PART ONE
Thinking About Journalism
CHAPTER 1

New Challenges for Journalism in the 21st Century

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Introduction
The emergence and uptake of digital, networked technologies in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have resulted in the development of the Internet as a platform for the production and consumption of news. This chapter examines the challenges facing established media, which have tended to transfer their journalistic culture to digital media rather than rethink established routines and conventions. It draws from studies in new media and new literacies to suggest that new technologies, new rules, and new skill sets necessitate a new conceptual framework for journalism. The new journalist needs to understand how news and information work in a digital world rather than simply apply established norms and practices in communicating that may no longer be effective.

Redefining the Journalist and Journalism
Journalists are grappling with the changes taking place in the profession in a media environment where even the questions of who is a journalist and what is journalism are open to interpretation (Deuze 2005). Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2001) say the primary “purpose of journalism is to provide people with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (12). The responsibility of the journalist is to deliver the independent, reliable, accurate, and comprehensive information considered vital to the functioning of democratic societies.

However, defining who is a journalist proves far more problematic. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a journalist as “a person who writes for newspapers or magazines or prepares news or features to be broadcast on radio or television.” This

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Introduction 9
Redefining the Journalist and Journalism 9
The Changing Nature of Journalism 10
Understanding New Media 13
New Media, New Journalism 15
Conclusion 17
Discussion Questions 18
Suggested Resources 18
References 18
definition is less about what a journalist actually does and more about whom they work for. It reflects how the profession of journalism developed in a mass media system where there was a close relationship between journalists, publishers, and the means of production.

The 20th century was characterized by the rise and dominance of mass media in Western liberal societies. The mass media system has its roots in the 19th century, with the spread of newspapers, mass market books, magazines, and eventually film, radio, and television. The shift toward an industrialized society where people lived in large and impersonal urban centres rather than in smaller communities led to the institutionalization of communication (Parsons 1964).

In a media system designed to reach the many, the journalist emerged as the mediator between power elites and the public. There was a need for “professional observers and communicators to work full-time to access, select and filter, produce and edit news, which is then distributed via the media to network members” (Domingo et al. 2008, 329).

The definition of journalism and the role of the journalist are closely linked to the socio-historical development of the media. Traditionally, journalism has been attached to the media as an institution, based on the production of news by paid professionals who decide what the public needs to know, when it needs to know it, and how it will know it. The term gatekeeper is used to describe this journalistic role, maintained and enforced by professional norms and practices arguably to ensure the quality and objectivity of journalism (Reese and Ballinger 2001; Shoemaker 1991).

Yet advances in technology and the introduction of new media are fundamentally altering the nature of mass communication, and with it journalism. The start of the 21st century has been marked by media industries facing profound change in their structure and business models, the nature of their content, and their relationship with audiences. Journalism and the journalist as a media professional are at the centre of a transformation that is challenging norms and routines that have remained, until now, highly consistent (Schudson 2003; Tuchman 2002). Mark Deuze (2005) suggests that

[the combination of mastering newsgathering and storytelling techniques in all media formats (so-called “multi-skilling”), as well as the integration of digital network technologies coupled with a rethinking of the news producer-consumer relationship tends to be seen as one of the biggest challenges facing journalism studies and education in the 21st century. (451)

The Changing Nature of Journalism
The idea of the convergence of media and technology was first proposed by Nicholas Negroponte of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the late 1970s. He argued that three distinct areas—broadcast and film, print and publishing, and the computer industry—would come together by the 21st century. Another MIT political scientist, Ithiel de Sola Pool (1983), described the impact technological convergence could have on the media. He suggested that convergence was blurring the lines between distinct forms of media such as newspapers, radio, and television, given that “conversation, theater, news, and text are all increasingly delivered electronically” (27).
Convergence is more than a technological process that brings together multiple media functions. For Henry Jenkins (2001), “media convergence is an ongoing process, occurring at various intersections of media technologies, industries, content and audiences; it’s not an end state” (93). He argues that this process is leading to what he calls convergence culture, with the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation of multiple media industries, and new behaviours by media audiences as they seek information and entertainment (Jenkins 2006).

The Effects of Convergence, Multimedia, and Audience Participation
A discussion on the effects of convergence on journalism could easily fill several volumes. In broad terms, it has changed the creation, distribution, and consumption of content (Gordon 2003). The convergence of print, broadcast, and online operations has resulted in changes in news production practices, with journalists required to produce multimedia content for delivery on digital platforms. Journalism on the Web is characterized by the ability to combine multiple media, blending elements from print, text, and graphics with those of broadcast, sound, music, and video. The mere presence of different media in a story, however, does not by itself create a multimedia story. Multimedia storytelling involves using text, photographs, video clips, audio, graphics, and interactivity in a complementary (rather than redundant) manner, requiring journalists to make editorial judgments about the choice of medium or media.

The boundaries between print, broadcast, and online media have eroded as newsrooms explore convergence and adopt multimedia working practices. Discussing the crisis in the American newspaper industry, Leonard Downie and Michael Schudson

Figure 1.1 Until 2010, this spot at a busy Toronto intersection where a planter box now stands was occupied by a long row of almost a dozen newspaper boxes. “Convergence culture” has forever changed how news and information are created, distributed, and consumed.
(2009) indicated that “many newspapers are extensively restructuring themselves to integrate their print and digital operations, creating truly multimedia news organizations in ways that should produce both more cost savings—and more engaging journalism.”

Research into the merging of the old and new logics of news production suggests that cultural resistance to the transition to a multimedia newsroom exists, as journalists who previously worked in one platform, such as newspapers, are required to provide content for the Web, in text, audio, or video (Singer 1998). Studies have also indicated unease among news professionals about the pressure to use storytelling techniques in different media formats (Cawley 2008; Klinenberg 2005; Lawson-Borders 2006).

Despite these concerns, a reporter in a converged media environment is increasingly required to know how to produce a news story in more than one format. In their study of the attitudes of editors and news professionals, Edgar Huang et al. (2006) found that the two top valued skills were good writing and multimedia production. While critical thinking remained important, they concluded that “multimedia writing and production skills are equally important when it comes to delivering a thoroughly reasoned, well-told and balanced story to the public in the multitude of ways readers want to access news today” (Huang et al. 2006, 94). They concluded that journalism education could play a role in overcoming professional and institutional obstacles by training students to practise news in multiple media platforms. Journalism schools are revisiting curricula to take account of the shifting demands of the industry and the new media environment (Young and Ward 2007).

Past changes in editorial workflow and patterns of content production have affected the routines and practice of journalism, but they have not challenged the space journalists have traditionally occupied as gatekeepers of information. However, the start of the 21st century has seen the emergence of online tools that allow for broad audience participation in the creation, publication, and distribution of news content. Dan Gillmor (2004) argues that “in the past 150 years, we’ve essentially had two distinct means of communication: one-to-many (books, newspapers, radio and TV) and one-to-one (letters, telegraph and telephone. The Internet, for the first time, gives us many-to-many and few-to-few communications” (26). Scholars suggest that the Internet has changed the relationship between journalists and audiences from a one-way, asymmetric model of communication to a more participatory and collective system (Boczkowski 2004; Deuze 2003; Tremayne 2007).

The ability of the audience to participate in the gathering, analysis, and communication of news and information presents a fundamental challenge to the “we write, you read” dogma of modern journalism (Deuze 2003). In their influential report, We Media, Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis (2003) argue that the participatory potential of new media technologies means media professionals have to give up control, even though the “news media are geared up to own a story. They shape it, package it and sell it” (60). Peter Horrocks (2009) has characterized this mindset as “fortress journalism”:

[Journalists] have lived and worked in proud institutions with thick walls. Their daily knightly task has been simple: to battle journalists from other fortresses.
But the fortresses are crumbling and courtly jousts with fellow journalists are no longer impressing the crowds. The end of fortress journalism is deeply unsettling for us and requires a profound change in the mindset and culture of journalism. (6–7)

Journalists have been resistant to relinquish their jurisdictional claim to the news, even at a time when that claim is being challenged by the emergence of the audience as content producers. Research shows that existing journalistic norms and practices have shaped audience participation opportunities in mainstream media (Hermida and Thurman 2009; Thurman and Hermida 2010) with what David Domingo et al. (2008) describe as “a general reluctance to open up most of the news production process to the active involvement of citizens” (339). By limiting the ability of the audience to exercise agency over professional publications, news professionals are maintaining the core journalistic role of gatekeeper.

Indeed, a growing body of research indicates that institutional media have sought to normalize the potential of new media, subduing them within established journalistic norms and practices (Hermida 2009; Matheson 2004, Robinson 2006; Singer 2005). Faced with challenges to newsroom routines, journalistic conventions, and professional identity, journalists have largely sought to reassert established norms and practices. John O’Sullivan and Ari Heinonen (2008) found that while journalists view the Internet as essential to their work, “the social institution called journalism is hesitant in abandoning its conventions, both at organisational and professional levels, even in the ‘Age of the Net,’ when overall communication patterns in society are being re-shaped” (368). (See also Chapter 2, “The Journalist and the Audience.”)

Understanding New Media

Fundamental to an awareness of the causes, dynamics, and consequences of technological change on journalism is an understanding of new media. This term is routinely applied to a wide range of information and communication technologies. Rather than use a definition of new media that is limited to particular technologies or content, this chapter adopts the comprehensive framework proposed by Leah Lievrouw and Sonia Livingstone (2006). Thus, **new media** is defined as “information and communication technologies and their associated social contexts” (23). A discussion of new media should take account of the following three factors:

- The artefacts or devices used to communicate or convey information; the activities and practices in which people engage to communicate and share information; and the social arrangements or organizational forms that develop around those devices and practices. (2)

This framework provides a method to better understand the transformation of journalism. The media have been in a state of continual technological, cultural, and institutional change, from print to radio to television. The new delivery systems for the transmission of news and information, such as the Web and mobile devices, are not simply new platforms for old content. New media cover both the remaking of established news organizations as they adopt new technologies and the development
of unique forms of digital media, such as blogs. New media technologies do not just offer new ways of delivering existing content. Rather, they are changing journalistic norms and practices.

In his discussion on what is new about new media, Terry Flew (2005) considers what is new in terms of the delivery of video. Satellite and cable television may be considered forms of digital media, but Flew suggests that they have not changed the viewing experience as the content available at any one time is determined by the broadcaster, rather than the viewer. He argues that these technologies contrast with the ability to download TV shows and films from the Internet. He cites the latter as an example of new media “because it changes the means of distribution and storage, and the associated business models, of these media” (2).

In the context of journalism, let’s look at the impact of new media on newspapers according to Lievrouw and Livingstone’s framework. The printed newspaper is a physical delivery system that provides an array of content, combined into one package. Consider the Internet as a delivery system for the newspaper. Instead of being stored, delivered, and consumed in analog format, the news is digitized into binary code. The online content might be the same as on the printed page, but the nature of the newspaper changes once it loses its physical form. The news and information it contains become atomized and fragmented. Nicholas Carr (2009) calls this the “great unbundling”:

When a newspaper moves online, the bundle falls apart. Readers don’t flip through a mix of stories, advertisements and other content. They go directly to a particular story that interests them, often ignoring everything else. In many cases, they bypass the newspaper’s “front page” altogether, using search engines, feed readers or headline aggregators. (153)

Together with changes in the news delivery system come changes in the practices of the public to access the news, such as being able to access specific content on demand and through a variety of devices. The cellphone, for example, has emerged as a ubiquitous device that allows us to check the news at any time from any place, as well as capture news events in photographs and video, and share them online. Unbundling is not limited to the news industry but being felt across most online media, such as music and film.

The digitization of news also has an impact at an organizational and societal level, such as in the shift to online news sources. In Canada, about 78 percent of Internet users go online for news (Zamaria and Fletcher 2008), while in the United States substantially more people regularly get news online (37 percent) than regularly watch one of the nightly network news broadcasts (29 percent). In addition to changing patterns of consumption, new ways of organizing the news emerge, such as news aggregators and search engines, as well as new forms of gathering, selecting, and disseminated the news, such as citizen journalism sites or social media services.

This brief overview of the impact of new media on journalism serves to shift the discussion away from an emphasis on technology and instead focus on how the systems, patterns, and structures that have traditionally been associated with journalism are changing.
New Media, New Journalism
Cultural, organizational, and institutional factors have shaped the adoption and implementation of new media technologies in journalism. Much of the research indicates that established media have tended not to realize the potential of new technologies. Rather, it suggests that journalism as a profession largely considers the media environment as the same as before, only now more technologized. Such thinking underestimates the consequences of what is new for the media industry and society:

New technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things we think about. They alter the character of our symbols: the things we think with. And they alter the nature of community: the arena in which thoughts develop. (Postman 1992, 20)

This chapter draws from the research in new literacies to further the discussion on the role of the journalist in a digital media environment. Literacy has been traditionally defined as the ability to read and write. The development of information and communication technologies has given rise to the notion of computer literacy—the ability to use a computer. These ideas are focused on skills rather than the ability to understand and interpret media. A more widely accepted definition of media literacy is “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts” (Christ and Potter 1998, 7).

New literacies research suggests that digital technologies are fundamentally changing communication and information flows. Julie Coiro et al. (2008) argue that the speed and scale of the technological changes require scholars to consider literacies with fresh lenses. Taking such an approach seeks to address what Deuze (2008) has identified as a bias in journalism studies, which he argues “is largely informed by the standards of research, education, routines, rituals, and practices set by print journalism” (199).

Scholars argue that as new technology develops, new literacies emerge. Mastin Prinsloo (2005) suggests that while existing literacies are “print-based, paper-based and language-based, reading and writing associated with the new literacies are seen to integrate written, oral and audiovisual modalities of interactive human communication within screen-based and networked electronic systems” (1). In their attempt to define what is new about new media, Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel (2007) distinguish between technical and ethos aspects of literacy. The technical aspects refer to digitization, which they argue represents “a quantum shift beyond typographic means of text production as well as beyond analogue forms of sound and image production” (9). The ethos aspects apply to the mindset informing a literacy practice. Lankshear and Knobel suggest that there are two mindsets: a physical-industrial mindset and a cyberspatial-post-industrial mindset (see Table 1.1).

Journalism research suggests that many journalists and news organizations have adopted the first mindset, assuming that the norms and practices that guided them in the modern industrial period continue to apply in a more technologized world. Within this paradigm, the value of journalism is based on the function of scarcity, where access to the machinery of news production and publication is an expensive commodity. The industrial view of production can be applied to the newspaper industry, based on its use of paper and the printing press. The individual person is the journalist or editor, whose authority is derived from the role of gatekeeper and affiliation
with a news organization. The space is the newsroom and the newspaper, which have a specific purpose and are largely closed off to the audience. Finally, the stable textual order is the fixed hierarchy of authorship maintained by the newspaper.

In contrast, the second mindset suggests that the media environment is significantly different from 30 years ago because of the development of networked, digital technologies and the new practices and social arrangements enabled by these technologies. According to Lankshear and Knobel (2007):

The world is being changed in some quite fundamental ways as a result of people imagining and exploring new ways of doing things and new ways of being that are made possible by new tools and techniques, rather than using new technologies to do familiar things in more “technologized” ways (first mindset). (10)

In the second mindset, the machinery of news production is widely available through, for example, blogging software, so value is created by the dispersal of information. In a post-industrial view of production, the focus shifts to enabling services, such as Google, and to tools that facilitate connectivity, such as Facebook. This mindset assumes a focus on collective intelligence, seen in online tools that enable people to collaborate online. Conventional social relations associated with the roles of author/authority and expert have broken down, challenging journalistic jurisdiction over the news. The emergence of what has been labelled “citizen journalism” can be considered part of this process. In this construct, the Internet represents an open and continuous space that has no inherent stable generic order. Rather, digital media spaces allow new activities, such as remixing content, that disrupt established authorial social structures.
Lankshear and Knobel (2007) acknowledge that new literacies are more complex than a simple table can express and admit that their approach tends to polarize the mindsets. However, the table does provide a functional tool to convey the differences in the two approaches and a way to understand the scale of the changes taking place in journalism. The practice of journalism has been focused on the production of finished products by designated individuals and teams, based on individual expertise and intelligence, operating in a shared physical space. However, new literacies research suggests that the changes taking place challenge fundamental norms, conventions, and routines of journalism. One of the most fundamental changes is the ability of the audience to become an active participant in reporting and disseminating news in photographs, videos, and text, undermining the monopoly on reporting that journalists traditionally enjoyed (Bowman and Willis 2003). In terms of the profession itself, news blogs have been described as a new genre of institutionalized journalism, where the journalist is more visible and the style is more personal (Domingo and Heinonen 2008).

The new literacies privilege the following:

- Participation over publishing, distributed expertise over centralized expertise,
- collective intelligence over individual possessive intelligence, collaboration over individuated authorship, dispersion over scarcity, sharing over ownership, experimentation over “normalization,” innovation and evolution over stability and fixity, creative-innovative rule breaking over generic purity and policing, relationship over information broadcast. (Lankshear and Knobel 2007, 21)

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored existing conceptions of the role of the journalist and journalism, and sought to locate these in the research in new literacies. It has avoided placing too much emphasis on the technological tools of media today and instead explored the interplay between changing social and cultural practices enabled by technology and the function of the journalist. The struggle of journalism as a profession to adapt to change may be indicative of a lack of understanding of the nature of the shift taking place—from a physical-industrial mindset to a cyberspatial-post-industrial mindset. Seen through the lens of new literacies research, digital media are more participatory, collaborative, and distributed, and less finalized, individualized, and author-centric than previous forms of media.

However, research indicates that journalism practice is rooted in the first mindset. Deuze (2003) says that the “suggested added values and characteristics of online journalisms cannot simply be incorporated one-by-one without fundamentally changing the ‘nature of the beast’—the beast being that particular newsroom culture and the professionals involved” (216). This is not simply an argument over the relevance of the traditional gatekeeping role of the journalist.

It centres on reimagining the functions and place of the journalist in a networked media ecology. Charlie Beckett (2008) argues that while news and information have never been more abundant and accessible, “journalism has never been more necessary to the functioning of our lives as individuals and societies and for the healthy functioning of global social, economic, and political relationships” (3).
Alongside the traditional, linear media system for journalism, a new framework has emerged that has eroded established definitions of producer and consumer. In the words of Jane Singer (2008), “in a networked world, there no longer is the ‘journalist,’ ‘audience,’ and ‘source.’ There is only ‘us’” (75). According to Rosenstiel, the journalist shifts from being the gatekeeper to being an authenticator of information, a sense-maker to derive meaning, a navigator to help orient audiences, and a community leader to engage audiences (Hermida 2008).

The future role of the journalist will clearly be determined by the complex interplay between media technologies, professional practices, and societal factors. Journalism has developed as a relatively closed journalistic culture for the production of knowledge, based on a system of editorial control. Yet new media are characterized by their connected and collaborative nature. The challenge for journalism, and the journalist, is to find a place along the continuum between control and connection, and between a closed and a collaborative media culture.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How do digital Internet technologies affect the role of the journalist?
2. How has the Internet blurred the distinction between the professional and the amateur in the field of journalism?
3. What is the value of professional journalism training when anyone can be a journalist?

**SUGGESTED RESOURCES**


**REFERENCES**


