet, 2015).

The problem resides around the unspoken rules of marking, intrinsically connected to the British university culture, as will be discussed. The range of marks routinely adopted rarely positions the grading curve within the 100 available points: it is restricted to something between 35 and 75, eventually, going from 30 to 80. The contrast between the praxis and the official rules is so evident that even documents from 'the national body which champions teaching excellence' (HEA, 2017) reveals it. In a report discussing a pilot project for the introduction of the Grade Point Average (GPA) system, the conversion table shows no differentiation for the marking above 75 percent - considering it all as an A+ - despite the 25 possible marks

above that line. It reveals a discrepancy from the arithmetical progression in relation to the other scales. It also does not offer different grades for the values under 29 percent (HEA, 2014).

## Discrepancies

These unofficial rules that define a shorter range of grades seem to be accepted with no questions among the lecturers but they are also a common sense among the students. As mentioned before, 106 answers were posted to the question ‘Is it possible to get 100% at uni?’ (TSR, 2010). After a non-reactive content analysis (Neuman, 2007, p. 227), 68 responses were computed as valid for the sample (not being emojis, excluding non-related comments or replies from the author of the question). Out of them, 48 (70.58 percent of the valid answers) said that is not possible to achieve a 100 at university; 16 (23.52 percent) offered a partial concordance, always mentioning it is possible only in areas such as Maths, Statistics or Physics, multiple choices examinations or, in Humanities, only in grammar exams; only four (5.88 percent) suggested that it is possible to achieve full marks. In this case, the respondents mentioned that they achieved those marks when the coursework assessed was a technical laboratory report or when they went beyond the requirements for a specific essay.

The unspoken rule that limits the range of marks can be clearly grasped in comments such as: ‘Getting over 75 percent in an essay subject is very difficult. Over 80 percent is near unheard of’; ‘It gets progressively harder to obtain the mark passed around 65 percent. Subsequently, by the time you’re in the mid 70’s, it’s near impossible to progress further without writing material that is potentially publishable’. In this case, it demonstrates the marking criteria is misaligned with the learning outcomes for a specific level. ‘So if you fulfil all the requirements, you generally get given a mark around the 80s as there’s no set percentage for what you’d assume a 90 percent or 100 percent essay would be’. However, there are discouraging statements that exemplify the students’ disbelief in a fair marking: ‘In a humanities subject, it’s not even virtually impossible, it’s completely impossible’ (TSR, 2010).

As noted by the students, in Maths, Physics, Statistics and other sciences that fall into the hard-pure-non-life classification (Biglan, 1973), where raw scores are more frequent, or where the criterion-referencing does not leave place for much subjectivity, the disparity on using the full range is not so evident and it is confirmed by a higher number of first honours degrees in comparison to other subjects (Yorke et al., 2000; Brint et al., 2012). However, the discrepancy should not occur, as all subjects are regulated by the same rules, and the full range must be applied in the same way. In fact, it does not happen. ‘How can a judgement be made regarding the relative equity of grading in different subjects when there appear to be different marking traditions that have to be added to the epistemological differences between the subjects themselves?’ (Yorke et al., 2000).

The subjectivity of marking in Journalism and Media seems to create a threshold for students’ achievements above a certain grade. The main concern caused by it is not about the chances to achieve a first-class degree (Yorke, 2017). The problem is the disarray in using the full range added to the subjectivity of the marking criteria and what this means for the students to produce *professional*, *publishable* or *industry standard* work in order to be graded with a 100.

In fact, there are unanswered questions in the UK, especially if the commonly accepted practices in higher education are observed from a cross-cultural perspective: what happened after 70? Which are the criteria to distribute 31 marks within a first-class honours? What are the implications of neglecting the use of all the 100 available marks?

## Criticism to the honours’ classes

Criticisms towards a current honour system that is ‘no longer fit for purpose’ (Sabur, 2015) are increasing (Yorke, 2017). The dissatisfaction is leading to the search for a solution that provides a better representation of the actual learning performances. One of the suggestions is moving towards the American system, the grade point average (GPA), that ‘provides students with a more precise grade’ (Shaw, 2015), by having a cumulative performance that varies from F- to A+ (FC, 2017a). The irony is that the official percentage system in place already allows such differentiations if used independently, disconnected from the honours classification.



However, when overlaying the two systems (0 to 100 and honours), it is not possible to contemplate a continual arithmetic ruler of marks, with a similar value within each one of the honours classes. The ruler has distinct segments with different values that contain the mark range for each specific honours classification (see Figure 1). From that perspective, in the UK, it is possible to suggest that the marking process will occur in three different moments (Ebel and Cunningham, 2017). First, by the examiner roughly determining if the assessment is a pass or a fail. Second, and almost concomitantly, the assessment's grade is placed within an honours' segment: a third, a 2:2, a 2:1, and a first-class.

The third step refines the position of the student's work within the specific honours' segment. It will be mentally recognised by the lecturer as weak, medium or good within that range and it will be assigned a place in one of the extremities or in the middle of the segment, receiving a numerical representation in a scale from 0 to 9. For example: the examiner identifies a piece of work that is a pass, they consider that represents a 2:1, but a relatively weak example. In this case, the marks will be something between 60 and 63. A medium quality work in the 2:1 range, will be marked as 64 to 66. A good 2:1 will receive above 67. This process seems to be widely adopted and culturally accepted in the UK.

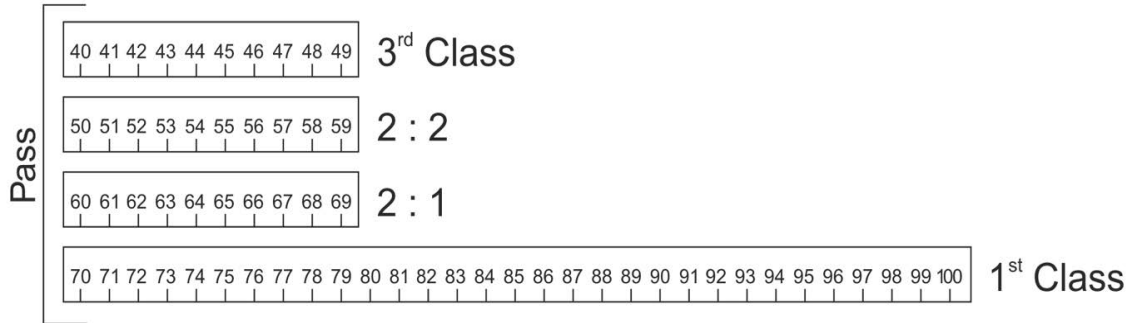


Figure 1. The distribution of the marks is not a continuous ruler but a series of classification segments

Based on that, one can observe that the tutors are comfortable to mark the students within segments containing a 10-mark range. The big marking discrepancy starts after the examiner decides that the work being assessed is a first-class. In that segment, comprising 31 possible marks from 70, what happens is a repetition of the progression used for the 10-mark segments. This arithmetical calculation helps to explain why the summative assessments rarely receive marks above 80 in Journalism and Media subjects. Inside that segment, the refinement does not follow the same elasticity. A low first will be marked between 70 and 73. A medium, from 75 to 76. A good one rarely will pass the barrier of the 80, because the lecturers are not used to calibrating the gap between the marks available within the first-class segment, and still mark the students in that category with the same grade distribution as they do in the other classifications.

To ensure a fair grading, the progression should respect the same distribution logic above the 70 within the first-class honour range. If compared to each mark awarded from 40 to 70, the equivalent progression above 70 would be around three marks (see Figure 2). A fair marking system will provide the same positioning within the segment as happens in the other classes (Ebel and Cunningham, 2017). For instance, within the range of the first-class distribution, a relatively weaker piece of work will be marked from 70 to 79. A medium quality piece with the first-class attributes will range from 80 to 89. The very best first-class work will be marked above 90, until reaching the most outstanding 100, representing not the perfection but the full achievement of non-subjective learning outcomes.

This necessary debate is still not receiving the required attention. A pilot using GPA marking implemented in the UK suggests a higher motivation and engagement from the students, as the grades reflect performance more precisely, ensuring a differentiation between one learner that has a 60 from another

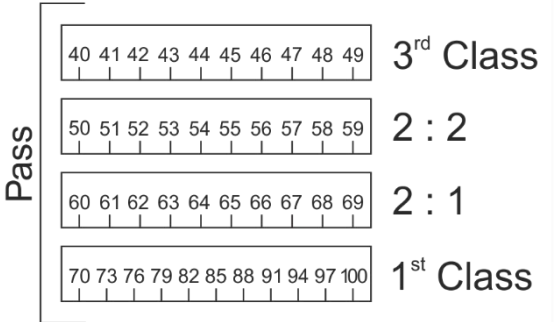


Figure 2. Recalibrating the elasticity within the first-class segment

that has a 69 (Shaw, 2015). If an improving system can be beneficial to better describe performances as it helps to differentiate the achievements within one honours class (the equivalent of ten marks), it seems it

would be even more beneficial for the larger gaps, such as the one currently in use to generalise different performances as a first-class honours (31 marks, from 70 to 100).

At the same time, on the other end of the scale, the definition of the pass mark of 40 also needs to be more detailed. In a system that, officially, has 100 possible marks to be awarded, ‘it may be difficult to justify awarding a pass where the candidate achieves less than half the learning outcomes’ (Karran, 2005, p. 11). If compared to other international systems (Study in Europe, 2017), the requirements in the UK do not seem challenging enough.

## International perspectives

The inconsistency of marking and the lack of using the full range of grades affects the honours distinctions across subjects (Hornby, 2003). At the same time, the discrepancies of fitting the grading curve into a shorter range affects British students looking to continue their studies abroad as the honours scheme has no parallels in most foreign cultures (Nuffic, 2015). By neglecting the full range of grades to accommodate the marking within cultural practices, unofficially aligned the honours scheme, British universities inflict a poorer grade conversion on their students in relation to the grades obtained in countries that traditionally use the full range (Lounes; TSR, 2010; Mendes, 2014).

It is understandable that health, social and political uncertainties could interfere with student mobility in the future but, so far, more than 200 thousand British students have benefited from the Erasmus exchange programme, including a period at a university abroad as part of the under or post-graduate curricula (Black, 2017). In total, 70 percent of the mobility takes place in Europe, with France (25 percent), Spain (17 percent) and Germany (9 percent) as the favourite destinations for Britons (Boe et al., 2015) – countries that do not adopt or directly recognise the honours classification scheme used in the UK.

In France, the grading system goes from 0 to 20. The equivalent of an A is awarded for marks from 16 to 18, and a A+ for above 18 (Univ-Lille, 2017). The country faces a similar misuse of the full range of grades as the one observed in the UK. ‘Even though professors grade on a scale of 20, the highest possible grade is 17 in most cases. In reality, the highest grade will be a 14, and 12 and 13 are considered excellent grades’ (Lounes, 2017). THF - Très Honorable avec Felicitations du Jury (Highly Honourable with Praise) grades, referring to marks from 18 to 20, are ‘relatively rare’ (FC, 2017b).

| England |                 |                 | France |                 |                 | Germany |                 |                 | Spain |                 |                 |
|---------|-----------------|-----------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Scale   | Equi-<br>valent | Per-<br>centage | Scale  | Equi-<br>valent | Per-<br>centage | Scale   | Equiva-<br>lent | Percen-<br>tage | Scale | Equiva-<br>lent | Per-<br>centage |
| 100     | A               | 100             | 20     | A               | 100             | 1.0     | A               | 90-100          | 10    | A               | 100             |
| 90      | A               | 90              | 19     | A               |                 | 1.3     | A               | 85-89           | 9     | A               | 90              |
| 80      | A               | 80              | 18     | A               | 80 +            | 1.7     | B               | 82-84           | 8     | B               | 80              |
| 70      | A               | 70              | 17     | A               |                 | 2.0     | B               | 79-81           | 7     | C               | 70              |
| 60      | B               | 60              | 16     | B               | 70              | 2.3     | B               | 75-78           | 6     | D               | 60              |
| 50      | C               | 50              | 15     | B               |                 | 2.7     | C               | 72-74           | 5     | E               | 50              |
| 40      | D               | 40              | 14     | B               |                 | 3.0     | C               | 69-71           | 4     | F               | 40              |
| 30      | F               | 30              | 13     | C               | 60              | 3.3     | C               | 65-68           | 3     | F               |                 |
| 20      | F               | 20              | 12     | C               | 55              | 3.7     | D               | 60-64           | 2     | F               |                 |
| 10      | F               | 10              | 11     | E               | 50              | 4.0     | D               | 50-59           | 1     | F               |                 |
|         |                 |                 | 10     | E               | 40              | 4.3     | F               | 49 -            | 0     | F               |                 |
|         |                 |                 | 9      | F               |                 | 4.7     | F               |                 |       |                 |                 |
|         |                 |                 | 8 - 0  | F               | 30 -            | 5.0     | F               |                 |       |                 |                 |

Table sources: University of Greenwich (UoG, 2017); Study in Europe (2017); University of Bonn (2017)

Table 1. The marking scale and the equivalents in the popular destinations for UK students

In Germany, the marking scale goes from 5 to 1, with 1 being the best possible achievement (HS-KL, 2017). Average grades starting with 1 (1.0, 1.3, 1.7) are quite common (Quora, 2014). In fact, higher grades seem to be more often applied in Social Sciences and Humanities – essay-based, in general – than in pure sciences, where exams – including oral tests – are more common (Academia, 2014). Spanish universities use a marking system from 0 to 10, 10 being the equivalent of a 100 percent of achievement (Uni Granada, 2017) and using the full range is a common practice (Chacón, 2015).

## The conversion dilemma

As seen, the marking scales and systems vary largely across European countries and, in some cases, even from one institution to another within the same country. The conversion systems in place are not flawless (Karran, 2005). *Table 1* illustrates the score that the student needs to achieve for the equivalent of an A – or a first-class honours – in terms of percentage, in three different countries. In the UK, any mark from 70 will be translated into an A. In France, where the full range is also not used, the student should get 75 or above for the same A. In Germany, where the full range is broadly applied, an A is the translation for marks above 85 percent. In Spain, the same concept is assigned only for the students achieving above 90 percent. It is clear that a pure mathematical conversion will be rather unfair. By removing the cultural aspects of the marking, the students interested in translating grades obtained in the UK will be at a disadvantage.

Two real cases observed by the authors in previous teaching experiences help to understand the discrepancies. The examples express one possible conversion between grades obtained in Germany and the UK but in fact, there is no common sense (FC; Uni Queen Mary; Gov.uk, 2017; Study in Europe, 2017; Uni Bristol, 2017).

The first situation shows an inflation of the grades during conversion from a mark obtained in Germany to the UK. In this specific situation, a British undergraduate Media student was enrolled in a German institution for a semester abroad and was marked with a 2.7 for an essay. In the German institution it is the equivalent of a C+. However, in the German scale, the C+ represents the equivalent of 72 percent to 74 percent, which when translated to the British system will be interpreted as an A (first-class honours). The same grade, that probably would have left a German student disappointed, when re-signified in a different cultural context, was effusively celebrated by the British undergraduate.

The second case showed the opposite and involved a student who graduated in the UK with a first-class degree (with an average mark of 76) in BA (Hons) Journalism. The student was interested in an international masters in Media Studies in Germany (in English and with no tuition fees). The electronic application form, that triggers the selection process, required the student to input the grading data and the conversion of the grades was done automatically, from a pure mathematical perspective. The form had a field requiring the student to input the maximum possible mark for the country of origin (in the UK, officially a 100) and the minimum pass mark (40). Based on that, the first honours degree, with an average of 76 was converted to the German scale as a 2.2, the equivalent of a B- ('Grade calculator', 2017), as algorithms interpret the equivalent only as a mathematical operation, not as a subjective system connected to local cultural values. The score was not enough to allow the student to proceed with the application (that accepted only graduates with the equivalent of an A or B+), causing unnecessary stress and disappointment for a high-performing student.

## Conclusion

There are two serious disarrays in the way that British universities evaluate students in Journalism and Media programmes. One is subject related, as the wording used to describe learning outcomes and consequently the marking criteria is subjective and open to interpretations that suggest unattainable performances. In many cases, the misalignment prevents students from being objectively evaluated against realistic standards. The use of definitions such as *professional*, *publishable* or *industry standards* are in disarray with good practices, as the students can be evaluated in relation to standards that are beyond the learning outcomes for a specific level.

The second problem is a wider spread practice in British academia: the cultural habit of not using the full range of marks (0-100) due to the juxtaposition of uninterchangeable marking systems, where two grading scales run in parallel. One is represented by the traditional honours classes, that roughly divides perfor-

mance in four passing categories, identifying anything marked with a 70 or above as a first-class honours. The second one is more refined and portable, assigning a percentage value in a scale from 0 to 100. In an attempt to combine both, academics tend to shrink the marking range from 30 to 80, damaging the numerical representation of the student's performance, especially in Humanities and other *soft-sciences*, where the learners perceive it to be virtually impossible to achieve the mythical 100. The full-scale range needs to undergo a recalibration to ensure the same elasticity across the available marks. It must be done because by neglecting use of the full range, academics deprive students' competitiveness outside the UK borders, going against the higher education internationalisation frameworks.

The implications of having one broad mark range (0 to 100) and adopting an unofficial smaller version (30 to 80) connected to unrealistic and subjective learning outcomes and marking criteria descriptors go far beyond the classroom. It affects the student stimulus, the quality indicators, the good practice, and the internationalisation of Journalism and Media programmes. The British honours system needs to undergo a revision to restate its validity (or not). The existence of two parallel marking systems in the UK must be questioned and the measures require a mobilisation of the sector and the engagement of the authorities.

Nevertheless, there are changes that are unpinned to the political scenario. The quality assurance needs to start with the careful description of the learning outcomes and the appliance of a constructive alignment through every validation process. The requirements to achieve those learning outcomes must be translated with precise and objective marking criteria. The marking process itself must be done by objectively comparing the performance to the learning outcomes, enabling the students to be awarded the full range of marks. The British higher education sector, especially within Journalism and Media schools, must remove its cultural bias in assessment to prevent students from graduating with grades that do not reflect their real performances in a multicultural scenario.

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## Kovach and Rosenstiel's *Elements of Journalism*: a foundational text or a moment in history?

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### Abstract

For many journalism students and teachers, and indeed working journalists, Kovach and Rosenstiel's elements of journalism, as set out in their book *Elements of Journal-*

ism have become veritable tablets of journalistic stone. Their Elements are seen by many as the definitive statement of ethical journalism practice. The book, first published in 2001, was based on the findings of an inquiry by the Committee of Concerned Journalists who gathered some of America's "most influential news-people" and, according to the book's blurb: "Through exhaustive research, surveys, interviews, and public forums, they identified the essential elements that define journalism and its role in our society." This paper asks whether Kovach and Rosenstiel's work – last updated in 2014 - should be regarded as a foundational text for journalists across the world, or as just an interesting reflection on the state of journalism in the United States at the turn of the century? For four basic reasons this paper argues for the latter. First, although when the book was first published in 2001 when we only had glimpses of the impact that web 2.0 would have on almost every aspect of journalism, by 2014 it was pretty clear that it had been transformative. And whilst in their updated version there is some recognition of this, in a world in which the very notion of who is a journalist has come under intense scrutiny, Kovach and Rosenstiel's analysis appears to be somewhat dated. Second, do the Elements, even updated, help in combatting 'fake news' however defined? Third, the book's sub-title "what newspeople should know and the public should expect" implies a division between news producers and news consumers that is no longer appropriate. And finally, behind the Elements lurks the twin shadowy notions of 'the truth' and 'objectivity' which still lie at the core of American journalism practice and education but which are highly contested elsewhere. The article will

argue that whilst Kovach and Rosenstiel have made an important historical contribution to the debate about journalism ethics – they have not produced universal and enduring tablets of journalistic stone (indeed, given the changing dynamics of contemporary journalism such an artifice would be outdated even before publication).

## Introduction

**For many journalism students and teachers, and indeed working journalists, Kovach and Rosenstiel's 'elements of journalism', as set out in their book *The Elements of Journalism: What News People Should Know and the Public Should Expect*, (2014) have become veritable tablets of journalistic stone.**

Their *Elements* are seen by many as encompassing the definitive statement of professional, ethical journalism practice. The book, first published in 2001, was based on the findings of an inquiry by the Committee of Concerned Journalists who gathered some of America's "most influential news-people" and, according to the book's blurb: "Through exhaustive research, surveys, interviews, and public forums, they identified the essential elements that define journalism and its role in our society."

In many ways this is a very good guide to journalism practice containing useful practical insights combined with a plethora of enlightening anecdotes and some indications of a number of theoretical approaches to journalism and journalism studies. But this article asks whether Kovach and Rosenstiel's work – last updated in 2014 – should be regarded as a foundational text for journalists across the world, or just an interesting and useful reflection on the state of journalism in the United States at the turn of the century?

There are three substantive reasons why this article argues for the latter interpretation.

The authors' understanding of the notion of 'the truth' – which is a cornerstone of their elements – is problematic and there is also an unsatisfactory engagement with the debates around objectivity.

The tone (and content) of the book has an underpinning assumption that American journalism values and practices are universal and this coupled with a discomfiting 'Pollyannaism' gives it a certain unworldliness.

And linked to this unworldliness there is a naivety, even for a book published in 2014, about the supposed liberating powers of the internet and the 'wonders of citizen journalism'; as a result, readers could be forgiven for being somewhat baffled by the subsequent rise of 'fake news' (a phenomenon that came to prominence after the book's publication date).

Before engaging with these substantive points there are three minor (though significant) issues to be mentioned. First, the main title, 'Elements of Journalism' is somewhat misleading. It should more correctly be titled 'Elements of News Journalism' – a feature writer, a showbiz reporter or a columnist, for example, might find significant parts of this book not just irrelevant but inappropriate. Then there is the book's subtitle: "What newspeople should know and the public should expect"; this implies a division between news producers and news consumers that is arguably no longer appropriate. Indeed, the entire debate about who is a journalist and, indeed, what is journalism, is now at the very heart of the journalistic debate as the formal boundaries between producers and audience continue to dissolve. One final quibble; the introductory chapter is headed 'What is Journalism For' and the authors go on to tell us: "The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with information they need to be free and self-governing" (Ibid. p. 17) It is a fine-sounding declaration but does it really have any meaning other than something to be carved over the portico of the entrance to a media publishing house? But just to confuse us, a little later we are told "The essential product of journalism is trust" (Ibid, p 83) – so which is it – one, both, neither, or should authors of journalism texts seek to avoid any such grand-sounding aphorisms?

## The 'Truth'

At the core of the book is a problematic and confusing notion of the 'truth'. The chapter heading for the very first Element is, "Truth: the First and Most Confusing Principle" (Ibid. p. 47) and shortly after we have a section heading "Journalism's first obligation is to the truth" (Ibid p. 49). So we begin with the notion that 'truth' is the first obligation but a confusing one. The authors then go on to compound the confusion by writing "On this [the obligation to the truth] there is absolute unanimity and also utter confusion: everyone agrees journalists must tell the truth, yet people are befuddled about "the truth" means." (Ibid. p. 49) – hardly surprising.

The problem that the authors keep confronting is that they seem to be aware that, in most cases, the notion of a definable 'truth' is hugely problematic but cannot bring themselves to admit that in most cases it doesn't actually exist in the singular there are as many truths as there are observers. The result is that they are in danger of sending young journalists on what amounts to a wild goose chase in pursuit of a non-existent truth. If it doesn't exist, as such, then it can't be found and to suggest to would-be journalists that they should be pursuing a chimera is, at the very least, unhelpful.

This argument should not be interpreted as a crude postmodernist Nietzschean notion of there being no such thing as the truth per se, rather it is to suggest that in most situations, whilst there might be obtainable facts, there are many truths depending on who is being asked. It is a position closer to Lyotards' argument that

*"...truth is always contingent on historical and social context rather than being absolute and universal and that truth is always partial and "at issue" rather than being complete and certain. (Aylesworth, 2015).*

In other words there are 'truths' for journalists to uncover but rarely 'the truth'. This is not to deny that there are not observable facts – the car was travelling on the wrong side of the road, a cyclist was in the middle of the road, the car struck the cyclist. But why was the car on the wrong side of the road, maybe avoiding a pedestrian, why was the cyclist in the middle of the road, maybe to avoid a pothole and why did the collision happen, perhaps it was night time and the cyclist had no lights? In other words is there not one truth about this accident but many.

This is not to argue that journalists should not always be 'truthful' - there are verifiable facts which journalists should obtain, check and publish, and nor should they resile from attempting to distinguish 'true facts' from false ones. But this does not imply that there is a pot of gold at the end of the journalists' rainbow labelled 'the truth'; although Kovach and Rosenstiel suggest that it does exist and is worth pursuing when they write: "We understand truth is a goal – at best elusive – and still embrace it" (Op cit. p. 58/9)

Tony Harcup put the notion of the 'the truth' into a more rounded context when he wrote:

*"Journalists aim to get as close to the truth as possible within the constraints under which they work and in as far as the facts of the matter under consideration are known to anyone. However, all the potential facts will be subjected to a process of selection and construction of news that is often said to simplify the messiness of reality into neat narratives. Also, exactly what the best obtainable version of the truth is may change over time as more information becomes available and/or more sources speak out. Furthermore, what is regarded as being true may also depend on the background and predispositions of journalists, sources, and members of the audience..." (Harcup, 2014, p. 140)*

Or, as put more succinctly by veteran Watergate reporter Carl Bernstein, who said journalists' mission was to seek "the best obtainable version of the truth" (Bernstein, 1998)

Deliberate falsification in journalism is rare - we will come back to 'fake news' later - but arguments as to what are and are not the most important elements of a particular event are not, and this is where the problem lies. For example, a reporter sent to cover a political gathering listens to perhaps an hour of speeches, followed by an hour of further contributions from the audience. What does he or she extract for a two-minute news package, or a 300-word story? Is it the main point the speaker is attempting to make? Or is it the central point of the speech as the journalist ascertains it, which might well be different from the intention of the speaker? Or is it the line that s/he, and the other journalists covering the meeting, subsequently agree upon? Or even, the line fed to the journalist by the speaker's spin doctor before the speech had even begun?

One thing is for sure, members of the audience will be unlikely to agree with the journalist's choice of lead. This is partly because, as Harcup notes (Ibid.) we all tend to experience the same event slightly differently, even if all things are equal; but in the case of the political meeting all things are not equal. Supporters of the speaker will undoubtedly appraise the speech more enthusiastically than any reporter could or should, and opponents will undoubtedly take a more negative view. Then, what of the other speakers? Are they to be

totally ignored in order to ensure that the main speaker's remarks get a prominent airing? And how about the contributions—heckles or questions - from the audience (if any), are they a part of the story? Which brings us to the bigger question. No political reporter goes to a meeting just to hear a speaker per se. They go to hear what the speaker has to say about a particularly salient issue. Should the speaker use the occasion to re-state his or her party's (or government's) well-known position that might constitute a story, but not an important one. However, should the speaker attack his or her party, or colleagues, then that becomes 'news' and takes precedence over all else. In other words, there are many ways of reporting a political meeting—dependent on the framing - all true but none of them necessarily the 'truth'.

Kovach and Rosenstiel clearly do recognise the problematics of fetishising the 'truth' and they do say that "the truth is a complicated and sometimes contradictory phenomenon, but if it is seen as a process over time journalism can get at it..." (Op. Cit. p. 58) The problem is that it isn't a "process" – at least not in common parlance – the truth is a noun, which suggests a verifiable existing fact which, in most cases, it isn't.

The UK media's 'difficulties' over reporting Brexit are a vivid example of how dangerous an illusion the notion of 'the truth' can be? Following the 2019 elections for the European Parliament, in which the UK was obliged to participate despite its commitment to leave the EU, the Brexit Party, who as their name suggests were very much in favour of the UK's withdrawal, finished first achieving 31.6% of the vote leading them to claim to have 'won' that election. But the parties that were wholly opposed to the UK's withdrawal gained 40% of the vote and hence they too claimed that they had won the vote. And the ruling Conservative Party, which came fourth, claimed that the election simply demonstrated how divided the country was and nobody had won the election. So there was no single truth just a number of truths, all of which differed but all were factually correct.

In a final attempt to justify building their elements on the shaky foundation of the 'truth' the authors posit that: "Coherence must be the ultimate test of journalistic truth" (Op. Cit. p. 57). But this is naïve. Any competent spin doctor can make any number of seemingly problematic statements appear coherent, and therefore, to follow Kovach and Rosenstiel's argument, these statements become the 'truth'. Politicians, or more probably their communications advisors, usually, try and ensure that their statements, particularly on controversial issues, leave them with, what is known as, 'wriggle room'. In other words they seek to ensure that their pronouncements are sufficiently ambiguous to enable them to present their latest prognostications as being consistent with their previous statements, despite the appearance of inconsistencies or lack of 'coherence'.

## The ongoing objectivity obsession

Closely linked to debates around 'truth' are those around 'objectivity' – another chimera that journalists pursue in vain. A forcible reminder of the pointlessness of its pursuit was demonstrated in 2018 when the UK minister then responsible for the media, Matt Hancock, told an audience at the Oxford Media Convention:

*"Objectivity means stating this fact is wrong, and that fact is true, and not giving any airtime to total nonsense at all. Where facts can be established, your duty is to tell the truth. Objective reality exists. Your job is to find it and tell it."* (Hancock, 2018).

At least Kovach and Rosenstiel do accept the problematics surrounding 'objectivity' but still display what almost amounts to a nostalgic longing for it when they head their section discussing this issue as 'The Lost meaning of Objectivity' (Op. Cit. p. 101) The section begins with a quote from Dan Gilmour who states: "We are human. We have biases and backgrounds and a variety of conflicts that we bring to our jobs every day." (Op. Cit. p. 101) And the authors note that he suggests abandoning the word altogether and replacing it with "thoroughness, accuracy, fairness and transparency" (Op. Cit. p. 101) But Kovach and Rosenstiel are clearly reluctant to let go of objectivity completely, instead arguing: "The call for objectivity was an appeal for journalists to develop a consistent method of testing information – a transparent approach to evidence – precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work." (Op. Cit. p. 101) But objectivity (like truth) is not a process it is a noun which implies it is something that actually exists. It does not; and it would be far healthier if journalism text books dropped the term altogether, or at least only discussed it to discount it. As this author has argued elsewhere (Gaber, 2015) 'fairness' is a far more worthy goal for journalists to pursue. And whilst, like objectivity, it is also a process rather than an end in itself, for the individual journalist it does have some sort of reality, which is revealed if, after completing a story, they interrogate themselves sufficiently robustly as to whether – given all the material they have collected – they



have been fair to all involved in the story and also fair to the audience.

Because the authors clearly recognise the fundamental weaknesses surrounding the notion of objectivity as a mythical journalistic mountain-top, they look for other ways to define it. In the final chapter of the book they remind readers that in their chapter on verification (Chapter Four) they had "... called on journalists to make a major shift toward transparency, arguing that this concept came closer to the real meaning of objectivity than the more muddled notions connected to neutrality that some journalists have used." (Op. Cit. p. 290). One wonders why they, like other journalism instructors, don't just cease trying to square this particular circle and abandon the idea of objectivity (and the truth for that matter) once and for all?

## Pollyanna-ism

*Elements* also displays a rather simplified view of the journalistic process and one that is essentially viewed, through a Stars and Stripes lens. One small, but significant, example of this is their assertion that the *New York Times* has become "... the most influential newspaper in New York and then the world (Op. Cit. p. 74)". This sort of statement is akin to assertions such as "we" (in this case the UK) have "the best broadcasting system in the world". It might be the case, but who is to judge, who is to say? In the case of the authors' assertion about the *Times*, it ignores the claims of the *Daily Mail* and the *Guardian*, both of whose websites have many more daily users than the *Times*, nor the claims of Japan's *Yomiuri Shimbun* which has a print circulation four times that of the *New York Times*.

This American bias could be discounted were it not for the fact that it perhaps explains the problematic tone of the book (a tone which bleeds into its substance). This tone can be characterised as "all is for the best in the best of all worlds". This is manifest early on when the authors trace the beginnings of newspapers in America to a golden age of small-town communities – an interpretation which relies more on American folklore than historical accuracy: and they betray a similar naivety in their descriptions of the origins of the Habermassian public sphere in eighteenth century European coffee houses when they write:

*"Community creation has always been at the heart of news from the earliest days of newspapers growing out of the conversation that occurred in coffeehouses to the communities of citizens and journalists that form and reform around breaking news stories or communities of interest on social platforms such as Twitter"* (Op. Cit. p.153)

Most interpretations of the motivations of American newspaper proprietors in the last century, as with the merchants' conversing in the coffee houses of Europe in the century before, suggest that commerce and profit were at the forefront of their considerations rather than Kovach and Rosenstiel's notion of "community creation". As Michael Schudson put it: "Commercial motives propelled American journalism from its beginnings" (2008, p. 28)

This Pollyannaism is, to some extent, fundamental to the authors' argument. They have section heads that enjoin journalists to be independent from "class or economic status" (Op. Cit. p.157) and from "race, ethnicity, religion and gender" (Op. Cit. p.161). This is all fanciful. As Harcup earlier argued journalists, like any other social animal, are shaped by their backgrounds, experiences and dispositions - which cannot be simply wished away. As a political reporter this author was always deeply suspicious of those of his colleagues who would claim to have "no political views". What they were in fact saying, unless they were being mendacious, is that they were not aware of their own political views, which is a hazardous state to be in if one is seeking to produce politically unbiased coverage. The notion that journalists can somehow transcend their own backgrounds, gender, ethnicity etc is, I fear, naïve not to say potentially dangerous.

Perhaps even more profoundly mistaken is the authors' views of how the capitalist system works and how it intrudes on virtually every aspect of journalism. They have an almost blind faith in the perfectibility of capitalism: "History promises that a market economy in an open society has the capacity to correct its mistakes organically" (Op. Cit. p.190), they write. Clearly 'history' promises nothing and its supposed ability to correct its own mistakes was not on show when the world economy crashed in 2008 and more parochially as newspapers in the US and elsewhere suffered, and continue to suffer, potentially mortal wounds as a result of the growing dominance of the big tech players - Google, Facebook, Apple etc.

This unreality also permeates of the authors' vision of life in the newsroom of today. "Journalists have an obligation to exercise the personal conscience (Op. Cit. p.272) they write and " ... journalists have a responsibility to voice their personal conscience out loud and allow others around them to do so as well" (Op. Cit. p.272). They make these statements without any suggestion that in today's work environment of unpaid internships, freelance assignments and zero hours contracts, journalists just don't have the freedom to call

out their bosses should they deem them to be crossing some ethical line - indeed there was no golden age when this was ever feasible. Although in a tone that sounds more like whistling in the dark than a reality-based observation they say: "Those who run news organisations must encourage and allow staff to exercise this personal obligation" (Op. Cit. p.273) And if that doesn't work they almost urge working journalists to martyr themselves when they write: "In the end most journalists should feel that communicating to fellow citizens is a mission that transcends the institution where they work. That it is something of a calling and everyone who works in a newsroom is a steward of that mission page" (Op. Cit. p.284). At this point it might have been appropriate to have had some discussion about the role of trade unions in protecting journalists who speak out against unethical practices, but of this there is no mention. Indeed, throughout the entire 334 pages of the book, journalists' trade unions receive no mentions whatsoever.

In Kovach and Rosenstiel's world journalists are seen as essentially free agents, able to write what they like without constraint "...for truth to prevail, journalists must make clear to whom they owe their first loyalty" to which they argue it is to 'the citizen' rather than as it is in the real world - the employer.

That might have been the notion behind the early years of small-town journalism in the US when the press developed under the carapace of 'serving the community' But even then it was something of a myth and has become increasingly so. For the defining characteristic of mainstream media in the US (and much of the rest of the world) is that it is, for the most part, either a creature of the state or commercially driven. In the States most newspapers are privately-owned as are the major broadcasting outlets. Hence, in crude terms the journalists' first loyalty is not to the audience, as Kovach and Rosenstiel argue, but to preserving her or his job and that means obeying the diktats of the management hierarchy who are mainly, and understandably, focussed on the bottom line.

Hence, the first 'loyalty' of the journalist might be, notionally, to the audience but only to the audience as consumers rather than citizens. This means, inevitably, that the choice of stories to be covered is largely determined by what the audience wants, rather than what they might need. But this is ignored by the authors who write: "Thus people who produce journalism have different loyalties from employees engaged in other types of work. They have a social obligation that at times overrides employers or financial sponsors immediate interests, and yet this obligation is the source of their employers' financial success." (Op. Cit. p.73). This is, I fear, in the context of the commercial media, close to delusional, as is their statement: "Journalism works best when both sides are committed to the values of honest independent news, not one side to business or ideology and some other cause and the other to public service. History suggests that this works only when the owner of the operation believes deeply in these core journalistic values." (Op. Cit. p.92)

## The Online world and fake news

Pollyannaism is also much in evidence in the discussion about the Web and whether, in terms of journalism, it is essentially a benign or malign factor. In the first edition of the book, published in 2001, we only had glimpses of the impact that Web 2.0 would have on almost every aspect of journalism, but by 2014 it was pretty clear that it had been, and would continue to be transformative, mainly as a result of the rise of social media. And whilst in their updated version there is some recognition of this Kovach and Rosenstiel's analysis appears to be somewhat dated; their guidance for journalists working on/with/against online news and social media would find little to assist them, as they seek to navigate their way through the shark-infested waters of the online world, where 'fake news' would soon be found lurking.

The authors begin their discussion about online journalism identifying the key issue when they write:

*"It has become fashionable recent years to wonder who is and who isn't a journalist. We think this is the wrong question. The question people should ask is whether or not the person in question is doing journalism.... Anyone can be a journalist not everyone is" (Op. Cit. p.144/145)*

As the digital revolution gathered momentum a number of respected scholars saw, or tried to see, in the growth of social media the possibilities of an idealised electronic public sphere. Followers of Habermas, if not the man himself, evinced great enthusiasm for the democratic potentials of the internet as a means of bypassing the traditional domination of the public sphere by the capitalist media. Habermas himself was not so sure. In 2006 he argued that far from the internet being the realisation of his notion of 'communicative action', the internet in fact performed a 'parasitical' role in the public sphere because of the fragmentation that inevitably arose from a communication medium that was essentially individualised (Habermas, (2006, p411-426). And the distinguished political communications scholar, Jay Blumler, moved from initial enthusiasm about the democratic potential of the web, to pessimism and back again to optimism as he became

enthused by the notion of the web providing “an online civic commons” (Blumler & Coleman, 2009). However, by the following year he (and his fellow author) were beginning to worry about the ratio of ‘signal to noise’ in the new online dispensation. (2010, pp. 139-154). Nonetheless such arguments did not detain Kovach and Rosenstiel who allowed their Pollyannaism to kick in when they asserted: “The web is a self-cleaning oven” (Op. Cit. p.199) It might have appeared to be the case in its earliest incarnations but surely by 2014 it would have been clear that this was a long way from the reality.

Fake news, as a major problem for journalists, only arose in 2016 during the Trump presidential campaign, hence its absence from the 2014 edition of the book is hardly surprising but given the upbeat tone of this edition one wonders how the issue will be tackled? Certainly, in terms of predicting the key issues that will be facing journalists in the future the authors did not predict either the mendacity of the web or the rise of fake news.

Having identified a number of flaws in the book it is only right that the conclusion of this article should reaffirm its beginning. In other words, in highlighting those aspects of the book that appear to fall short, it is also important to recognise that the broad thrust, not to mention much of the detail, makes this one of the best general books about journalism currently available. But journalism is undergoing rapid change and the speed of that change is intensifying. In these circumstances it is to be hoped that a book that has the standing of *Elements* should be updated and re-published – and in so doing perhaps some of the shortcomings and contradictions addressed in this article may be resolved.

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# Confessional journalism and podcasting

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## Abstract

Broadcast reporters are trained to report on a story and not express opinions. Staying impartial is fundamental to their role and forms part of the UK broadcasting regulator Ofcom's code, but what happens when the reporter is the story? In 2017, I was diagnosed with an extremely rare form of abdominal cancer. Medical literature quotes just 153 recorded cases of cystic peritoneal mesothelioma in the world. Apart from a few tentative tweets to see if I could find any other people with the same cancer, I didn't tell my story. This is in complete contrast to my fellow news presenter on BBC Radio 5live, Rachael Bland - when diagnosed with breast cancer, she told her story. She blogged, tweeted and posted on Instagram as well as presenting an award-winning podcast. She wanted to report on her cancer to help as many people as possible know the facts. Sadly, Rachael died in September 2018. In the many tributes following her death, many said she had changed the conversation around cancer, normalising the talk about the disease.

With the rise of the podcast, there is a new type of confessional journalism. Broadcasters are expressing their opinions and telling previously untold stories in a new

way. Newspaper columnists have done this for years but for impartial broadcasters, trained not to express opinions when reporting on a story, a fundamental change is taking place as they start to tell their own stories adapting to a new storytelling genre. Using Rachael Bland and others as case studies, this paper focuses on podcasts and their potential for opening up new, more intimate and subjective spaces in contemporary broadcasting, challenging the accepted rules of objectivity and impartiality and telling those untold personal stories to new audiences.

## Introduction

**Confessional journalism allows journalists to share deeply personal stories about themselves. Rosalind Coward (2010, p.224) describes it as “autobiographical writing exposing intimate personal details [which is] part of [a] rapidly growing cultural trend towards the inclusion of “real life” stories in the media and linked to exposure of ever more intimate personal details.”**

Most often the domain of newspaper columnists, increasingly, broadcast journalists are reporting on themselves in a way not seen before. Broadcast reporters are trained to report on a story and not express opinions. Staying impartial is fundamental to their role and forms part of the Ofcom code “News, in whatever form, must be reported with due accuracy and presented with due impartiality.” (Ofcom, 2017)

With the rise of the podcast, there is a new type of confessional journalism emerging as broadcasters are expressing their opinions and telling previously untold stories in a different way. Original, more intimate and subjective spaces are opening up in contemporary broadcasting, challenging the accepted rules of objectivity and impartiality and telling those untold personal stories to new audiences.

This paper will examine the phenomenon of confessional journalism and the growth of podcasting. Using one British journalist and her podcast as a case study, it will explore the increase in popularity of this new form of media and the potential for broadcast journalists to express themselves in ways they were previously unable to because of Ofcom regulation of radio and television broadcasts. It will also look at the change in audience behaviour and the interaction they have with a podcast host through social media, contrasting it with the traditional way an audience would interact with a programme broadcast on television or the radio. It concludes by examining the ethics of confessional journalism and asks whether broadcast journalists are “crossing a line” when they podcast about personal experiences.

## Methodology

Interpreting the storytelling nature of certain podcasts whilst drawing on my own experiences demands an autoethnographic approach. By describing and analysing my personal experience as both a BBC news broadcaster and podcast guest, I am able to evaluate the narrative nature of certain podcasts. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011, Section 1, para. 3) describe autoethnography as “one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than



hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist". Thus, the research method is qualitative rather than quantitative and allows for reflection. As Mendez (2013, Section 3, para.2) says "autoethnography allows researchers to draw on their own experiences to understand a particular phenomenon or culture."

Several interviews were conducted with podcasters and a commissioning editor as original research, these were then analysed and evaluated to understand both the confessional nature of those podcasts and their audience impact.

## Discussion

Many newspaper columnists write about themselves but with confessional journalism, marriage break ups, eating disorders, health issues, bereavement, family problems are in the spotlight. Zelizer and Allen (2010, p.23) say they often share "emotional responses to the trials and tribulations of everyday, usually middle-class life" and are "thought to help draw attention to underreported topics, such as issues concerning self-esteem, raising children, eating disorders, sexual relationships and financial problems." Liz Jones writes about her life in the Daily Mail, according to Gold (2009) "there are many confessional journalists in Britain, but none as forensic or as self-critical as Jones." Topics she covers have included her anorexia and marriage break up. The Times columnist Melanie Reid broke her neck and back whilst horse riding and is now a tetraplegic, her weekly column "Spinal Column" is about disability and her life as a disabled person. Rosalind Coward herself became interested in this area of journalism after writing a column in the Saturday *Guardian's* Family section. Her "Looking After Mother" column, which was about the problems faced by those caring for people with dementia, was published between 2005 and 2008.

I became interested in this area of journalism following my diagnosis of cancer in 2017. My type of cancer, cystic peritoneal mesothelioma is extremely rare; medical literature always quotes just 153 cases in the world. The treatment was extremely gruelling as I underwent surgery to remove several organs before I was washed out with chemotherapy heated to 42 degrees Celsius. By any standards, this is a news story, it's so rare and yet I felt, initially, that I couldn't tell my story.

A cancer diagnosis hasn't stopped other journalists. John Diamond wrote a column in the Saturday edition of The Times newspaper about his experience with throat cancer between 1997 and 2001. He was awarded Columnist of the Year at the "What the Papers Say" Awards in 1997 and featured in a BBC documentary called "Tongue Tied" which followed his treatment through surgeries and radiotherapy. He subsequently published an autobiography called "C: Because Cowards get Cancer Too" in 1998 before dying in March 2001. Ruth Picardie wrote five columns for the Observer's magazine "Life" about living with breast cancer. It culminated in a book "Before I say Goodbye" published posthumously after her death in 1997 which was culled from her columns and from her personal correspondence. Her writing secured the British Press Awards Columnist of the Year in 1998. The citation at the awards (1998) said she "faced her tragically early death with an exemplary fortitude reflected in a series of moving articles written with great honesty and a conspicuous lack of sentimentality." Deborah Orr wrote about her breast cancer in The Guardian after being diagnosed in 2010, having previously talked about her diagnosis of complex post-traumatic stress disorder in 2017. An obituary published after her death in 2019 said "her smartness, vivid personality, serious edge, willingness to tell it as it is and bravery shone out to the end." (Brown, 2019)

It's not just confined to newspapers, Steve Hewitt, the presenter of the Media Show which is broadcast on BBC Radio 4, chronicled his treatment for cancer of the oesophagus in a series of interviews for the network radio station. Victoria Derbyshire reported on her own treatment for breast cancer. The broadcaster had her own television show on BBC television called simply "Victoria Derbyshire" which was described by the BBC as a morning news and current affairs programme with original stories, exclusive interviews, audience debate and the latest breaking news. In 2015, after undergoing a mastectomy, whilst still in hospital she filmed herself just after the operation, sitting up in bed with two homemade signs. One said "HI, THIS MORNING I HAD BREAST CANCER" whilst the next she held up said "THIS EVENING I DON'T!" It was the start of a series of films which she made herself following her journey as she underwent post-operative chemotherapy. These were shown on her BBC mid-morning television programme and posted on YouTube, whilst she also posted updates on Twitter. It culminated in a book published of the diary she wrote for her children while undergoing treatment called "Dear Cancer, Love Victoria". Filming her treatment, Derbyshire (Personal communication, August 7, 2019) says: "felt really completely natural, it felt like a really normal thing to do. I'm quite open, I'd tweeted about having cancer.... I literally felt like I was chatting

to my mobile phone. I didn't keep anything back." When asked about impartiality, she said she was reporting on a story as a broadcaster, even though the story was about herself "I don't go on air and talk about my family and what I did at the weekend or whatever but....because it was medicine and the NHS and science it didn't feel like me commenting on politics or a national news story, that's why it felt natural."

Cancer columns demand a particular type of raw honesty. Talking about treatment and death can make for uncomfortable reading and yet it can also allow for an intense emotional connection with the reader. As Coward (2014, p.626) says "Cancer columns demonstrate the positive attributes of confessional journalism writ large – the lifting of repression and silence, the sharing of experience which can be otherwise isolating, the engagement of readers in new democratic ways."

Sharing her experience is exactly what the BBC Radio 5live news presenter Rachael Bland wanted to do when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She started a blog called "Big C, Little Me" as she wanted to report on herself, to help others and chronicle her treatment. In one text to me she said (Personal communication, November 22, 2017) "I always feel lighter for getting it down on paper."

She then approached BBC Radio 5live to launch a podcast called "You, Me and the Big C" in March 2018. With her co-hosts Deborah James and Lauren Mahon they wanted to show that cancer can affect anyone; the traditional pictures of grey faced thin cancer patients with shaven heads don't tell the whole story.

Podcasting has seen a huge boom in recent years. Ofcom (2019, p.99) in their 2019 annual report "Media Nations" describe podcasts as "episodic speech-based pieces of content, primarily audio-based though some also have accompanying video content." The latest figures from the website Podcasting Insights (Winn, 2019) show there are now over 750,000 podcasts with over 30 million episodes world wide. Blubrry which tracks podcasts by monitoring Apple Podcasts and other sources, says there are about 3,000 new titles per month. In the UK, figures from Radio Audience Joint Audio Research (RAJAR), show almost seven million adults said they listened to a podcast in June 2019. Ofcom's survey (2019 p101) published in August 2019 found in the UK, 1 in 8 adults now listen to a podcast every week with the average age of a podcast listener being forty years old, around ten years younger than a typical radio listener.

Podcasters can create content specifically tailored to individual communities. As Llinares, Fox and Berry (2018, p.5) say in their book on podcasting "the origins of the medium come from a desire to circumvent the mediated practices of the radio station and to deliver independent content directly to the listeners." Podcasts are not constrained by clocks and can explore topics in greater depth than a radio programme would sometimes be able to. "Podcasts may take on forms that simply would be inappropriate for linear broadcast due to content, duration or format in many cases." (Berry, 2016, p.666) Importantly, podcasts can cover all topics and all genres from comedy, current affairs, and health to technology, travel and films and all things in between. McNally (2019) says "podcasts lend themselves to the current era of convenience: they are generally relatively short and can be consumed as and when it suits the individual."

As the digital commissioning editor for BBC Radio 4, Rhian Roberts, (personal communication, June 4, 2019) says "you're establishing a world here that you really want the listener to feel they're part of because the act of putting on headphones takes you even closer to the sound and I think that you have to feel, the audience has to feel close to you. It's a very strange relationship, its different from radio."

This intimacy and ease of access to audio really highlights the difference from radio. The same audio production techniques can be used to create, say sound effects in a drama, but the listener is choosing when to listen. They can start and stop when they like and crucially they are not listening at the same time as someone else. This highlights why social media is so important for podcasts to create a community where listeners can interact, to discuss and comment and share reactions. "Podcasts are interwoven into social media and as such have a heightened capacity to enhance engagement with and activate an audience." (Spinelli and Dann, 2019, p.8) It is no longer a linear activity as the "audience" (or community of listeners) interacts and continues the conversation about the podcast content on social media long after the podcast has been released. Podcasts are not constrained by time in the same way a set programme broadcast on the radio is. As people are listening to the podcast at different times but still wanting to comment, the social media platform Twitter is a natural home for the conversation to take place. This conversation is no longer curated by the presenter in the same way as a radio programme, as people are free to express opinions as they wish without them first being filtered through a producer before being expressed on air. A 2002 study of online journalism in the Netherlands (Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002, p. 97) concluded that online journalists were "perceived to empower people and further democratize the relationships between consumers and producers of content (be it news or information)." The same can now be said of podcasts.

So what of confessional journalism and podcasting? Podcasting gives broadcast journalists a platform to be more intimate than is possible on the radio or TV - to share personal stories and observations which are

not possible when reporting on a story. In effect they can become “columnists” in the traditional sense of talking about themselves but on a new digital medium rather than television or radio. In the UK, the 2003 Communications Act prevents people providing a service on television and radio from expressing views and opinions on “major political or industrial controversy and major matters relating to current public policy.” Broadcast journalists are trained to be impartial and objective when reporting on the news, podcasts can allow for more subjective stories and opinions to be aired by broadcast journalists.

Jane Garvey who presents *Woman's Hour* on BBC Radio 4, also hosts a podcast called “Fortunately” with her fellow BBC Radio 4 presenter Fi Glover. The format consists of them chatting about their week before interviewing a guest, usually a well-known broadcaster or journalist. She says the podcast allows her to be herself in a way she can't when she is broadcasting on Radio 4 (personal communication, July 2, 2019) “Sometimes we are thinking out loud and reacting to each other's inner most thoughts.”

The BBC news presenter Clive Myrie appeared as a guest in one episode of “Fortunately” (ep. 83). He told the story of reporting for BBC News on Barack Obama being elected President. He says as a black man he became very emotional, his exact words were “I crossed the line” as if journalists shouldn't show emotions. Podcasts can allow this type of emotional response in a way traditional broadcast media can't. Rhian Roberts highlighted a BBC Radio 4 podcast called “Beyond Today” which looks at some of the stories behind the big news of the week. She said “quite often with some news radio programmes we're told a story or we hear an interview which is genuinely moving and absolutely the BBC's normal way of doing it, the neutrality is about moving on then to the next item and doesn't allow an emotional response but within the podcast we're trying to allow space for feelings, allow space for a response to the storyteller which isn't necessarily about being partial but it's about responding as the listener would respond.” In one of the episodes, the presenter Matthew Price cried when discussing the grief surrounding the loss of a sibling.

Roberts continued to say in podcasts, presenters are “showing their emotions and I think it's fine and there are some things that as human beings we have collective response to and I think it's OK. It's really interesting, it's a whole developing new space for the BBC, it's interesting and some presenters find it really tricky.”

In her podcast “You, Me and The Big C” Rachael Bland was completely open and honest about her treatment and the effect it had on her, her hopes and fears and the impact the cancer was having. She wanted people to know the reality of living with cancer. The last podcast was recorded just weeks before she died. Her husband Steve Bland (Personal communication 2019, May 21) says she took an enormous amount of comfort from the hundreds of messages she used to get; “for someone who didn't have a huge amount of confidence that was just massive for her, the amount of people who were pulling for her like that and not only pulling for her but saying she'd helped them....it really, really, really helped Rachael.” As Coward (2014, p.625) says “it is generally agreed by confessional writers that writing autobiographical columns is therapeutic, allowing writers to put down and order their life events and connect closely with readers who reflect back one's experience.”

The impact of Rachael's podcast was huge - “You, Me and the Big C” reached number 1 in the iTunes Podcast charts the week she died and her legacy has continued to have an effect. The podcast has continued after her death in September 2018 and regularly gets fifty thousand listeners an episode. Steve Bland says a lot of doctors and nurses tell him they use the podcasts for patients and that it has helped them understand patients a lot better. Steve was contacted by one listener whose cancer care plan given to her in hospital included the advice “listen to ‘You, Me and the Big C’”.

After my diagnosis with peritoneal mesothelioma, I was a guest on the podcast in an episode on rare cancers. The resulting story written for BBC News online received more than 960,000 hits and the podcast episode itself in the following month had close to 25,000 plays and downloads. The online community of listeners was evident in the number of interactions with Tweets about the podcast. Eight separate Tweets had more than 124,100 impressions which is the number of times people saw the Tweet on Twitter, showing a high level of engagement. This reinforces the view expressed by Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Buchholtz (2018, p.533) that podcasts must be considered from a cross-media perspective “where various social media technologies are integrated and, through that convergence, the affordances of the podcast and audio broadcasting more generally are expanded.” The comments on social media showed many listened to the podcast as a source of information about cancer or because they themselves were going through treatment. The podcast was also discussed at a conference in Vienna run by the European Society of Surgical Oncology in a discussion about the type of surgery I underwent, showing engagement from the medical community. The dialogue amongst listeners on social media and wider at the conference, demonstrates how the act of listening is interactive, the individual is not just feeding a comment back to the presenter but participating in a wider community on social media. As Spinelli and Dann (2019, p.67) say, “podcasting can provide a space

where the listeners can begin to communicate with one another.” As previously discussed, the conversation is no longer curated by a presenter and is not time limited. Once it is started on social media it can continue without an end date as people listen or search for information on certain topics, in my case, mesothelioma.

But what of the ethics of confessional journalism? Particularly when podcasting? How much should be shared and what can the impact be on the lives of those around you? Julie Myerson was the anonymous author of a column for the *Guardian* newspaper published on Saturdays called “Living with Teenagers” based on her family experiences. The column was stopped when one of her sons was identified. Myerson had previously denied being the author of the column. She also wrote a book called “The Lost Child” in which she detailed her son’s use of drugs, telling how she had thrown him out of the family home and was estranged. Her son reacted angrily to the publicity, giving a series of interviews. She had, he said “taken the very worst years of my life and cleverly blended it into a work of art, and that to me is obscene.” (Walker, 2009) All this raises the question Coward (2013, p.6) poses “How much right does an autobiographical journalist have to include material of living members of family, especially if there is a background of conflict or dispute? Whose life is it anyway?”

HG Wells writing in 1922 (as cited in Harcup, 2015, p.212) in a message to fellow National Union of Journalist members said: “We affect opinion and public and private life profoundly” Affecting opinion can bring a great responsibility to a podcaster, particularly a broadcast journalist sharing a deeply personal experience. Not only must the effect on a community be considered, in the case of a cancer podcast - on the cancer community, but also the effect on close family and friends. As Jake Lynch (cited in Harcup, 2015, p.213) discusses “In this information age, journalists are not disconnected observers but actual participants in the way communities and societies understand each other.” He mentions the “ethic of responsibility” of being a journalist. This is brought into sharp relief when sharing personal experiences which could affect others, whether it be in an autobiographical column in a newspaper or in a podcast. Frost (2011, p.10) says “all too often the right to know is used as an excuse to publish circulation-boosting journalism” Is this the case with personal columns and podcasts? Could these outputs be created without friends and families being mentioned?

With her podcast “Fortunately”, Garvey (personal communication, July 2, 2019) says: “I would never overstep the mark, I protect my nearest and dearest whilst also being quite open....I’m happy to be confessional about myself and my lived experience but I don’t do in my own children for example. I will reference my elderly parents but I don’t say anything they wouldn’t be happy to hear.” She is, in effect self-editing, referencing her family but remaining acutely aware of the effects the content of her podcast could have on the lives of those closest to her.

With cancer, ethical issues are brought into even sharper relief as death is confronted. As Coward (2014, p.618) says “All confessional journalism raises stylistic and ethical issues, but taking the trend of baring all to its logical conclusion, writing that focuses on extreme illnesses raises those issues in a more extreme way.” Rachael Bland was the mother of a young son and frequently mentioned him in her podcasts and the blog she also wrote. In one blogpost (Bland cited in BBC 2018), she described the moment she received a telephone call telling her the cancer was terminal as she watched her two year old son on a day out: “I watched my little Freddie innocently playing away in a tyre in the barn and my heart broke for him. I scooped him up and dashed home and then had to break Steve’s heart with the news that my cancer was now metastatic and therefore incurable.” Rachael’s husband (Personal communication 2019, May 21) says the decision for Rachael to blog and podcast was a joint decision - “the blog and then the podcast were partly my suggestion. I knew it would help her so much.....everyone was fully on board with what she was doing and how much it was helping her”. In this instance, Rachael was recounting her life experiences and the effects on those around her as she came to terms with her own impending death.

## Conclusion

So, are broadcast journalists crossing a line when they podcast? It can be argued that podcasts have opened up a space for news broadcasters to more freely express opinions and share personal experiences. From the examples shown, it is certainly true they are revealing things about themselves in a podcast which they wouldn’t when broadcasting. They are observing but also commenting and being subjective. Podcasts can give freedom to explore issues in greater depth, be more graphic or honest. As Garvey (personal communication, July 2, 2019) says “If you’re going to do a podcast and you’re going to ask people to buy into it, then



you need to be prepared to offer them something that they wouldn't hear on radio, otherwise don't do one." In a speech at the Cruncie Awards in San Francisco in 2010, the CEO and co-founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg (cited in Frost 2013, p.328) said "people have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds, but more openly and with more people." The same could now be said for journalists who host autobiographical podcasts.

In conclusion, podcasts provide a new platform for confessional journalism. By connecting with listeners and the podcast community through social media, it allows for personal experiences to be shared and reflected.

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# Keeping it real as Covid-19 pandemic forces new ways of teaching and learning

For many journalism educators (if not all) the last few months have been a torrential mix of hard work, panic and revelation. For many the final few weeks of the academic year are the ones where students work on their major projects, allowing them to develop the skills they have been learning and showing that they are ready for the world of work. For MA students and many third-year undergraduates it is a time of considerable pressure and anxiety - the last thing most needed was to be told they could not use the university facilities that they had joined their course to learn about.

Despite this anxiety, they got to grips with the new ways of working and many showed real resourcefulness and creativity when properly supported by their tutors. Here four lecturers in different universities, *Jonny Greatrex*, *Emma Hemmingway*, *Zahera Harb* and *Claire Wolfe* describe their reimagining to ensure their students were not disadvantaged and made the best of their time on the course even when working from their bedrooms connected only by their phones and the internet.

## The experience of moving MA Broadcast news days online: teaching resourcefulness and creativity

**Emma Hemmingway, Nottingham Trent University**

The primary purpose of the MA Broadcast news days is to provide a chance for students to work in a simulated “real news” environment and it is a very attractive though demanding part of the MA course. The student cohort prepares for these days by learning all the required radio, TV and online news production skills in the four months prior to the news days starting in March of the academic year.

For the students the main attraction of the days is being allowed to learn what “being a journalist” is like in a real newsroom, TV studio and gallery. They undertake all roles from News Editor to studio camera operator, sound engineer to TV studio director, news presenters, to radio and TV reporters.

Each student will perform at least eight or ten different newsroom roles throughout the course of the 15-20 news days and be assessed on each role. In addition, all of the work handed in for assessment must be completed under news day conditions and broadcast live in the radio or TV shows scheduled each news day.

From a University standpoint news days are integral to the accreditation of the MA course and are monitored closely by the Broadcast Journalism Training Council [BJTC] so they have to be up to current industry practice and standards.

It was thus an onerous task to move a converged TV, radio and online news day to a remote online setting as immediately we were losing key elements; mainly the newsroom and studio production facilities and what these afford the students in terms of working in “real life” environments.

From the beginning as tutors, we had to be open and honest with the students about what was changing with regards to the provision. We had to recognise what we couldn't offer as much as what we could offer, and to be clear about that. It would have been harder to engage the students and get them on board with new working practices had we not been absolutely straight with what we couldn't now provide - namely everything the facilities afforded - the production of TV and Radio in a studio and news room setting.

But we emphasised what we could offer as different “extras” in terms of provision, and as this is an exercise in simulating the real world, we needed to show them what the main broadcasting organisations like the BBC or ITV or Sky News were doing and how their journalists across the world were now reporting; how they were moving online and with what varying degrees of success.

## **The secret of our “Success”**

I would conclude that our online, remote news days were a success and that success was founded on four main principles.

The first was the careful managing of student expectations and the clear communication with them about how the module assessment points were being changed to correspond exactly with the new news day model. Students want to do well. They had to be convinced they could still succeed under these conditions. They also care that they are learning skills that will equip them in the news environment in which they will be competing for jobs. So we had to show them that they would learn brand new skills and technological applications that would be crucial to new working conditions for all journalists going forward.

The way in which we got students fully engaged with the new model was in thoroughly preparing them for the news days in advance. There were many who felt very unconfident about working remotely and autonomously so they had to feel supported throughout.

We held three planning meetings prior to the news day with whole student cohort on Microsoft Teams. We used Microsoft Teams as our primary means of communication throughout and we set up numerous channels for each section of the news day, from preparatory newsgathering meetings, online folders for story ideas, channels for each individual news day, channels for communication with separate clusters of people in the team and separate channels for staff to speak to staff and for technicians to talk to students. We also ensured that the student rotas for each news day were uploaded here in advance of the entire run of news days so students could see what they were doing on each day and prepare well for the role.

On the first news day at the very first prospects meeting held on Teams at 9am everyone was well prepared.

## **Success going forward with delivery**

### **Connection**

Students obviously needed to be fully connected via technology - any technological issues with students who may have been joining the teams from different parts of the world had to be managed prior to the news day. We had two students in India and one in self isolation in a facility in Slovakia. Our technicians worked tirelessly with every student to ensure their internet connection would be adequate enough to fully partake in the news day. There were some connection issues in Lincolnshire and some sporadic power cuts in Mumbai, but we managed to keep everyone connected pretty much all of the time!

Related to this and equally important was recognising that students needed to feel emotionally connected to one another and to the University as a result of that technological connection. Technology was a key player in the success of these online news days; something we as media academics have for years perhaps been underplaying in our explorations of media practice.

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## Communication

Students were able to communicate at all times in a number of different ways. Microsoft Teams and the way we have it set up gives them at least 3 different channels to do so. Clusters of students who are key to roles through the day, a separate channel for Editors to communicate with teams, a separate technical channel for all technical questions, a separate channel for communication with the tutor on the day and also crucially a PRIVATE space of their own where they can talk/ let off steam/complain. We made sure that final one was not monitored or encroached on by any staff. My students did this separately on What's App, though it was interesting because as the news days became more "normal" they abandoned this channel and simply communicated openly on Teams.

## Community

Once the two previous provisos of connectivity and communication had been successfully established then a sense of community followed on quite naturally. If students feels they are in a learning community they value, they will invest in it... and this happened throughout the day and levels of adherence and loyalty to this community and a sense of pride in this also grew throughout the news days as they became more of a normal way of life! One of the main ways we also helped to develop this was by inventing a role whereby the two news editors on any day then pulled together all of the stories published on the web site and created a separate "news digest" on Shorthand.com which is a smart online platform where students can be more creative with production than on a word press site which out basic web site runs on. This way they created a "show-reel" for the day. It was also an assessment point so they invested in it, but in addition it gave them something to put forward to the news industry for job applications as well as sharing on social media platform and gave students an added sense of pride in the work achieved as a community.

It has also given us department portfolios for any industry awards such as BJTC and RTS.

## Collaboration

This is essential so that weaker members of the team did not feel left behind or marginalized and stronger ones could do above and beyond what the remit or task outlined for them was. With online journalism there is so much scope for collaborative work as we had students sharing story ideas, video or audio inserts, infographics, data, information and even methods of using the technical software platforms we gave them. We made sure they were given anything we could lay our hands on in terms of technical applications; KapWing, Adobe Spark, Canva and even an online autocue application known as BigVu which meant they could do Facebook lives or news presenting from their bedrooms and we could make sure we retained the crucial broadcasting elements of the news day, as opposed to only developing online skills.

This collaborative work deepened their individual experiences and brought added dimensionality to the work as well as showing them how this is an essential component of online work in the "real world."

## Challenges and the future

The main challenge was to make sure that students kept in touch remotely and weaker students did "go off radar" from time to time and were harder to track down than if they had been physically present in a newsroom. To avoid this we did set on the day staggered deadlines and had a final publishing deadline by which all material had to have been submitted, seen and subbed by editors and then by a staff member and published in time for a 4pm deadline. If work was not published in time (and some wasn't) it could not be handed in for assessment. The newsgathering side of things went surprisingly well even given the challenge of finding interviewees without students leaving bedrooms or houses! The students seemed to have more confidence in ringing and approaching people for interviews remotely than they do in a newsroom where the feel watched or monitored or even judged by their peers. This was a surprising discovery and one which we can work with for the future in building up student confidence in the early days of newsgathering.

I will certainly be building remote online news days into my teaching curriculum going forward, even when and if we do return to teaching news days in a newsroom environment. These days teach students how to work autonomously; how to be resourceful and creative working alone out in the field. I believe that more remote working will certainly be a common practice within the industry for all journalists and many of our students have now developed crucial skills on more online applications geared to remote working than many professional journalists already working in established broadcasting organisations.

# MA student newsdays: Doing it for real in Covid's new normal

**Jonny Greatrex, Nottingham Trent University**

**Newsweeks on the MA News Journalism course at Nottingham Trent University are an integral part of our teaching toolkit and student experience. Our students spend eight intensive months learning the skills and knowledge they need to successfully run a live digital news brand and its accompanying social media channels across two weeks in May. They take on different roles working as reporters or on newsdesk. We try to make the experience as “real” as we can, to give them an experience close to working in a professional newsroom.**

The UK's coronavirus lockdown presented several challenges which threatened to undermine this experience for our students. These ranged from pedagogical concerns about whether learning outcomes could still be met and assessments still completed with the necessary rigour, to the more hearts and minds issues around getting students to engage with a process which would be inherently different to the one they and their tutors expected.

There were also the more mundane but equally important issues around whether our technology and workflows would function well enough to allow for cohesive teamwork and what exactly students who could not leave their homes would report on. We considered postponing or even cancelling the newsweeks however we chose to run them remotely online. It was the right decision.

The module learning outcomes and assessments issues were quickly overcome. A close reading of the module spec showed all outcomes could be met by students working remotely. As a news journalism course focused on digital-only publishing we do not require specialist teaching spaces to produce our journalism. The original assessment needing tweaking, particularly around requirements for original video and stills, however the briefs which were set at the start of the year still held.

Winning the hearts and minds of students was a bigger challenge. The cohort was not inherently hostile to remote online newsweeks, however as their course leader I sensed a degree of anxiety when first explaining how, to quote a former prime minister ‘nothing had changed’. This was overcome in several ways. We ran detailed briefing and preparation sessions including clear descriptions of roles, expectations and workflows with shared online documents outlining briefs and rotas in our virtual learning environment NOW and on a dedicated Google Drive. Students were offered increased 1-2-1 tutorials to help them prepare their newlists before the newsweeks started. It was explained to students they would be operating the same way as thousands of journalists who were now working remotely.

These extra preparation activities allowed us to test tech we would rely on – our university uses Microsoft Teams – for communication while also acclimatise to the new rhythm of our learning, which was broadly, meet, discuss, go away and work independently, meet, discuss and review (an unexpected benefit from a tutor perspective was punctuality for online sessions was much better than the face to face ones they replaced). Finally, students were assured there was no shortage of news to cover in Nottingham. It might be different to previous years, but there was plenty happening.

The newsweeks were not without challenges. Teaching via Teams – even if it is just running conferences, 1-2-1s and debriefs – was especially tiring. A power cut in Mumbai left one student cut off from us for a day. Another student's laptop and wifi only just held-up. And of course, we would much rather have been in our busy student newsroom working side by side as a team.

However, what was remarkable was how “normal” the operation felt just a couple of days into the first newsweek. We followed the same routine as if we were in the newsroom. We stuck to our usual schedule with conferences in the morning and afternoon. Guest editors joined us for these then occupied a “room” in Teams where students took turns for 1-2-1s to discuss their work. Our early guest editors included recent



MA News graduates now working as reporter for regional titles using their laptops and wifi from home. This was a usual reminder to students that the way they were working matched the real world. We decided being on a perpetual videocall together would be too draining so instead communicated (almost constantly) via the group chat function in Teams. This meant tutor feedback to one student was seen by the group. When students needed individual help tutors or guest editors were available instantly via video call. Students said they felt well supported through the two weeks.

There were also some unexpected positives in this approach. A key part of newsweeks is building students' confidence and ability to work effectively with limited supervision. The increased challenge the students faced working this way was rewarded with an even greater sense of achievement and boosted confidence. Similarly, they were working alone, without distractions, with just their journalism to focus on. There is sometimes a temptation for students to coast during newsweeks, letting others take the strain. This is less easy when you know you will be on a videocall in an hour outlining the progress you have made since the last conference (this is a small cohort MA, this might not translate well to large undergraduate programmes). And, the most terrifying activity a student journalist faces, making phone calls in front of peers, became, making phone calls in your bedroom. We suspect students made many more phone calls than usual. These unexpected positives mean we will consider – pandemic or no pandemic – running at least some newsdays in this format for future cohorts.

Crucially, the students were able to meet their learning outcomes and fulfil the assessment requirements. Just like audiences for real news outlets, no-one would know the work they saw on our platforms was done via webcam and wifi with people spread between Wolverhampton and Mumbai. We would never have chosen to do it this way. It was not a normal experience, but we did manage to offer students their first taste of doing it for real in the new normal.

# Seven points to consider when teaching journalism practice online

**Zahera Harb, City, University of London**

**On March 16, City, University of London decided we are moving to online teaching. We, on the MA International Journalism programme, had two weeks left of our term two and were looking forward to term three, when seven weeks of news production take place.**

Much speculation about what we could do and not do were surfacing among colleagues from inside and outside City. Students anxiety levels were rising and emails of panic started to ping into our inboxes questioning our decision to switch practice teaching to online and not postpone it. The uncertainty that surrounded us on different levels guided us as a team to go ahead with plans to substitute studio-based broadcast production with online remote production of multimedia websites embedding the broadcast component of the course within the suggested multimedia production.

We completed seven weeks of broadcast and multimedia production module remotely. 43 students were engaged in producing two multimedia websites, including the production of 16 live streaming TV and Radio news bulletin. Following every day of production, students' anxiety in regard to learning outcomes were significantly calming down. They became excited and fully engaged in every step of the news production process. By the last two weeks of production, the culmination of their hard work and preparation manifested itself. They were in control of running their websites three days a week over two weeks, producing new content and updating available content. Excitement grew higher for what we call production fortnight (weeks six and seven) and students successfully met their goals. However, to be able to achieve this, huge effort by staff and additional tech resources had to be put in place and above all that students' willingness to learning

and to adapt to new mode of receiving it.

Much of what I have read on teaching online, relates to lecture based modules, which have little to do with running editorial meetings, engaging with student discussions about ideas, layout, sounds, footage, supervising editorial content and bulletins running order and making sure reporters, editors and producers meet their deadlines, etc... here are a few things I learned through that experience.

Teaching practice online requires more resources in staff numbers and in tech equipment and software.

If we are to deliver good quality journalism practice teaching, hold to our reputation and meet students' expectations to a large extent, we need to enhance our tutor hours and not decrease them. We need to enhance our technical resources and not cut them.

Practice teaching can only be efficient if done in small groups, where students are able to get one to one feedback on work they produce.

To assess teamwork and to be able to step in if a crisis happens means tutors need to be part of several groups of communication and lines of news production. The time designated for contact hours becomes blurry and irrelevant.

One platform of communication is not enough. We have been utilising Zoom and Microsoft Teams at the same time and in addition students have established a third line of communication via social media the like of Facebook and WhatsApp. Moodle has been used as a place to share resources, but in many cases that role was taken over by Microsoft Teams. Students endorse easy access platforms of communication. They go with the familiar most of the time.

Students online need individual attention. They appreciate the fact we are showing we care by setting individual meetings, when one slips off the radar. The personal connection, assurances and support we offer students face to face become harder online. Hence more time and effort are needed to pay attention to individual grievances.

Attending to details, making sure they can access the online sessions, being patient with technical hiccups, with their WiFi not holding up (and ours for that matter), mitigating assessment criteria to fit all of that, making sure they get the best learning experience without forgetting that we are all going through a global crisis, are all draining emotions tutors have to endure on daily basis and I cannot see that being sustainable on the long run.

The hardest encounter of all was not been able to reassure two of my British students, whose very old laptops could not cope with downloading editing software. All I could do is direct them to the hardship fund the University has established, which might only cover part of new laptop costs. Students access to the right equipment is essential for their online practice learning experience. To overcome issues with students' technical resources, we asked them to share resources working as pairs (forming a small unit of support), in using their mobile phones to film, to count on their team mate's mobile camera if theirs was not good enough for example. Students technical resources are crucial for their online learning. We had to buy a new light weight editing software to address some of these issues, which had to be emailed individually to each one of them. We ran online training sessions on how to use the software, but that would have been more complicated and time consuming if students had not already had training on Premier Pro software in the department newsrooms earlier in the year. To enhance their live broadcast production, the department bought two live streaming apps for the tech team to form live hubs and run it from their home computers.

Student feedback, which the seven learning points listed above incorporate, expressed satisfaction with the skills and knowledge they learned. Many withdrew the cynicism they expressed in the first few days of news production.

We as a team are excited about what students have been able to achieve during these weeks. We were five tutors looking after 43 students, of which some were working beyond their contracted hours, along with four members of the department technical team, making sure we give our students some of the experience in producing broadcast news they were promised when they joined our program. During those seven weeks, we sought input from eight guest speakers via Zoom. Eight journalists shared their experience working remotely during lockdown and gave students extra tips on mobile journalism production and online broadcast and multimedia skills. In addition, we gave students access to several recorded testimonies from journalists, our graduates, on how to overcome the challenges of producing news remotely.

Much of the basic learning and teaching of news production and storytelling took place earlier in the year, I wonder what additional hurdles we could face and if we ought to start the process of learning and teaching broadcast journalism practice online (remotely) from day one.

# Fledgling snappers turn to social documentary

**Claire Wolfe, University of Worcester**

**Teaching a year one photography module at the University of Worcester turned into a baptism of fire in more ways than one.**

To be suddenly and unexpectedly thrust into teaching the topic after being an enthusiastic iPhone snapper was a challenge in itself. A Nikon D7200 became my new best friend along with a helpful technician.

Brushing up my Photoshop skills was another challenge and I learnt to navigate my way around the various online 'professionals' who either talk to you like a geek or a total gooner. Finding that middle ground, with just the right pace, brought back the horrors of finger thumbing and window gazing as a young pupil - a lesson in itself!

I determined that this would be an exciting journey for the group. It began with floods. The freak weather sent torrents down the River Severn bringing extensive flooding throughout the city. Our campus was cut off with students stranded in halls on either side of the river. It proved a perfect storm for some dramatic flood pictures, but the main worry was how to enthuse the students without them ending up the subject of a tragic news report. They now understand the importance of owning a pair of Wellington boots.

Some of the excellent images captured included people stranded in cars, young lads fishing in a car park and swans taking over the shopping areas.

With Assignment one successfully out of the way we prepared to crack on with the second, a series of portraits with news story and a stand-alone news picture with copy.

Next came pestilence. Covid-19 brought a sudden halt to sessions with students scrambling to get flights back to the USA, Finland, Poland and the Czech Republic. Home-grown students fled home before total lockdown.

Immediately spotting the potential for social documentary style work I urged them to capture these historic moments. I realised I was being a bit too ruthless when one female advised that she was so upset at parting from her boyfriend she simply couldn't take the photos. Some were in meltdown and fearing the worst.

I hurriedly rewrote the assignment and asked them to focus on the stories of people in their homes. They also needed to be alert with a keen news sense when going for their daily exercise. This proved difficult for some of the international students who had been quarantined. However, one San Franciscan managed to get to the testing centre in a park and took some superb shots. Others unearthed stories of troubled journeys back home, illness, courageous acts and the simple, but effective stories of ordinary humans coping in lockdown.

They appreciated what makes a news story. The captions had a clear news focus. As a group the students achieved mostly grade As and Bs. The work was second marked and the moderator was impressed by the high standards, not quibbling over the grades - in fact suggesting a grade A went up to A+. What was most impressive was that the Nikons took a back seat. Students couldn't physically book them out. I accepted smartphones and arranged for free access to Photoshop.

Teaching them the skill of getting a good idea and framing content well from the start, helped to minimise the need for massive editing. Recognising this helped them to become better 'mobile journalists'. They also learnt how to be creative, with little to work on. They had to talk to their own family members and, in some cases, close friends, in a different, more gentle, probing way to extract good copy. There was a realisation that the intuitiveness of journalists can really 'make' the news.

And what did I learn? It refreshed me on the skills of the newsroom. There is opportunity in every crisis. No blank pages. But most of all it reminded me of how talented young people are. Give them the confidence and motivation to achieve and they really can do great things.

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## Software used

**Moving online obliged the use of new and often unfamiliar software. Here are some of the apps involved:**

**Microsoft Teams** – industry standard videoconferencing app.

**Zoom** – a widely used videoconferencing app.

**KapWing** – online creative collaborative platform ideal for infographics.

**Adobe Spark** – online design package.

**Adobe Photoshop** – industry standard picture editing software.

**Canva** - design software that makes design simple, convenient, and reliable.

**BigVu** – an online autocue app.

**Facebook** – ubiquitous social media app.

**WhatsApp** – encrypted message app and communication tool.

**Moodle or Blackboard** – both are educational information platforms widely used and available in most universities.

# Reviews

The reviews pages are edited by Tor Clark. If you have a book you would like to review or have come across a new book we should know about please get in touch. Also if you have recently had a book published and would like to see it reviewed, please contact Tor on [tor.clark@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:tor.clark@leicester.ac.uk)

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**The Covid pandemic has slowed the release of new books in 2020 and slowed the opportunity to review books so this edition we take the opportunity to report some of the new releases from major publishers including many by AJE members.**

**Jukes, Stephen (2020) Journalism and Emotion Sage publications Ltd: London pback: £27.99; eBook: £21.99; pages: 200**

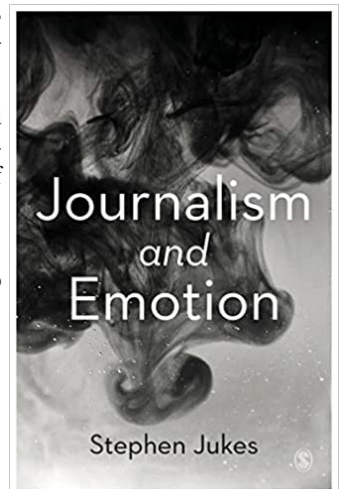
Stephen Jukes of Bournemouth University, UK asks how can we understand the complex relationship between journalism and emotion? He goes on to explain that in a world of live-streamed terror, polarised political debates and fake news, emotion has become central to our understanding of contemporary journalism.

Including interviews with leading journalists throughout, *Journalism and Emotion* critically explores the impact of this new affective media environment, not just on the practice of journalism, but also the lived experience of journalists themselves.

Bringing together theory and practice, Stephen explores:

- The history of objectivity and emotion in journalism, from pre-internet to digital.
- The ‘emotionalisation’ of culture in today’s populist media landscape.
- The blurring of boundaries between journalism and social media content.
- The professional practices of journalists working with emotive material.
- The mental health risks to journalists covering traumatic stories.
- The impact on journalists handling graphic user-generated content.

In today’s interactive, interconnected and participatory media environment, there is more emotive content being produced and shared than ever before. *Journalism and Emotion* helps you make sense of this,





explaining how emotion is mobilised to influence public opinion, and how journalists themselves work with and through emotional material.

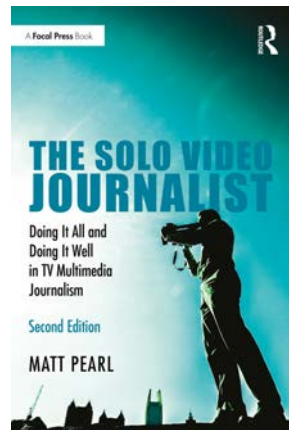
*"Indispensable.... for anyone who cares about journalism." - Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen*

## **Pearl, Matt (2020) The Solo Video Journalist Routledge: London pback £23.99; pages:186**

**The Solo Video Journalist, now in its second edition, offers a comprehensive overview of the solo video reporting process from start to finish.**

Drawing from years of professional experience in the field, the author covers all aspects of multimedia journalism, from planning for a segment, to dressing appropriately for multiple roles, to conducting interviews, and editing. The book contains interviews with more than a dozen top storytellers from around the United States and offers practical advice for how to succeed in a growing media field. New to this edition are Career Chronicles – chapters that detail the career paths possible for modern journalists – and a fully updated chapter on the importance of building a digital and social media presence.

This book is an excellent resource for students learning skills in broadcast, multimedia, backpack, and television journalism, as well as for early-career professionals looking for a back-pocket resource in solo video journalism.



## **Keeble, Richard (2020) Journalism Beyond Orwell Routledge: London pback £27.99; Ebook £27.99; pages: 200**

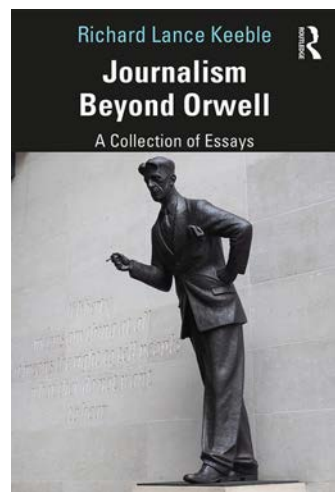
**Journalism Beyond Orwell adapts and updates pioneering work by Richard Lance Keeble to explore George Orwell's legacy as a journalist in original, critical – and often controversial – ways.**

Though best known as the author of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell was, throughout his career, a journalist. The essays in this collection explore Orwell's important legacy: as a practising activist journalist critical of the dominant media; as a polemicist, essayist and novelist constantly concerned with issues relating to war and peace; as a literary journalist determined to make 'political writing an art'; and as a writer who warned of the growing powers of the secret state. Through this highly individualistic essay collection that connects Orwellian themes to modern journalism, Richard Lance Keeble explores key topics, including:

- Orwell the 'proto-blogger'
- How Orwell put his political economy critique of the corporate press into practice
  - Information warfare in an age of hyper-militarism
  - The manufacture of the myth of heroic warfare in the reporting of the Afghan conflict
  - The debates over the theory and practice of peace journalism
  - The ethical challenges for journalists reporting on conflict
  - The crucial role of the alternative media
  - The pleasures and pitfalls of the celebrity profile

This collection will be of particular interest to students and researchers in journalism studies, English literature, media, intelligence studies and international relations.

Richard Lance Keeble is Professor of Journalism at the University of Lincoln and Honorary Professor at Liverpool Hope University. Chair of the Orwell Society, he has written and edited 40 books. In addition, he



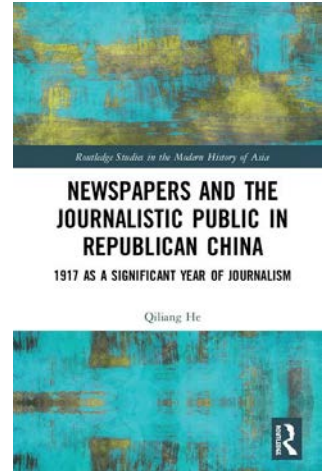
## Qiliang He (2020) *Newspapers and the Journalistic Public in Republican China*:

**1917 as a Significant Year of Journalism** Routledge: London Pback £29.59; eBook £35.99; pages: 302

Offering an entirely new approach to understanding China's journalism history, this book covers the Chinese periodical press in the first half of the twentieth century. By focusing on five cases, either occurring in or in relation to the year 1917, this book emphasizes the protean nature of the newspaper and seeks to challenge a press historiography which suggests modern Chinese newspapers were produced and consumed with clear agendas of popularizing enlightenment, modernist, and revolutionary concepts. Instead, this book contends that such a historiography, which is premised on the classification of newspapers along the lines of their functions, overlooks the opaqueness of the Chinese press in the early twentieth century.

Analyzing modern Chinese history through the lens of the newspaper, this book presents an interdisciplinary and international approach to studying mass communications. As such, this book will be useful to students and scholars of Chinese history, journalism, and Asian Studies more generally.

Qiliang He is Associate Professor of History at Illinois State University. He has published several books, including *Feminism, Women's Agency, and Communication—The Case of Huang-Lu Elopement* (2018) and *Gilded Voices: Economics, Politics, and Storytelling in the Yangzi Delta since 1949* (2012).



## Gutsche, Robert E. J & Brennen, Bonnie (2020) *Journalism Research in Practice: Perspectives on Change, Challenges, and Solutions* Routledge: London pages: 154

**Journalism Research in Practice: Perspectives on Change, Challenges, and Solutions** is a unique collection of research on journalism written for journalists and wider audiences.

Based on scholarship previously published in *Journalism Practice*, *Journalism Studies*, and *Digital Journalism*, authors have updated and rewritten their works to make connections to contemporary issues. These 28 studies include perspectives on modern-day freelancing, digitization, and partisan influences on the press. They appear in four distinct sections:

- Addressing Journalism in Times of Social Conflict
- Advancements in New Media and Audience Participation
- Challenges and Solutions in a Changing Profession
- Possibilities for Journalism and Social Change

This book is a collection by leading scholars from the field of Journalism Studies who have revisited their previous work with the intent of asking more questions about how journalism looks, works, and is preparing for the future. From coverage on Donald Trump and alt-right media to media trust, verification, and social media, this volume is relevant for practicing journalists today who are planning for tomorrow, students learning about the field and its debates, and scholars and educators looking for approachable texts about complex issues.

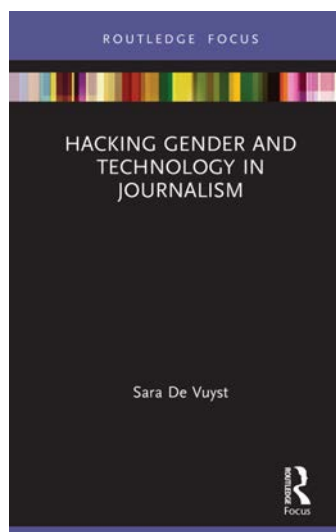


**Robert E. Gutsche, Jr.** is Senior Lecturer in Critical Digital Media

Practice at Lancaster University, UK. He is author or editor of *The Trump Presidency, Journalism, and Democracy*; *Reimagining Journalism and Social Order in a Fragmented Media World*; and *Geographies of Journalism*, all published by Routledge.

**Bonnie Brennen** is Professor Emerita at Marquette University, USA. Her research addresses relationships between media, culture, technology, and society. She is the author or editor of seven books and one novel and her research has also been published in academic journals and edited books.

## De Vuyst, Sara (2020) *Hacking Gender and Technology in Journalism* Routledge: London ebook £12.00; pages 118



**Hacking Gender and Technology in Journalism** addresses the question of whether journalism's new digital spaces suffer from the same gendered structures as traditional media organisations, or whether they go beyond such bias.

This book offers insights into the challenges that women journalists face in relation to technological innovation, as well as the potential for developing strategies for empowerment that it offers. More specifically, there is a focus on the gendering of digital skills, the construction of gender in new digital spheres of journalism, and how these changes can lead to the disruption of gender inequalities in journalism.

This book will be of interest to scholars in multimedia journalism, media ethics, and gender studies.

Sara De Vuyst is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Communication Studies at Ghent University. Her research interests are feminist media studies and, more specifically, gender issues and technological innovation journalism. She has a passion for feminism and a strong interest in digital storytelling, data journalism, and innovative journalistic formats. De Vuyst is vice-chair of the ECREA Gender and Communication section

and part of a network of research on gendered online harassment.

## Gulyas, Agnes & Baines, David (2020) *The Routledge Companion to Local Media and Journalism* Routledge: London eBook £31.99; pages: 498 - 20 B/W Illustrations

**This comprehensive edited collection provides key contributions in the field, mapping out fundamental topics and analysing current trends through an international lens.**

Offering a collection of invited contributions from scholars across the world, the volume is structured in seven parts, each exploring an aspect of local media and journalism. It brings together and consolidates the latest research and theorisations from the field, and provides fresh understandings of local media from a comparative perspective and within a global context. This volume reaches across national, cultural, technological and socio-economic boundaries to bring new understandings to the dominant foci of research in the field and highlights interconnection and thematic links. Addressing the significant changes local media and journalism have undergone in the last decade, the collection explores the history, politics, ethics and contents of local media, as well as delving deeper into the business and practices that affect not only the journalists and media-makers involved, but



Edited by Agnes Gulyas and David Baines

consumers and communities as well.

For students and researchers in the fields of journalism studies, journalism education, cultural studies, and media and communications programmes, this is the comprehensive guide to local media and journalism.

**Agnes Gulyas** is Professor in Media and Communications at the School of Creative Arts and Industries, Canterbury Christ Church University, UK. Her recent projects have focused on local media gaps and local news consumption in the UK, as well as journalists' use of social media. She is a founding member of the Local and Community Media Network of the Media, Communication and Cultural Association, UK.

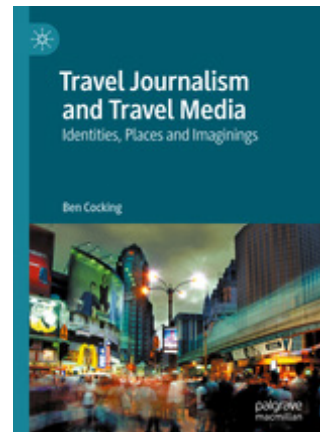
**David Baines** is Senior Lecturer in Journalism at the School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University, UK. He worked in local and regional newspapers for 30 years before moving to the academy, where his research focus is on transformations in local and community media, journalism practices and journalism education. He is a founding member of the Local and Community Media Network of the Media, Communication and Cultural Association, UK.

## Cocking, Ben (2020) *Travel Journalism and Travel: Identities, Places and Imaginings* Media Palgrave Macmillan; London ebook £35.99

This book charts the trajectory of travel journalism from its print based origins to the emergence of hybridised multi-platform content. It considers how this has led to not only different kinds of travel journalism but different kinds of travel journalists; the professional travel journalist is now challenged online by user generated content.

Cocking focuses on the conventions and “news values” of British print-based travel journalism, examining the genre’s liminal position between truth and fiction. In the context of the expansion of global tourism, Cocking explores how travel journalism from different parts of the world negotiates cultural differences in its depictions of destinations, regions, and tourist practices. Consideration is also given to the political potential of travel journalism and its capacity for awareness raising. Based on original research including qualitative analysis of print-based articles and blogs this book offers an innovative and original contribution to this emerging field of study.

**Ben Cocking** is Senior Lecturer and Director of Research at the Centre for Journalism, University of Kent, UK. His research interests include travel journalism, travel writing, news media and political communications.



## Harcup, Tony (2020) *What's the Point of News? A Study in Ethical Journalism* Palgrave Macmillan: London

This book questions whether the news we get is as useful for citizens as it could, or should, be.

This international study of news is based on re-thinking and re-conceptualising the news values that underpin understandings of journalism. It goes beyond empirical descriptions of what journalism is to explore normative ideas of what it might become if practised alongside commitments to ethical listening, active citizenship and social justice. It draws lessons from both alternative and mainstream media output; from both journalists and scholars; from both practice and theory. It challenges dominant news values by drawing on insights from feminism, peace journalism and other forms of critical think-

ing that are usually found on the margins of journalism studies. This original and engaging contribution to knowledge proposes an alternative set of contemporary news values that have significant implications for the news industry, for journalism education and for democracy itself.

**Tony Harcup** is Senior Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Sheffield, UK. He worked as a journalist within mainstream and alternative media before becoming a teacher, researcher and author. His books include the *Oxford Dictionary of Journalism* (2014); *Alternative Journalism, Alternative Voices* (2012); and *Journalism: Principles and Practice* (2015), which has been translated into several languages.



# Style guide

**Please provide a title and an abstract and author details together with a 50-70 word biography for each author on a separate sheet to allow for anonymization. This sheet will be separated from the article before being sent to referees so please put the title only at the start of the article.**

- Sub-heads should be in bold
- Second order sub-heads should be in bold italic
- Please use single quotation marks (double quotation marks for a quote within a quote)
- Indent long quotes of two lines or more.
- Please do not use the enter button to insert space between paragraphs or headings.
- All illustrations, tables and figures should be sent separately either at the end of the MS Word file or as attached JPGs. Clearly label approximately where they should be placed with fig 1, table 1 etc.

**Citations and bibliographic references should be in Harvard style.**

## Part I: Citations

Place references in your work in the following order: Name, Date: page number(s)

For example,

1. Directly quoting an author

It is sometimes forgotten that 'English is one of the most flexible and expressive languages in the world' (Hicks, 1993, p.1)

He goes on to say, 'In brief, the reigning media consensus has been characterised either as overly liberal or leftist or as conservative, depending on the view of the critic' (McQuail, 1992, pp.255-6).

2. Indirectly quoting an author (where you sum up what is being stated in your own words). This must be grammatically correct, as well as accurate.

E.g.: Hargreaves (2003, p.47) believes that Henry Hetherington's populist journalistic techniques, employed by him in the 1830s, were the basis of tabloid journalism.

3. Referring broadly to ideas you have read in a publication (not to a specific point/quote). You don't need to cite page number in this case. E.g.: Franklin (1997) has highlighted the effects and reasons for so-called dumbing down in the media.

4. If the same person is referred to immediately after a previous citation, you can use *ibid*.

5. If there are more than two authors, you can use *et al*.

## Part II: Bibliographic References

A list of Bibliographic References is required at the end. Please provide the FULL name of the author (including first name) and provide references in alphabetical order of surname. With an author who has written a number of books and articles that have been cited, list them all separately, with the most recent first (see Manning).

Examples of how to present Bibliographic references for Journalism Education are given below

Bibliographic references

Franklin, Bob (2003) 'A Good Day to Bury Bad News?': Journalists, Sources and the Packaging of Politics in Simon Cottle (Ed.), *News, Public Relations Power*, London: Sage pp. 45-61

Hall, Stuart, Critcher, Chas, Jefferson Tony, Clarke John, and Roberts, Brian (1978) *Policing the Crisis. Mugging, the State and Law and Order*. London: Macmillan

Harcup, Tony (2004) in Susan Pape and Sue Featherstone (2006) *Feature Writing*, London: Sage.

# Journalism Education

## The Journal of the Association for Journalism Education

The Association for Journalism Education is a subject discipline membership association of journalism schools in higher education institutions in the UK and Ireland. The association maintains its rights to copyright of the contents. Universities are entitled to maintain articles by faculty on their archive sites provided they are correctly referenced and identify *Journalism Education* and the author.

## Volume Nine, Number One. Inside this issue:

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### Articles

**Going digital, not dying out: how universities are uniquely placed to teach digital journalism survival skills** by Ian Bucknell, University of Leeds

**Teaching responsible suicide reporting (RSR): using storytelling as a pedagogy to advance media reporting of suicide** by Sallyanne Duncan, University of Strathclyde and Anne Luce, Bournemouth University

**How increasingly large cover price rises of regional daily newspapers accentuated the decline in their sales, as the move from traditional media to the web gained momentum between 2006-2016** by Richard Bowyer, Derby University

**The Flaws of the UK grading system** by Ivana Ebel and Alex Ward, Derby University

### Comment and Criticism

**Kovach and Rosenstiel's *Elements of Journalism*: a foundational text or a moment in history?** by Ivor Gaber, University of Sussex

**Confessional journalism and podcasting** by Kate Williams, University of Northampton

**The new journalism education – teaching and learning during a pandemic**

**The experience of moving our MA Broadcast News Days online: teaching resourcefulness and creativity** by Emma Hemmingway, Nottingham Trent University

**MA student newsdays: Doing it for real in Covid's new normal** by Jonny Greatrex, Nottingham Trent University

**Seven points to consider when teaching journalism practice online** by Zahera Harb, City, University of London

**Snappers turn to social documentary** by Claire Wolfe, University of Worcester

### Books - this year's publications

Journalism Education is published by the Association for Journalism Education and you can contact the editors on [AJEjournal@gmail.com](mailto:AJEjournal@gmail.com)