

References

- Allan, Stuart. 2012. "Civic Voices: Social Media and Political Protest." In *News Literacy: Global Perspectives for the Newsroom and the Classroom*, edited by Paul Mihailidis, 21-39. New York: Peter Lang.
- Bruce, Michael D. 2014. "Framing Arab Spring Conflict: A Visual Analysis of Coverage on Five Transnational Arab News Channels." *Journal of Middle East Media* 10: 1-26.
- Fry, Katherine G. 2008. "News as Subject: What is it? Where is it? Whose is it?" *Journalism Studies* 9 (4): 545-560.
- . 2014. "What are We Really Teaching: Outline for an Activist Media Literacy Education." In *Media Literacy Education in Action*, edited by Belinha S. De Abreu and Paul Mihailidis, 125-137. New York: Routledge.
- Galander, Mahmoud M. 2012. "News Values, Cultural Proximity and Cross-Cultural Media Framing: How Western and Muslim Media Covered Darfur." *Journal of Arab and Muslim Media Research* 5 (2): 113-128.
- Hobbs, Renee. 2011. "News Literacy: What Not to Do." *Nieman Reports*. Accessed April 20, 2015. <http://www.neiman.harvard.edu>.
- Lee, Jae Kook. 2015. "Knowledge as a Measure of News Reception in the Agenda-Setting Process." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 59 (1): 22-40.
- Mihailidis, Paul. 2009. "Beyond Cynicism: Media Literacy and Civic Learning Outcomes in Higher Education." *International Journal of Learning and Media* 1 (3): 19-31.
- Oktem, Kerem. 2013. "Why Turkey's Mainstream Media Chose to Show Penguins Rather than Protest." *The Guardian*, June 9, 2013. Accessed April 15, 2015. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/09/turkey-mainstream-media-penguin-protest.
- Postman, Neil. 1992. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Knopf.
- Robinson, Sue. 2009. "The Cyber-Newsroom: A Case Study of the Journalistic Paradigm in a News Narrative's Journey from a Newspaper to Cyberspace." *Mass Communication and Society* 12 (4): 403-422.
- Rushkoff, Douglas. 2013. *Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now*. New York: Penguin.
- Strate, Lance. 2012. "Counting Electronic Sheep: Understanding Information in the Context of Media Ecology." *Information* 3 (3): 442-471.

From print newspapers to social media: news literacy in a networked environment

Julie Frechette, Worcester State University, Worcester MA

Abstract: By devising critical news literacy frameworks centered on networked environments, this article will evaluate the benefits and drawbacks associated with new informational sources, as well as their emerging symbiotic relationship. Studies on generational changes in news acquisition tend to dichotomise each medium (print vs. social media) along old vs. new technology and trends. Rather than create artificial dualisms between old media / traditional journalism and new media / emerging social media, the approach herein offers a more complicated and nuanced notion of critical news literacy. News literacy models must acknowledge and address the porosity of legacy news outlets and social media as they work symbiotically in the Digital Age to distribute and constitute contemporary forms of news and networks.

The goal is to widen the scope of news literacy paradigms to better address the transformational shifts that are occurring within the production and dissemination of news in society. Using a critical approach, news literacy must carefully consider the gains of local-to-global news enabled through social media and networked environments, as well as how the loss of traditional print newspapers may affect the viability of an informed and engaged citizenry as the virtual transformation of society is rapidly altering the fabric of American democracy. Similarly, news literacy requires a critical understanding of internet access and the digital divide in order to address how the rising prominence of information in the digital age impacts those who do not have the social and economic affordances of technology in their daily work and life.

Keywords: News literacy, civic journalism, social media, newspapers, democracy, networked environments, digital divide.

Introduction

The rapid emergence of social media technologies, mobile phones, wikis and video sharing systems such as YouTube have undoubtedly altered the production and distribution of news. On February 26, 2009, the social networking site

Twitter beat the traditional mainstream news media in being the first to provide dramatic photos of a Turkish Airlines plane crash in Amsterdam.

Upon confirming with Dutch officials that the crash had happened, *CNN International* then followed with their own reporting of the story. In an unusual revelatory admission, *CNN* correspondent Errol Barnett conceded, “this proves that social networking sites can be a real asset in covering breaking news and gathering eyewitness accounts” (Edition.cnn.com 2009). Barnett’s acknowledgement that *Twitter* “stole a march” on traditional media was followed by a tactical disclaimer about such significant shifts in news information coverage: “The web should always be treated with extreme caution” (ibid., 2009). That same spring, when a building explosion in Bozeman, Montana levelled a downtown block and released debris over 200 feet, it was reported within minutes on *NewWest.com* - a Missoula-based online network covering the Rocky Mountain West (Lowery 2010). The news footage for the story was not obtained through traditional news reporters. Instead, photos and news details emerged from “crowdsourcing,” namely amateur spectators using new social media tools and Web 2.0 technologies to tell their stories and share them.

Although many news events and stories have since been covered in similar ways, these early examples served as avant-garde reporting, providing a glimpse into the social and economic displacement that hegemonic news organisations are experiencing in the new social media millennium. As documented by a June 2014 Gallup poll,

the circulation of newspapers continues to shrink to the point that University of Southern California’s Annenberg Center for the Digital Future estimates that most print newspapers will not exist in five years. Television news continues to see a proliferation of new cable news networks, including the launch of Al-Jazeera America in August 2013. Meanwhile, news from the Internet now figures prominently in the average American’s news diet, whereas not so long ago this mode did not even exist (Dugan 2014).

When controlling for age, digital news media have surpassed television and print in worth for the younger generation, with studies showing that digital is significantly more dominant than other news platforms. In fact, among consumers aged 16-34, print does not even measure on the scale (Blodget 2014).

Given the dramatic changes in the field of media, this paper explores the seismic shifts in news production and social activism that have emerged from new social media, and provides a news literacy framework for addressing the transformation of information in networked environments. As a result of the rapid deterioration of print newspapers as primary sources of information over the past decade, the paper addresses the symbolic, political and economic transformations that have resulted from social media and Internet networks as a means to develop news literacy models suitable for the digital age. While studies have explored the “structural and functional characteristics of mass/ interpersonal/ and peer communication” as they have evolved with Web 2.0, new epistemological approaches to news literacy in networked environments must develop in accordance with vast changes in the social construction of news and information in the digital age (Walther et al. 2011).

By devising critical news literacy frameworks centred on networked environments, this study will evaluate the benefits and drawbacks associated with new informational sources, as well as their emerging symbiotic relationship. Studies on generational changes in news acquisition tend to dichotomise each medium (print vs. social media) along old vs. new technology and trends. Rather than create artificial dualisms between old media / traditional journalism and new media / emerging social media, the approach herein offers a more complicated and nuanced notion of critical news literacy. Just as the aeroplane did not replace the automobile, news literacy models must acknowledge and address the po-

rosity of legacy news outlets and social media as they work symbiotically in the Digital Age to distribute and constitute contemporary forms of news and networks.

The goal is to widen the scope of news literacy paradigms to better address the transformational shifts that are occurring within the production and dissemination of news in society. Using a critical approach, news literacy must carefully consider the gains of local-to-global news enabled through social media and networked environments, as well as how the loss of traditional print newspapers may affect the viability of an informed and engaged citizenry as the virtual transformation of society is rapidly altering the fabric of American democracy. Similarly, news literacy requires a critical understanding of internet access and the digital divide in order to address how the rising prominence of information in the digital age impacts those who do not have the social and economic affordances of technology in their daily work and life.

News literacy 2.0

One of the fundamental goals of media literacy is to inform readers and viewers about the social construction of news and information. W. James Potter (2005, 101) explains that “news is not a reflection of actual events; it is a construction of news workers who are subjected to many influences and constraints”. Web 2.0 has shifted the emphasis of news production by expanding the scope of news workers beyond mainstream news reporters to include a broad swathe of people and communities referred to as crowdsourcing. With more people participating in news production and blogging, the range of public interest stories has led to a renewed interest in civic journalism. According to the Pew Center, civic journalism refers to “both a philosophy and a set of values supported by some evolving techniques to reflect both of those in journalism. At its heart is a belief that journalism has an obligation to public life - an obligation that goes beyond just telling the news or unloading lots of facts” (2015). The idea behind civic journalism is to foster the democratic process of discussion and debate within the public sphere as a means to validate the contributions of community members alongside journalists who shape and participate in civic life. In theory, the goals of civic journalism are rendered more easily within digitally networked environments as they have expanded the public sphere and led to the proliferation of new voices, narratives and issues. However in praxis, there are no definitive measures to qualitatively and quantitatively determine the ability of digital networks - of which social media are a part - to exclusively provide civic journalism as a necessary means of democratic engagement.

The swift and steady erosion of traditional newspapers gives pause to the idea that digital networks are a democratic panacea. As Evgeny Morozov (2012) explains in his assessment of the rise of social media and its ability to advance social revolution for democracy and freedom, *people* are far more likely to advance social causes and liberate humanity from government oppression than digital technologies [emphasis mine]. Digital networks are not enough because governments who wish to suppress civic journalism can do so by controlling the platforms used by those seeking social and political mobilisation.

When applying a Marxist approach of labour and surplus value to digital spheres of production and surveillance, many scholars have argued that all users of digital tools are labourers by producing social media content, news and/or entertainment (Curran, Fenton & Freedman 2012). As such, the production of news content in digital networks isn’t necessarily aligned with the goals of civic journalism because not everyone shares the same goals or economic standing in such environments. Not only are broad swathes of society left out of the production of civic ‘net-journalism’ due to the digital divide, but those who are producing news via such platforms may find the results of their labour unsustainable for investigative reporting and research. In the cyber-industrial complex, the ownership,

design, and architecture of online platforms reward the corporate owners of technological infrastructures over the values and practices of civic journalism. As Curran, Fenton and Freedman explain (2012), the owners of digital media sites have amalgamated and outsourced the data they have collected about their users to advertisers for a profit, providing a new type of e-commerce that keeps them profitable and dominant through a culture of surveillance.

Similarly, the 'pluralisation' and 'amateurisation' of news sources online may not necessarily lead to quality civic journalism. Although the evolution of social media is inevitably leading to profound shifts in the cultural and economic capital of traditional mainstream news media and journalism in the twenty-first century, concerns over the accuracy, representativeness, and democratic nature of these new media modes remain acute. In today's digital age, the overabundance of news channels and media sources has made it easier for Millennials and non-Millennials alike to access news and information online and through mobile apps. The challenge, however, is to develop critical thinking skills that go beyond the buzz-based algorithmic news feeds that reproduce the mainstream media's celebrity gossip, punditry and spin. According to the 2014 Pew Research Journalism Project, "Facebook reaches far more Americans than any other social media site... [with] three in ten adults get[ting] at least some news while on Facebook" (Matza and Mitchell 2014). The study explains that, while the range of news topics on Facebook is broad, entertainment is the pinnacle of news that users report seeing. These findings beg the question: is coming across a social media newsfeed the same as developing strategic search skills to find significant and verifiable news necessary for informed democratic participation? As the Pew Research Journalism Project (2014) indicates, getting "news" on Facebook is an incidental experience, leading critics to argue that inadvertently seeing news from your friends is not the same as using critical news literacy skills to locate trustworthy sources from diverse viewpoints. For the majority of today's media users, finding reliable sources of news is a challenge, especially for Millennials cultivated in a media landscape that encourages them to surf entertainment, trivia, gossip and pseudo-news from their friends rather than informative citizen-oriented news.

Given the challenges brought on by the Digital Age, news literacy must draw from multiple frameworks and multiliteracies. For instance, news literacy includes:

Layered Literacy, which describes the way that print and digital overlap, creating intertextuality; Transliteracy, or the ability to read and write across a wide variety of media formats; Electracy, which refers to the pedagogical skills necessary for new digital skills; and digital citizenship, which covers the role and rights of a person within the digital world (Briggs 2014).

A multiple literacies approach also consists of critically analysing media content, narrative structures, grammar, medium theory, advertising, and institutional analysis of media ownership, production and distribution (Frechette 2002). In order to help cultivate news literacy in the age of digital information, educators must go beyond including more platforms and technology into their lesson plans. Rather, teaching news literacy means addressing how citizens can leverage networked technology and infrastructures to enhance the quality, access, and diversity of news sources from local-to-global sources. It's about using networked news environments "to locate oneself in digital space, to manage knowledge and experience in the Age of Information" (Briggs 2014). The following ten key frameworks address the specific ways to achieve this kind of news literacy.

News Literacy Framework #1: Social media in a post-Internet world have displaced the hegemonic role and function of traditional mainstream news media outlets.

Few would disagree with the notion that social media have displaced the hegemonic role and function of traditional mainstream news media outlets. The transformation of the mainstream media landscape has been enabled by the pervasiveness of digital tools, allowing individuals and organisations to benefit from low-cost distribution networks in new online and portable media environments.

There are many examples of quality journalism found within online platforms. *ProPublica* is an important online venue for investigative journalism, offering an independent, non-profit e-newsroom that sheds light on issues affecting public interest. Its focus on exposing truth for social justice is its trademark as it seeks to provide stories with "moral force" (Joyner 2015). Leaning to the left of the political spectrum, *The Huffington Post* provides powerful public interest stories on its daily blog, and has steadily increased its commitment to underwriting original investigative reporting. Signalling a monumental shift in the sourcing of the Washington press corps, President Obama called on *Huffington Post* blogger, Sam Stein, at his first prime-time news conference in 2009 (Kurtz 2009). On the international scene, *GlobalPost* is an online news outlet that began providing in-depth coverage of newsworthy subjects in January 2009. Using an expansive network of professionally-trained journalists, its site has been recognised for its stellar investigative field reporting and blog updates on subjects from the global fiscal crisis to the war in Afghanistan (Sennott 2010).

Among others, these sites have proffered using experimental business models ideally suited to digital age reporting. The low-cost entry to the web, combined with large networks of writers, has allowed digital news providers to create entrepreneurial models of success. Non-profit online journalism has been ideally suited to offering in-depth and investigative reporting via digital platforms, particularly since low budgets have been standard for this genre of news. *Voiceofsandiego.org* (VOSD), the non-profit online daily, boasts that it is able to produce quality news under a million dollars since it is not burdened with the costs associated with paper printing (Donahue and Scott 2009). Whereas newsprint can total up to 86% of the cost of a traditional news organisation, online daily publications using this model explain that web hosting and production represent a small portion of their costs, allowing them to spend the vast majority of their budgets on trained journalists. Given the economical affordance of digital media, the VOSD site offers a glimpse into what non-profit online community news looks like editorially, covering a range of local issues and narratives from local activists leading the conversations on racial justice, to controversy surrounding the funding and building of a new city stadium, to California's epic drought. "Powered by 1,915 members", the site's editorial staff cover key communal issues, like the campaign financial scandal, concussions among the Chargers' football players, police misconduct, emergency response times, school performance, and state government (VOSD 2015). It offers a variety of podcasts with RSS feeds covering arts/culture, economy, education, food, government, headlines, land use, opinion, public safety, science/environment, and sports. Most uniquely, it offers an entire section to Partner Voices, which provides non-profits "a platform to showcase their contributions to the community in a more interesting format than traditional promotions" by allowing non-profits to fund their own coverage or to obtain funding from "local businesses or philanthropists who support their efforts" (ibid., 2015).

Given the significance of such structural and economic shifts within contemporary digital news production, access, and distribution, news literacy in the digital age must acknowledge the ways in which informational economies on the Internet and in the blogosphere allow alternative narratives and stories to thrive in local, national and global communities.

News Literacy Framework #2: Privacy invasion, data mining and marketing

are rendered more easily within networked environments

Given the vast amounts of personal data mining and marketing within networked environments, the rapid shift toward digital social media may very well lead to unintended consequences (see Zuboff 1988). Concerns have abounded as digital social media quantify how much content is downloaded, what type of information users prefer, what share of the market access content, during what time span, through what behavioral patterns, and so on. Governmental and consumer rights groups have assailed attacks on content providers who have registered personal user information through stored data via the aforementioned software tracking devices. For instance, in late April 2010, privacy changes on Facebook's social networking site prompted cacophonous alarm among site users and federal regulators when it was revealed that personal data would be disclosed for advertising and marketing purposes. As a strategic marketing initiative, Facebook asked users if they wanted to link personal demographics information (such as current city, hometown, school, and workplace history) with business-operated Facebook pages, upending user-designated privacy settings (Richmond 2010). Advocacy groups such as *Privacy Journal*, *PrivacyActivism.org*, and *The Center for Digital Democracy* harshly criticised these changes, openly calling for government legislation to "address this massive and stealth data collection that has emerged" (Chester, cited in McCullagh 2010).

Accordingly, news literacy frameworks designed for networked environments must go beyond addressing the impact of traditional advertising by critically assessing issues associated with privacy, data mining, and marketing in the digital age (Frechette 2002).

News Literacy Framework #3: Social media often promote narcissism, celebrity news and "infotainment" rather than civic journalism

Alongside the market's penchant to obtain and register demographic information for advertising, marketing and branding as a means to offering customised content portfolios, there are legitimate concerns that "social" media will become even more narcissistic by supplying users with exclusive tailored content at the cost of providing a range of content that reflects broader social issues related to the larger public sphere. The privileging of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and news "apps" symbolically and materially leads to a gravitational value shift toward individualised and personalised news and information over shared public information through a collective common. For those who revere the notion of civic journalism through a shared medium - even in spite of its inherent problematic of advertising and institutional conventions - online-only publications may signal a further demise of a tangible, equally-accessible public press.

As networked manifestations of news and information become more commercially specialised toward amusing and soliciting the individual, the function of news as a *public commodity* is marginalised. Celebrity news and "infotainment" have increasingly overshadowed muck-raking and watchdog analysis. As *New York Times* writer Andrew Rice explained early on when news trending became predominant, more often than not, high-ranking posts on people's websites revealed sex, scandal and Sarah Palin (2010). GlobalPost, an online publication for international news, also revealed a similar trend when noting that, during its serious coverage of international wars and earthquakes, two popular sites in their first year were for a post titled "Meet India's First Porn Star" alongside a slide show of Japanese cat outfits (Rice 2010).

As Ken Tucker contends in his more recent analysis of mainstream American morning news shows, most programmes like NBC's *Today*, ABC's *Good Morning America* and CBS *This Morning* are turning to social media models of infotainment to redefine their contemporary news model through trending social media promotions and synergistic ad promos at the cost of substantive news. He writes,

I discovered that the networks' news divisions are pumping out morning TV that is a riot of brightly colored sets, social-media branding and sponsored segments. They wave wildly for the attention of viewers who can get hard-news headlines on a multitude of formats and platforms. Their efforts are both heroic and dismaying (Tucker 2014).

Currently, with consumers spending more time obtaining entertainment news and content via their mobile devices and tablet apps (New York Daily News 2014), news will become even more tailored to their personal profiles, social interests, past search history, and spending capital. To best address these content shifts, news literacy must help users distinguish between civic journalism and other forms of information available digitally.

News Literacy Framework #4: Not all news providers are equal within networked environments

As with the previous framework, this measure is concerned with shifts in the authorship of news content among digital media. Although more voices and perspectives are feasible within networked environments, the professional training and craft associated with journalism is eroding as freelancers and novice writers colonise the blogosphere. Resulting from training, experience and depth reporting, professional reporters are skilled to investigate and expose corruption while raising critical questions about public policy and civic issues. Yet many amateur citizen-journalists "do not have the skills and background to produce the most accurate journalism", leaving "space for rumor, incorrect facts, and just plain nonsense" (Abramson 2010). In fact, the vast majority of investigative and watchdog journalism reports that are publicised still come from newspapers with professional reporters and editors, generating fodder for bloggers and websites who serve as secondary sources. Accordingly, whole occupations are vanishing as traditional newspapers and media organisations restructure in the current fiscal and cultural climate.

Although the potential for more voices to find their way online in digital media helps to further democratic ideals, inaccuracy remains a major concern among educators and news consumers alike. The findings of a 2014 Media and Public Opinion (MPO) study documenting the rise of internet news as the most dominant media source raises several news literacy concerns. As MPO journalist Katherine Mendelson explains,

with so many people turning to the internet for their news, who is there to vet which sources are accurate and which are sensational? Will journalists lose their ethical compass and publish at a whim. Sure, it's ultimately up to the reader to decide for him or herself what to believe and what not to believe, but in this fast paced day and age, will news consumers really have time for that? I don't believe that the majority of us will which means we're entering the wild west of news consummation. My motto - buyer (or surfer in this case) beware...

Given these important concerns for legitimacy and trustworthiness, news literacy in a networked environment requires the critical analysis and production of accurate and ethical media across digital platforms and channels. This means learning to make distinctions between the validity and reliability of amateur bloggers, crowdsourcing, and stories produced by qualified journalists.

News Literacy Framework #5: Networked environments do not necessarily sustain investigative journalism.

Investigative journalism has become a casualty in the new social media environment, as costs associated with probing news stories are prohibitive for failing news organisations. Budgetary cuts among most regional newspapers have significantly hampered efforts by writers to investigate complex socio-political and economic stories affecting the political elite, the disenfranchised, and those in between. For example, the decreased number

of credible journalists available to investigate wrongful convictions and exonerations for prisoners is a noteworthy harbinger of the declining newsroom's investigative capacity. Diminished newsroom resources have impeded efforts by death-penalty opponents to seek out indisputable DNA evidence related to innocent executions in America.

Science journalism is another victim among dwindling news organisations with fewer expert journalists to render complicated ideas into palatable "public interest" stories. Civic journalism champions Robert McChesney and John Nichols (2010) contend that the elimination of science beats and specialist journalists threatens journalism's function as a democratic cornerstone: "When CNN eliminated its entire science, space and technology unit in 2008, the field was left almost entirely to newspapers and magazines. Unfortunately, print publications were following the CNN route..." (25).

The trend of budget slashing combined with fewer bureaus and specialised news departments have further reduced the ability of professional journalists to address newsworthy stories affecting whole segments of the civic sector. National news magazines, such as *Newsweek*, have also been unable to compete with the new business model for providing quality journalism in the digital age, as they seek new ownership (Vanacore 2010). Local dailies, providing the ethos of most communities, are among the last holdouts, suffering cutbacks and layoffs among their staff.

Finally, many fledgling news organisations seeking to boost online advertising revenue have turned to automation to create quantifiable readership traffic boosts by creating feeds from their news pages to post scheduled headlines and links to Twitter and Facebook accounts. Such actions circumvent the qualitative purpose of social media to add value to stories by "pulling important information, soliciting feedback and in general, acting like a human, not like a robot" (Lowery 2009).

While networked environments level the playing field of production among digital media users, news literacy models must address the political and economic factors affecting investigative journalism.

News Literacy Framework #6: Social media and traditional media constitute a symbiotic relationship

There is growing concern that the weakening of traditional news media institutions will lead to the loss of an important collective public medium. At the very same time that participatory social media enterprises have demonstrated their function, popularity, and success as alternatives to corporate media, there are concerns about the financial demise of several large media companies that provide civic journalism. Many American cities are facing a dilemma as established daily newspapers are undergoing economic restructuring through downsizing, bankruptcy, or worse - closing publications.

In light of the economic downturn among traditional newspapers, the "new media" vs. "old media" paradigm may not accurately represent the continuum that stretches between alternative news media on one end, and traditional print journalism on the other. Inasmuch as the advent of the aeroplane did not render meaningless the function of the automobile, the emergence and function of alternative online dailies and social media should be conceptualised as a symbiotic relationship in which they work alongside institutional news media rather than replace the journalistic function of a vibrant daily newspaper in any given metropolitan area. Newsroom practitioners, such as *NewWest.Net* editor, Courtney Lowery (2010), have observed the importance of both traditional and social news media. Lowery describes the importance of her news organisation in filtering and fact-checking incoming information, testifying to the critical functions of traditional news organisations alongside new social media such as Twitter and Facebook.

Given the benefits of both forms and structures of traditional and digital media and their interconnectedness, news literacy frameworks will need to establish and draw from the symbiotic relationship between old and new media.

News Literacy Framework #7: Web 2.0 funding models alter the quality, scope, diversity and frequency of news

As capital investments have shifted away from traditional journalism to non-traditional digital media start-ups, there are mixed reviews about the formation of new economic models for producing news content. From a market standpoint, investors of institutionalised news organisations have been fostering experimentation in order to remain financially viable. Unique versions of financing through "pay walls" and "crowdfunding" that ask readers to pay for some of the news costs have been employed to deal with declining advertising revenue and institutional budgets (Kilby 2010; Szendro Bok 2010). The Knight Foundation, a large non-profit institution dedicated to improving journalism worldwide, has helped news organisations transition into the digital age. Having invested more than \$400 million on traditional journalism programmes since 1950, the foundation began exploring digital alternatives in 2007 by investing \$25 million in new exploratory projects over a five-year period (Bebinger 2009). Included in these projects was the early crowdsourcing site *Spot.us*, a website offering journalistic news content based on donations from those seeking to have an issue or story covered by reporters. The decision to cover stories was based upon revenue generated through community funds to cover the costs of reporting expenses. Designed as an open source project, tax-deductible donations were solicited to cover news stories commissioned by the public on topics deemed significant or otherwise marginalised. If a news organisation decided to buy exclusive rights to the content, donations were reimbursed.

Spot.us offered an inventive idea at a time when news was going digital. It was purchased by Public Insight Media (PIN) in 2015. Instead of allowing anyone to write a story based on community member interest, today's new site brings journalists and citizens together by pairing crowdsourced stories with established public and private news outlets, such as National Public Radio, American Public Media, the Center for Public Integrity, the Washington Post and state public radio networks across the country. The key difference in this model is that the general public is encouraged to "sign up to share knowledge and insights with journalists, helping them cover the news in greater depth and uncover stories they might not otherwise find" (Public Insight Network 2015). In spite of earlier goals for crowdsourcing from diverse sources, results of the proportionality and representativeness of the PIN stories accepted by community members are not disclosed.

Unlike the dissolution of *Spot.us*, *EveryBlock.com* remains solvent as a crowdsourcing digital news bulletin, offering community members in Chicago, Philadelphia, Denver and Boston "a new way to keep track of what's happening on your block, in your neighborhood and all over your city". By selecting a neighborhood or typing in a zip code, tailored news corresponding with a geographic center point is provided to the site user. In addition to providing news, trends are tracked over time in selected regions, including crime, local violations and permit applications.

As a whole, social media experiments like these offer promises as well as perils for civic journalism. On the one hand, paying journalists story by story to provide news media coverage of an issue may be considered a viable means to dealing with shrinking news coverage of important beats, such as science, healthcare and education, within mainstream news. According to Matt James, the senior vice president at the Kaiser Family Foundation, alternative crowdfunding news systems like these can help their organisations obtain the news they require. In Kaiser's case, dwindling news stories about healthcare have led

the company to form its own news service by supplying stories to newspapers with whom they have formed partnerships, including *The Washington Post* and *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Bebinger 2009). While such practices may have been deemed unacceptable in previous economic climates, they have been warranted by cuts in news coverage.

On the other hand, a system of journalism that renders a dollar into a vote for news coverage is fraught with problems. While stories that are marginalised in the corporate press may potentially have a greater cyber-market share if citizens mobilise collectively to pay for them, the costs - both literally and figuratively - acquiesce to a capitalist system that renders civic journalism obsolete. In this model, news about school committees, local organisations, community forums and government agencies no longer fall under the purview of civic journalism; they are now subject to the interests and whims of the dominant classes valued in privileged geographic locations. In these new neoliberal systems, those who cannot pay for news content or produce it no longer retain membership in “public interest” circles as they are redefined through social media.

In fact, the recent dissolution and buyouts of these online news sites by for-profit corporate media firms confirms the vulnerability of crowdsourced public interest news. For instance, the Canadian social media news site NowPublic.com was bought out by a private investor and closed in 2013, with traffic redirected to Examiner.com. While the new site claims it draws its content from independent contributors, the goal is no longer quality public journalism. Today, its function is to offer “dynamic entertainment, news and lifestyle” content vetted to support the Examiner.com’s business model. Boasting a viewership of more than 20 million monthly readers across the U.S. and around the world, the website looks like any other commercial entertainment news provider, chock full of celebrity photos and trending stories. Similarly, Newsvine.com also states that it is a collaborative crowdsourced news website; yet it is privately owned by MSNBC with an amalgamation of news content links from mainstream news and Associated Press. It uses algorithmic, ad-revenue-generated funding for its content, leading content contributors to push for increased traffic to their stories, topics and photos - not unlike those popular with mainstream sources. Likewise, AllVoices.com is fuelled by corporate branding and funding, and dictated by private commercial editorial considerations.

With local news shifting to digital platforms, contemporary modes of news literacy require that community members become more locally invested and civically engaged if they are to help contribute knowledgeably about their communities to other interested citizens. This means that more participants will need to take an active role in public interest news participation and production. Moreover, members of the public sphere will need to demand and maintain clear and overt funding mechanisms for producing and sustaining quality journalists within the community. Given the rapid rate at which public news sites are being purchased and privatised, citizens will need to establish news information portals and digital news networks that value community-based stories for their members.

News Literacy Framework #8: Informed publics must learn to become watchdogs for detecting secrecy, inaccuracies or libel in social networks.

In addition, the editorial independence of journalism is called into question when news organisations provide content on a pay-as-you-go system. Unlike traditional advertising, which, as an aggregate, helps to fund the majority of news in a given programme or venue, individual sponsors are able to underwrite single-focused news content. This practice will invariably raise concerns about the influence of sponsorship on the fairness and balance provided in a news story. As *Pew Journalism Project* director Amy Mitchell explains, this will mean that “there’s a lot more responsibility put on members of the public to be wise about where their information is coming from and to be doing some of their own background work on organisations and who they are and where they’re coming from” (cited in

Bebinger 2009).

Likewise, the onus will be on well-funded online news sources or public groups to engage in watchdog and muck-raking practices. According to a recent review of thousands of federal court records conducted by Syracuse University’s Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, it was discovered that mainstream media organisations “were filing fewer lawsuits challenging federal government secrecy than in past years” (Johnson and Hall 2015).

Although more FOIA lawsuits were filed against the federal government in the 2014 fiscal year, Syracuse researchers found that the “*The New York Times* was the only so-called ‘legacy’ news organisation to have brought several legal challenges in federal court” (Johnson and Hall 2015). Although other news groups, namely *ProPublica*, *MuckRock*, *VICE News*, and advocacy groups such as the left-leaning Public Citizen and the right-leaning Judicial Watch, were more likely than several traditional news organisations to issue lawsuits under the FOIA, the Syracuse report discovered that private interests have now surpassed public ones when it comes to filing FOIA suits for watchdog purposes (ibid., 2015).

As such, with private interests and alternative news sources now usurping the power of legacy news organisations to provide investigative journalism, news literacy will require teaching the public how to become watchdogs for detecting inaccuracies or libel within networked environments by accessing open source portals and access sites.

News Literacy Framework #9: Clear and overt funding mechanisms are needed for quality journalism in networked environments.

As for localised news through *EveryBlock.com* and *PublicInsightNetwork.org*, the promise of participation is held through a belief that people will become more locally invested and civically engaged if they are knowledgeable about their communities. While this may occur, the funding mechanisms for producing and sustaining quality journalists within a given geographic area are not rendered clear.

“If it is a long-term project, the mainstream media doesn’t have the interest or necessarily the resources to play what I’d call the long game,” said Hodes, who added that “mainstream media had a lot of money in the past and they used big law firms. And big law firms charge big fees.” So who has the money, and the inclination to spend it? (cited in Johnson and Hall 2015).

According to Matt Smith, a veteran journalist with the *Center for Investigative Reporting* in Emeryville, California, private and individual interests are much more likely to show up in FOIA logs for investigative inquiries:

“Often it’s all law firms, or if you Google names on a FOIA log they are industry investigators or their competitors,” said Smith. “It seems to be less sort of public-serving organisations and more individual interests that are using FOIA for something from which they can profit” (cited in Johnson and Hall 2015).

Accordingly, without the proper structural mechanisms designed to fund investigative journalism online, the fear is that public interest may be trumped by private interests when it comes to having the necessary resources to access the FOIA and other muck-raking sources. Moreover, within alternative digital news portals, there are no journalistic caveats prescribing who is best qualified to provide fair and accurate news and information in a given community on an online news site. Therefore, news literacy should encourage members of the public to demand and maintain clear and overt funding mechanisms for producing and sustaining quality journalists within the community, while also teaching skills unique to detecting and reporting inaccuracies or libel.

News Literacy Framework #10: Readers will need to learn to become politi-

cally engaged with social media by broadening their scope of news and information from local to global sources, and by “becoming the media”.

If social media sites function as trend recorders through data mining and targeted marketing, the qualitative aspects of community journalism will be displaced in favor of for-profit advertising and marketing, expediency and apolitical social networking. Online tracking features such as “Google Analytics” allow news providers to know precisely which published stories are read, and how often, thereby altering the choices news organisations make to produce items that drive traffic to their online sites (LaPointe 2010). Such traffic is quantified to lure advertising dollars to a particular site. Joel Kramer explains the powerful effect that Google Analytics has on *MinnPost’s* site as it impacts the process of news production: “It makes us want to do more of what gets read, and less of what doesn’t, while remaining true to our mission.” (Kramer 2010) Inevitably, shorter news stories generate more traffic to the site, forcing Kramer to concede that short-form work “does mean that we do a lot fewer ambitious investigative reports than I would like us to publish” (6).

In documenting the wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo where two successive wars since 1996 have killed more than five million people, freelance journalist Anjan Sundaram offers a poignant critique:

“The Western news media are in crisis and are turning their back on the world. We hardly ever notice. Where correspondents were once assigned to a place for years or months, reporters now handle 20 countries each. Bureaus are in hub cities, far from many of the countries they cover. And journalists are often lodged in expensive bungalows or five-star hotels. As the news has receded, so have our minds. To the consumer, the news can seem authoritative. But the 24-hour news cycles we watch rarely give us the stories essential to understanding the major events of our time. The news machine, confused about its mandate, has faltered. Big stories are often missed. Huge swaths of the world are forgotten or shrouded in myth. The news both creates these myths and dispels them, in a pretense of providing us with truth”. (2014).

Given the unequal ways in which some issues and areas of the world are covered, and the institutional limitations associated with dwindling global news bureaus, shrinking sound bites, and the reduction of news stories to 140 characters, international news coverage continues to remain marginalised in the digital sphere. Ultimately, there are clear differences between using social media technology to stay connected with one’s pre-defined social group, and being a member of a public sphere where tensions and important issues require a firm commitment to civic engagement. What’s more, the hyper-localised, hyper-personalised content delivery system of social media may paradoxically alter the global nature of cyberspace by altering the scope of the user’s social interactions. Accordingly, news literacy must address shifting behaviours and patterns of social media practices by encouraging readers to scan a wide variety of sources within global contexts rather than rely upon individually-tailored news or local contexts.

Moreover, news literacy must incorporate media production skills so that students learn by doing, through effective blogging, vlogging, podcasting, creating new apps, etc. By “becoming the media,” students will learn to use social media for their own transformational outcomes in limitless ways via local, regional, national and international networked platforms.

Conclusion

Public participation in social media is proliferating at a pace that few can track and comprehend. New paradigms of news literacy in networked environments must evolve alongside technological developments. As the business model of journalism creates new distribution systems, it remains unclear who will fill in the gap for shrinking mainstream news,

and who the winners and losers will be. Longstanding print dailies, such as *The New York Times*, have already turned their once free online news into a pay-as-you-read system, indicating profound changes in the accessibility of news dailies. Moreover, the distinctions between professional and amateur journalists are becoming blurred as bloggers and crowdsourcing alter the composition of news institutions. While the participatory nature of social media has endowed certain populations within particular geographic regions with a new set of agency, others have not found their place within these social spheres due to political, economic and social reasons. With dwindling numbers of the public reading newspapers, watching mainstream news, and participating in institutional electoral politics, the concept and function of journalism within civil society will continue to change as new social media evolve.

Although new choices of media sources will continue to proliferate within networked digital spheres, thereby offering alternatives to those provided by corporate news organisations, the ability of news producers and users to access and assess the quality and reliability of news content remains a concern. The importance of recognising how these changes will affect public awareness, public opinion and civic engagement are ever more pressing in an information age defined by technology. In the end, news literacy skills are needed to address networked environments:

News literacy in a networked environment requires the analysis and production of ethical media as well as media criticism skills.

Without traditional gate keeping, the public will have to be wise about where their information is coming from and actively engage in their own background work on bloggers, organisations and their credentials.

This means learning to make distinctions between the validity and reliability of amateur bloggers, crowdsourcing and stories produced by qualified journalists.

Distinctions between civic journalism and news that promote narcissism, celebrity news and ‘infotainment’ will need to be made across digital media.

Given the benefits of both forms and structures of traditional and digital media and their interconnectedness, news literacy frameworks will need to establish the symbiotic relationship between old and new media.

If localised news is digitised through sites like *PublicInsightNetwork.org*, *GoLocal*, and *Placeblogger*, community members will need to become more locally invested and civically engaged if they are knowledgeable about their communities. This means that more participants will need to take an active role in social media participation and production.

The public will need to demand and maintain clear and overt funding mechanisms for producing and sustaining quality journalists within the community.

Bloggers and their readers will need to create journalistic caveats to help determine what stories to cover and who is best qualified to provide fair and accurate news and information in a community on these sites.

The onus will be on the public to become watchdogs for detecting inaccuracies or libel.

Readers will need to scan a wide variety of sources within global contexts rather than rely upon individually tailored or local contexts.

By incorporating a holistic approach through these key frameworks, the hope is that news literacy will provide viable measures for digital citizenship by encouraging all generations to rethink their approach to obtaining and producing valid and reliable news and information that serve civic interests and democratic ideals.

References

- Abramson, J. 2010. "Sustaining Quality Journalism." *Daedalus* 139 (2): 39-44.
- AFP RELAXNEWS. "People Use Apps More than Web Browsers: Study." *NY Daily News*, August 22, 2014. Accessed December 8, 2014. <http://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/people-apps-web-browsers-study-article-1.1913628>.
- Anon. 2015. Accessed 21 Mar. 2015. www.indymedia.org.
- Bebinger, M. 2009. "The Bottom Line: Experimenting with the Future of Local News." *WBUR*.
- Blodget, H. "If Newspapers and Magazines Think Life Is Tough Now, They Won't Want To See What Happens Next ..." *Business Insider*, May 4, 2014. Accessed April 21 2015. <http://www.businessinsider.com/media-usage-by-age-2014-5#!JrJED>.
- Briggs, S. "20 Things Educators Need to Know About Digital Literacy Skills." *Innovationexcellence.com*, August 12, 2014. Accessed April 15, 2015. <http://www.innovationexcellence.com/blog/2014/08/12/20-things-educators-need-to-know-about-digital-literacy-skills/?Itemid=92>.
- Castells, M. 2001. *The Internet Galaxy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- CNN. "Twitter first to publish dramatic crash pictures." *CNN.com*, February 26, 2009. <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/02/25/twitter.amsterdam.plane.crash>.
- Curran, J., Fentor, N., and D. Freedman. 2012. *Misunderstanding the Internet*. London: Routledge.
- Donahue, Andrew, and Scott Lewis. 2009. *Voice of San Diego | News. Investigation. Analysis. Conversation*. Accessed January 21, 2015. <http://www.voiceofsandiego.org>.
- Dugan, A. 2014. "Americans' Confidence in News Media Remains Low." *Gallup.com*. Accessed April 15, 2015. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/171740/americans-confidence-news-media-remains-low.aspx>.
- EveryBlock. 2015. *EveryBlock: A News Feed for Your Block*. Accessed April 6, 2015. <http://everyblock.com>.
- Frechette, J. 2002. *Developing Media Literacy in Cyberspace*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.
- Habermas, J. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Johnson, K., and K. Hall. "New Players Replacing Newspapers in Seeking Government Info." *BillMoyers.com*, March 16, 2015. Accessed April 14, 2015. <http://billmoyers.com/2015/03/16/new-players-replacing-newspapers-seeking-government-info/>.
- Jones, A. 2009. *Losing the News*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Joyner, J. "Why is ProPublica Writing Articles for the Washington Post?" *Outsidethebeltway.com*, June 27, 2009. Accessed March, 14 2015. http://www.outsidethebeltway.com/why_is_propublica_writing_articles_for_the_washington_post.
- Kilby, J. "New Sites Try 'Crowdfunding' to Finance Journalism." *Newser*, August 24, 2008. Accessed March 23, 2015. <http://www.newser.com/story/35644/new-sites-try-crowdfunding-to-finance-journalism.html>.
- Kramer, J. 2010. "Lessons I've Learned after a Year Running MinnPost." *Nieman Lab*, March 19, 2009. Accessed January, 21 2015. <http://www.niemanlab.org/2009/03/joel-kramer-lessons-ive-learned-after-a-year-running-minnpost/>.
- Kroker, A., and M. Weinstein. 1994. *Data Trash*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

- Kurtz, H. "At His First Prime-Time News Conference, Obama is Serious and Expansive." *The Washington Post*, February 10, 2009. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/09/AR2009020903701.html>.
- LaPointe, E. "Google Analytics Releases New, Faster Tracking Code." *Search Engine Land*, May 21, 2010. Accessed March 21, 2015. <http://searchengineland.com/google-analytics-releases-new-faster-tracking-code-42367>.
- Lowery, C. 2009. "An Explosion Prompts Rethinking of Twitter and Facebook." <http://niemanreports.org/articles/an-explosion-prompts-rethinking-of-twitter-and-facebook/>.
- Morozov, E. 2011. *The Net Delusion the Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. New York: Public Affairs.
- McChesney, R., and J. Nichols. 2010. *The Death and Life of American Journalism*. Philadelphia, PA: Nation Books.
- McCullagh, D. "Privacy Groups Assail Facebook Changes." *CNET*, May 27, 2010. Accessed February 21, 2015. http://news.cnet.com/8301-13578_3-20006220-38.html.
- McLuhan, M. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Mendelson, K. "Where Do Americans Get Their News?" *Media and Public Opinion Post*, June 4, 2014. Accessed April 14, 2015. <http://www.mpopost.com/where-do-americans-get-their-news-2-2821>.
- Perez-Pena, R. "As Cities Go from Two Papers to One, Talk of Zero." *The New York Times*, March 11, 2009.
- Pewcenter.org. 2015. "Nonpartisan, Non-Advocacy Public Opinion Polling and Demographic Research." Accessed March 20, 2015. <http://www.pewcenter.org>.
- Potter, W. 2005. *Media Literacy*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Public Insight Network*. 2015 Accessed April 10, 2015. <https://www.publicinsightnetwork.org/about>.
- Rice, A. 2010. "Putting a Price on Words." *The New York Times*.
- Richardson, M. 2009. "The Rocky Mountain News Closes Its Doors for Final Time." Accessed March 17, 2015. <http://wettub.com/the-rocky-mountain-news-closes-its-doors-for-final-time/>.
- Richmond, R. 2010. "Facebook Stirs Privacy Concerns Again." *The New York Times*.
- Sennott, C. 2010. "A Blast of Ground Truth from the Field in Afghanistan." *Groundtruthblog.com*. Accessed March 19, 2015. <http://groundtruthblog.com/2010/05/28/a-blast-of-groundtruth-from-the-field-in-afghanistan/>.
- Spot.us*. 2015. Accessed March 21, 2015. <http://spot.us>.
- Stanley, A. 1994. "Technology and the Future of Work." In *Culture on the Brink: Ideologies of Technology*, edited by G. Bender and T. Druckery, 15-29. Seattle: Bay Press.
- Sundaram, A. 2014. "We're Missing the Story: The Media's Retreat From Foreign Reporting." *The New York Times*.
- Szendro, M. "Exploring New Experiments in Journalism: Newsday Paywall Fails, While Spot.us Lets Readers Decide What News to Pay For." *Newmediarights.org*. February 3, 2010. Accessed March 21, 2015. http://www.newmediarights.org/citizen_journalism/exploring_new_experiments_in_journalism_Newsday_paywall_fails_Spot_us_lets_readers_decide_to_pay_for_news.
- Tucker, K. "Ken Tucker: Morning News Shows Now Full of Social-Media Promo-

tion, Synergistic Shilling — But Little News.” *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 9, 2014. Accessed April 16, 2015. http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/ken-tucker-morning-news-shows-739318?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_term=hollywoodreporter_breakingnews&utm_campaign=THR_Breaking_News_2014-10-09_06:00:00_America/Los_Angeles_acouch.

Vanacore, A. n.d. “Washington Post Seeks Buyer for Newsweek.” *ABC News*. Accessed March 21, 2015. <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory?id=10561910>.

Voice of San Diego. 2015. “News. Investigation. Analysis. Conversation.” Accessed April 9, 2015. <http://www.voiceofsandiego.org>.

Walther, J., Carr, C., S. Choi, D. DeAndrea, B. Heide, J. Kim, and S. T. Tong (2010). “Interaction of Interpersonal, Peer, and Media Influence Sources Online.” In *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, edited by Z. Papacharissi, 17-38. New York: Routledge.

Zuboff, S. 1988. *In the Age of the Smart Machine*. New York: Basic Books.

When teens create the news: examining the impact of PBS/news hour student reporting labs

Renee Hobbs, University of Rhode Island / Media Education Lab

Abstract

The PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs program (www.studentreportinglabs.com) connects middle and high school students to local PBS stations and broadcast news professionals in their communities to report on critical issues from a youth perspective. Through a project-based, active learning model, students learn how to synthesise information and investigate important topics, while building media literacy, communication and problem-solving skills necessary for the knowledge economy of the 21st century. The program involves more than 50 schools and community centers across the country and each site has adapted the program to meet the particular educational needs of its students, faculty and community. The intended goals of the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs program are to help students gain a better understanding of what constitutes news; evaluate the credibility of the information they receive via news content; strengthen their appreciation for the norms of professional journalism; and build skills and confidence as communicators through learning how to produce news content in a collaborative real-world environment where what they create may be viewed by an authentic large audience and publication becomes the ultimate assessment. Findings from pre-post quantitative research conducted with nearly 500 high school students who participated in the program reveal the development of media production skills that involved gathering and synthesising information, using digital media and technology to communicate ideas in the format of a broadcast news package, and engaging in cycles of revision and feedback to polish their work. This study found significant increases in collaboration and teamwork competencies, including intellectual curiosity, the ability to give and receive feedback, and confidence in self-expression and advocacy.

Keywords: journalism, media, media literacy, education, high school, secondary education, public broadcasting, news, partnership, program, evaluation