

**THE NEXT STEP
SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE EVOLUTION OF JOURNALISM**

Honors Thesis

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By

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Introduction

In 2013, Cision conducted a survey of 3,000 journalists. They wanted to ask them a simple question: how did they feel about the rise of social media? The responses varied, but a fraction of about 600 journalists, or 20%, responded that they thought that social media spelled the death of journalism (Hanson, 2013).

Social media have been around for less than two decades, rising from the growth of the Internet. They represent a new sort of freedom for the common user – an opportunity for someone to broadcast their thoughts far wider than ever before in history. The late 1990s saw the first blogs and web forums; 2004 gave birth to podcasting, where users could create online radio programs; 2005 saw the founding of YouTube, an online video host; and, 2006 saw the worldwide release of Facebook and Twitter, two of the most popular websites today (Watson S.; Hendricks, 2013).

In the eyes of traditional journalism, these social media directly challenged not only their profession, but the very definition of journalism itself. Online users were inserting themselves into the journalistic sphere, and media organizations were feeling their territory shrinking through falling advertising revenue and circulation numbers.

This panic, however, has echoed many times in the annals of history. Often, the introduction of new technology into the media sphere has caused disruption, chaos, and bells tolling the end times of journalism. And, each time, the news survived. Indeed, by swiftly converging with the new mediums and incorporating their values into journalism, the news did more than survive – it evolved.

Social media represents the next occurrence of this cycle.

The introduction of social media into the journalistic sphere represents another historical moment of punctuated equilibrium, where convergence with new technology causes a quick and drastic change in the definition and practice of journalism.

The History of Journalism and its Stages of Evolution

The internet and social media are only the most recent ‘disruptive innovations’. In recent history, there were two earlier technical revolutions that triggered similar worries – first the introduction of the radio and then, the advent of television. Both deeply changed the profession of journalism – however, they were not its death knell (Dimitrov, 2014, Conclusion section, para. 1).

Almost a century ago, the journalists of the world were in a panic. The validity and values of the newspaper, which had withstood the rise and fall of civilizations for hundreds of years, was being challenged. The press had divided opinions on how to react to this new intruder on traditional communications. Some ignored it. Some attempted to ban it entirely. Others reluctantly embraced it, convinced they were signing the death warrant of journalism itself. What was this new specter that frightened the media world in so many ways?

It was the radio.

When the first newscast was sent out in Pittsburg in 1920, radio was treated as more of a novelty than anything else (Horn, 1945). After the initial excitement wore off, however, the newspaper journalists began to fear for their profession.

Though both mediums – the newspaper and the radio – served to propagate the news, their methods were entirely different. Listening to the radio was easy; you could turn it on and attend to other tasks rather than give it all your focus. It allowed for more emotional evocation on behalf of the journalist due to the nature of the human voice, punctuating in a way that a

newspaper never could. It allowed reporters to explain the news in a more informal style to listeners than the paper journalists did for their readers. And, perhaps most importantly, the radio allowed for instantaneous transmission of the news. The speed in which breaking news could be disseminated far outstripped the newspaper.

In the beginning of its adaption, one could see how these attributes could send traditional journalists into a panic. Not only did this new medium appear to be making it easier to take in the news – thus allowing for wide and possibly universal adoption – it held the potential for the professional death of what they considered the news and journalism to be.

And yet, the newspaper survived. Why? Gunnar Horn explains it best in his 1945 report on radio journalism: “Viewed dispassionately, the truth of the matter is that radio and press have advantages peculiar to each. That either will displace the other for quite some time is highly unlikely” (p. 257).

As he said, the newspaper, with its many years of refinement, held certain advantages over the radio. While the radio allowed for instant transmission, it didn’t allow for the same depth or detail in articles that the newspaper did. It also allowed for a certain amount of flexibility, where a reader could start an article at one moment and return to it later at any time – rather than having to tune in to a specific station at a certain hour to listen to the news. In this way, rather than one medium replacing the other, news organizations adopted them both. “Newspapers print radio programs and run radio columns, and radio stations obtain most of their news from the same services and agencies as the newspapers” (Horn, 1945, p. 257).

Journalism didn’t die. It evolved, and it evolved quickly. The on-scene reporter was created, a standard of the news today. Popular commentators quickly popped up, interpreting the news on the radio and moving to editorialize in a column (1945).

This same cycle repeated itself with the advent of the television. When the television first emerged and began wading into broadcasting, there was a large pushback from more traditional media. Just as before, the debate was first framed as newspapers vs. television (Fuchs, 1966). Different trade offices, representing the different institutions, fired off exclamatory press releases, conducted contradictory research, and posed broad, self-serving questions (1966).

Much in the same vein as the radio decades before, there were key elements of television that distanced it from newspapers so the two retained their importance.

First, as with the radio, television allowed for instantaneous communication. One report found that in a sample of 449 people, every single one of them had first found out about the assassination of President Kennedy by watching a broadcast themselves or hearing about it from someone else who watched a broadcast (1966). Obviously, this event was still reported on afterwards by newspapers, and covered during the time by radio, but the Kennedy assassination is also a useful case study in how it demonstrated the unique power of television. Film of the shooting, played over and over again, engaged the nation in a way that other mediums couldn't.

Traditional journalists and cultural elites proposed that television news was catering to sensationalism and bias (1966). Research soon discovered, however, that not only were the upper classes of society consuming television as much as any other in a lower station, but there was evidence that newspapers were quickly adapting to new methods of reporting to attract readers:

One wonders why newspapers in a now non-competitive city - San Francisco - resort to such depressingly typical front page fare as in their constant banner stories on rape, society divorces, LSD, and murder...if people show a propensity to consume sensationalism on television, it seems consistent to expect that they will want to consume the same in their newspapers (Fuchs, 1966, p. 38).

In this way, not only did television provide another facet for journalism, it evolved the functions of journalism itself – for better or for worse. In 1966, Fuchs declared the growing sensationalistic journalism as “the ultimate detriment of both television and newspapers” (p. 39). One would be hard-pressed, however, to ignore its existence and influence in our current media landscape.

Just as Roumen Dimitrov stated before, these two technological innovations – the radio and the televisions – changed the definition and practice of journalism. And as he laid out, the next battle in journalism is occurring today between traditional and social media.

Defining “Social Media”

Writings on social media have always encountered difficulty because, as Xiang and Gretzel note in their study on the role of social media in online travel research, there is no formal definition (2010). Most definitions, including the one used in that study, place a large emphasis on the role of social media in the distribution of user-generated content (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This appears to fit with many different social media sites; when you send out a tweet, when you publish a blog post, or when you upload a video, you are using the framework provided by a social media website to broadcast your content to the whole of the Internet.

However, it also seems that there is a weakness in an overly simplistic definition, such as the one provided by Xiang and Gretzel: “‘Social media’ can be generally understood as Internet-based applications that carry consumer-generated content which encompasses ‘media impressions created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience, and archived or shared online for easy access by other impressionable consumers’” (Blackshaw, 2006 as cited in Xiang & Gretzel, 2010, p. 180). The abilities of social media extend beyond solely distributing

user-generated content. Many social media sites today have the ability to share content not created by users – such as professional news stories – while also providing a place to discuss the content on the social media website itself. In this way, social media websites are becoming the hubs of conversation not only around user-generated content, but around content created through other media outside of that website. Examples of this can be seen on Facebook, Twitter, or many miscellaneous web forums.

In this context, I would argue that while it may not be a formalized definition, a good definition for social media – and the definition that will be used in this paper – is this: social media are Internet-based web sites and applications that not only allow for the wide distribution of, and easy access to, user-generated content, but for the distribution and discussion of professionally-produced content as well.

The Modern Debate on the Definition of Journalism

There has been a great amount of recent debate on what exactly it means to be a journalist. The main arguments, emerging within the past decade, find themselves represented and championed by two separate sides: the professional journalist of traditional media, and the citizen reporters of social media.

In Defense of Traditional Media. Roumen Dimitrov, in his 2014 article *Do Social Media Spell The End Of Journalism As A Profession?*, laid out the definition of a traditional media journalist. For Dimitrov, journalism is both “an occupation and a profession” (2014, Journalism as a Profession section, para. 1). In this context, he frames an occupation as a job which requires the majority of a person’s working time and provides them with a majority of their salary. A profession is an enhanced occupation that requires special selection, by designated

bodies, in order to join. The main characteristics of professions are “service, knowledge, autonomy, organisation, and ethical codes” (2014, Journalism as a Profession section, para. 2).

Applying these statements, one finds that journalism lies firmly in the hands of those who work at established news organizations. Journalists must obtain degrees from universities, to gain knowledge and pass the first layer of selection, and find work at established media outlets, which provide binding ethical codes and a clear organizational structure. This would also work to supply a journalist with a steady salary to conduct his/her writing and potential investigations, free from any outside influence which may alter what he submits as news.

Dimitrov’s view of journalism is again supported in the statements of David Simon, former reporter of the Baltimore Sun, in a 2009 US Senate hearing on the *Future of Journalism*. Echoing the idea of journalism as an established and enhanced occupation, Simon states that “high-end journalism is a profession. It requires full-time commitment by trained men and women” (*The Future of Journalism*, 2009, p. 29). In this view, the news is not something to be taken lightly. The structure of professional news organizations provides that ability for reputable journalists to use the sum of their time and professional experience to gather information, cross-check facts, and publish the news. Anyone doing anything else are “amateurs...pursuing the task without compensation, training, or, for that matter, sufficient standing” (2009, p. 29).

In Defense of Social Media. The other side of the debate heavily disagrees with the framework of journalism laid out by Dimitrov and Simon. In the mind of social media advocates, there is one power, and one power only, that defines journalism as a profession. Up until the last decade or two, this power rested solely with traditional news organizations, who maintained control over the radio, newspaper, and television. Now, however, this power has been extended

to anyone with an internet connection; thus, journalism, as defined by Dimitrov and Simon, has died.

What power, now democratized, has killed the traditional profession of journalism? The power of publicity.

“If anyone can be a publisher, then anyone can be a journalist” (Shirky, 2008, p. 71).

Clay Shirky, in his book *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, argues that if someone can push their news content out onto an audience, then that makes them a journalist reporting the news. This, of course, is one of the defining features of social media. If someone on Twitter sends out a tweet about a shooting that he just witnessed or heard, then he becomes a part of the media sphere.

Shirky compares the arguments postulated by traditional media in their defense of the survival of journalism as a profession to the arguments of the Abbot of Sponheim in his defense of scribes in 1495, half a decade after the moveable type replaced their core services. In his passionate plea, *De Laude Scriptorum – In Praise of Scribes*, the Abbot waxes poetic about the benefits of writing (2008). For Shirky this is a clear comparison to the ‘professional’ journalists of the modern day; he sees them as people unwilling to let go of once-specialized function that can now be mass produced:

A professional often becomes a gatekeeper, by providing a necessary or desirable social function but also by controlling that function. Sometimes this gatekeeping is...embedded in technology, as with scribes...scribes existed to increase the spread of the written word, but when a better, nonscribal way of accomplishing the same task came along, the Abbot of Sponheim stepped in to argue that preserving the scribes' way of life was more important than fulfilling their mission by nonscribal means (Shirky, 2008, p. 69).

The traditional journalist gatekeepers, unwilling to let go of their professional status, are refusing to recognize the inevitable advance of technology. Social media has removed all the restrictions on who can become a journalist, and social media has become the new representation of journalism.

The Two Types of Social Media Journalism

As mentioned previously, modern-day social media not only allow for the creation and distribution of user-generated content, they allow for the distribution and discussion of professionally-generated content as well. This definition of social media falls neatly into a discussion of social media journalism, where two distinct frameworks have emerged: News Content Creators and News Content Disseminators.

News Content Creators. Social media content creators are primary sources of content – and, as noted by Shirky, they are primary sources of news. These are the citizen reporters, the journalistic amateurs, that are generating content separate from traditional news sources and distributing it through online platforms rather than through huge media conglomerates. These content creators have taken each of the three main sources of traditional news – newspapers, radio, and television – and modernized them.

Blogs and Twitter, the citizen reporters declare, are the new newspapers. Not only do these platforms provide a free and easy framework to host content, they are giving a voice to citizens who may feel that the stories they want to read are not being covered in traditional newspapers.

One recent – and highly charged – example can be seen in the events surrounding the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, 2014. Days before any national reporters made their way to the city, a number of users on Twitter had begun hosting content.

Twitter user @TheePharaoh, a rapper from St. Louis, posted pictures immediately after a police officer shot Brown (Gillmor, 2014). Antonio French, a local politician, picked up the story on his Twitter and sent over 300 tweets every day between August 12 and August 1; between the shooting and that time, his Twitter followers went from 4,179 to 121,291 (Mandaró, 2014). Laura Mandaró, in her assessment of the situation, doesn't hesitate to proclaim the superiority of social media content creators in the reporting of what was happening:

The frequency and intensity of the tweets about Ferguson may reflect a turning point for how developing events reach a national U.S. audience. As cable programs and print journalists tried to keep up with the story, comments and images — aided by better-quality cameras in cell-phone cameras and social networks that support short video clips — beat the traditional media with range and frequency (2014, para. 9-10).

The idea of a citizen reporter being a champion of the people's news is not centralized in the United States, however. The United States' guarantees of the freedom of the press do not apply in every country. In a nation such as Mexico, where traditional newspaper journalists can be killed by organized crime or pressured by authorities to cease reporting, citizen journalists on Twitter can become the only source or real, hard news (Watson H. et al., 2012). In China, state-controlled media and government censorship have stonewalled a great deal of newspaper reporting, but independent bloggers have still been able to uncover corruption and spur political action (Hassid, 2012).

Just as Twitter and the blogosphere have encroached on the territory of newspapers, podcasts have developed in the minds of social media content creators as the logical counter to radio.

Joining the Podcast Revolution. Jham et al. declare, through their review of the podcast and the development of audio technology, that the new medium is valuable due to the freedom it allows its users (2007). Richard Berry, in his study on the podcast – *Will the iPod Kill the Radio Star? Profiling Podcasting as Radio* – more closely compares the new medium to the traditional medium in an attempt to discern the possible benefits and the future of the two technology (2006)

Berry styles the podcast as the direct counter to radio; it was a disruptive technology, even back in 2004 (2006). The main attraction of the podcast, as stated earlier by Jham et al., is the freedom it allows in contrast to the radio. For listeners, the radio has strictly set schedules, geographic restraints, and a one-way style of media associated with traditional journalism. Podcasts deliver audio files, available in many different formats, to any listener, at any time in any location, with the technological ability to play them (Berry, 2006). In addition, podcasts deliver the type of interactive user-to-user format that is the hallmark of social media websites and journalism:

Listeners can talk back to the producer and establish a dialogue unheard of in traditional top-down vertical media...what Podcasting offers is a classic 'horizontal' media form: producers are consumers and consumers become producers and engage in conversations with each other (Berry, 2006, p. 144).

Furthermore, any person with access to the Internet can create and host a podcast. No radio license is required, no radio station needs to be acquired or rented. In this way, the podcast represents the destruction of the traditional media gatekeeper – the central theme of Shirky's thesis on the future of journalism.

The final category of news social media content creators is one which intends to upset the traditional news medium of television. This branch of social media – the web video – is best represented by the most popular online video player and uploader: YouTube.

Much like the other social media platforms, YouTube's key offering lies in the freedom it allows its viewers and users. Any person can create an account and, with the use of a video recording device, can create and upload content. Moreover, YouTube allows for greater independence in what the content is that you broadcast; Simran Kapoor, professional YouTuber, notes that through YouTube, his is able to explore topics such as sex that may be censored to an extent on television (Bahirwani, 2014). Most importantly, YouTube has proven itself, through several high-profile cases, to be an important part of citizen-journalism.

One example of YouTube's influence as a journalistic tool can be seen in the re-election of former Virginia Senator George Allen, as noted by Craig and Shear in 2006. During a campaign rally, a video was recorded of Allen using a racial slur. The backlash from this turned the video into an internet sensation, and caused Allen to lose the election (as cited in Antony & Thomas, 2010). One of the most prominent cases of YouTube's importance and influence, however, can be seen in the trial of Oscar Grant (2010).

In 2009, Oscar Grant was shot and killed by a police officer in a Bay Area subway station. The event was recorded by several nearby passengers, and multiple videos from multiple angles were hosted on YouTube within days (2010). The videos sparked outrage and backlash, and the user-generated content was used as evidence in the eventual trial. To this end, Antony and Thomas argue that YouTube and its user-generated content established itself as a powerful agent of "social change," that can "simultaneously challenge the domination of previously inaccessible and elitist mainstream news media," and demonstrate "how technology can

empower the average citizen to challenge the restrictions imposed by authority figures attempting to suppress the truth” (Antony & Thomas, 2010, p. 1284).

News Content Disseminators. News Content Disseminators represent the other large group of online social media participants. As opposed to News Content Creators, who generate their own content and distribute it through social media, News Content Disseminators take content created by professional journalists through systematized news organizations and broadcast it in a way that these organizations never could. Indeed, not only do News Content Disseminators refine the process for the consumer, they provide it for free.

According to social media advocates, traditional news organizations lack one crucial component in their broadcasts: interactivity. They have a point. The journalistic sphere has understood for decades the one-way transmission of information that traditional media utilize. Habermas noted back in 1962, in his heavily referenced work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, that traditional media almost seemed to rely on one-way transmission to maintain their status as professionals:

They draw the eyes and ears of the public under their spell but at the same time, by taking away its distance, place it under ‘tutelage,’ which is to say they deprive it of the opportunity to say something and to disagree (1989, p. 171).

This statement by Habermas is true even today, and it includes the different sorts of ‘interactivity’ that one would associate with traditional media – such as Letters to the Editor section of newspapers (Schultz, 2006). In these sections, consumers would write letters to the newspaper, usually in reaction to an article, a general message that newspaper is purveying, or a media event. As Schultz notes, this very method of interaction is deficient because it is a *reactive* sort of interaction. The reader is never the one initiating the conversation, and when the letter is

sent the interaction ends. Not only that, the power remains firmly in the hands of the newspaper. Thousands of letters may be sent to the editor, but only a select few are granted permission to enter the conversation. The principle remains the same with radio and television ‘call-ins,’ which are the greatest comparison to this situation (2006).

Traditional media organizations have attempted to augment their one-way interactions through online portals that they control – namely, online newspapers. These news organizations didn’t want to break distribution away from their centers, yet recognized a growing desire among the population for greater levels of interactivity. In this, they failed miserably.

This was the conclusion that Deborah Chung came to in her 2008 study *Interactive Features of Online Newspapers: Identifying Patterns and Predicting Use of Engaged Readers*. Defining interactivity as “Features that promote human interactivity that facilitate user-to-user mutual communication, or interpersonal communication” (p. 661), Chung noted that not only did she find that online newspapers don’t generate the interaction craved by those who use social media, “online news publications have failed to fully take advantage of the unique characteristics of the Internet” (p. 662).

To solve the problem of one-way interaction, several social media websites have sprung up that not only serve to broadcast news put out by traditional news organizations, but create a community of interactivity among users. The two greatest social media News Content Disseminators are web forums and Facebook.

Web forums have been around since the early age of the Internet. They remain one of the most prevalent areas of online discussion, where users interact with each other on equal levels. There are no top-down or one-way discussions. As such, web forums are popular lightning-rods for discussion on topics including the news. Reddit, an online social media and networking

website, has many different sub forums dedicated to posting news articles and discussing them. The forum dedicated to news mainly focused in the United States, <https://www.reddit.com/r/news/>, has 5.5 million subscribers as of early 2015. The forum dedicated to world news, <https://www.reddit.com/r/worldnews/>, has 8.2 million.

In a 2014 study on internet web forums, Lopez-Gonzalez et al. looked into the trend of these social communities in an attempt to understand how they work; and there was one fact key to this discussion that they determined early on: “media projects have been particularly successful in the realm of other domains where communities of interest already exist” (p. 85). Relating to social media dissemination, the largest communities develop online where interest and content are being generated outside of them – such as with the news. Not only that, Lopez-Gonzalez et al. found evidence that web forums were beginning to decisively take the conversation and the attention away from the traditional media sources: “In those comments, participants interact with each other and the media creating online discussions that may even gain more attention than the news articles posted by the hosting website itself” (p. 84).

Facebook is another one of the great News Content Disseminators. The most popular social media website of all time, Facebook boast well over a billion monthly users (Bullas, 2015). Not only that, but users are active, and users are talking. Every 15 minutes, Facebook finds over 49 million new posts, users are sharing on average 1.3 million pieces of content every minute of every day (2015). This news content is spurring discussions amongst users in a way that the news has never been able to, and it’s quantifiable through the statistics of interactivity.

About two-thirds (64%) of Facebook news consumers at least sometimes click on news links (16% do so often). Nearly as many, 60%, at least sometimes “like” or comment on stories (19% do so often). Just under half, 43% post or share links themselves at least

sometimes (10% do so often) and about a third, 32%, discuss issues in the news with other people on Facebook (Mitchell et al., 2013, para. 12).

During the timing of this Pew Research Center study, the number of Facebook monthly active users was 1.2 billion (Bullas, 2015). In this case, there were 384 million users discussing the news with other people online. This is higher than the weekday circulation of the top 10 newspapers in the United States put together and then multiplied by 40 (The Associated Press, 2013).

Some Facebook users also find the social media website beneficial as a news content aggregator. As one respondent in the Pew Research Center study wrote, “If it wasn’t for Facebook news, I’d probably never really know what’s going on in the world because I don’t have time to keep up with the news on a bunch of different locations” (Mitchell et al., 2013, para. 4). Not only that, young adults are at least as engaged or more engaged with news on Facebook than on other platforms (2013).

Impact of Social Media on Traditional Media

When you take a look at trends in traditional media, one thing is certain above all others: they are in decline. And it’s a very recent phenomenon.

Newspapers survive not off of the revenue they gain from subscribers or newsstands, but from advertisers. Advertisements have always been the source of life for private news organizations, whether for good or for ill, and that source is running thin. Figure 1, below, is a graph of the total ad revenue that newspapers have generated since 1979, in the billions of dollars. For most of this time period, revenue has been increasing. In 2000, a sharp dip occurs before newspapers rally themselves. After 2004, however, ad revenue beings a decline that it has not yet recovered from. These declines correspond greatly to the introduction of various social

media into the journalistic sphere – web forums and blogs in the early internet age, and Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and more in the year 2004 and beyond.

Ad Revenue Decline

In Billions of Dollars

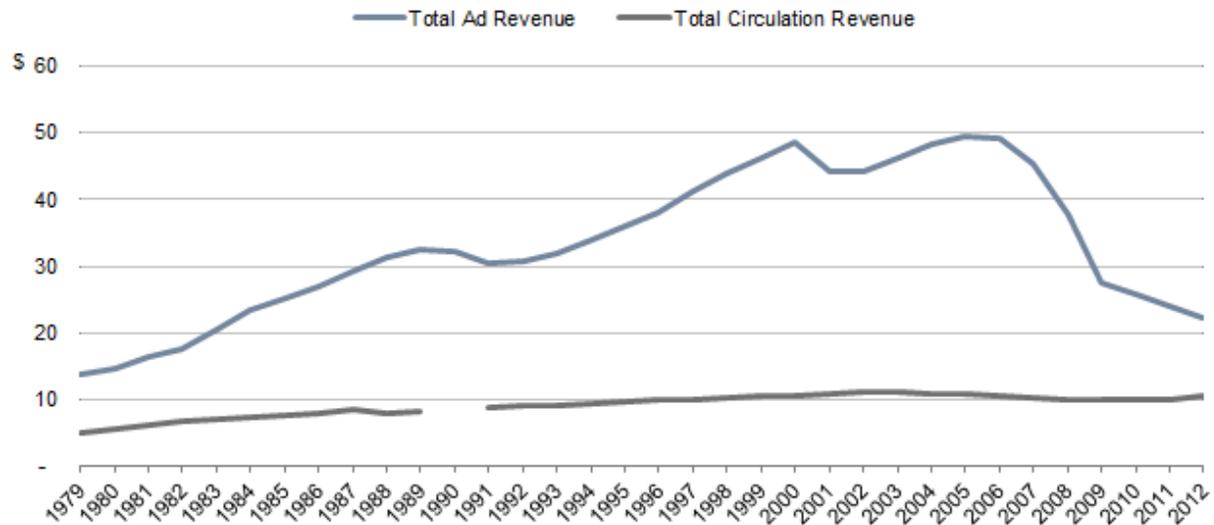


Figure 1 Ad revenue decline from 1979 - 2013. Reprinted from *Newspapers: By the Numbers*, by Pew Research Center. Edmonds et al., 2013. Retrieved May 6, 2015.

Newspaper circulation has taken a similar hit. In Figure 2, below, we see how in the years leading up to 2004, circulation might have been relatively steady as social media were still in their early stages. In 2004 and beyond, however, circulation spirals into a deep decline. Comparing Figures 1 and 2, one will note that while circulation has dropped, circulation revenue has stayed the same or even risen. This is due to sharp price increases (Edmonds et al. 2013), a possible indication that newspapers are beginning to run out of options in their competition with online social news sources.

Newspaper Daily Circulation			
Year	Morning	Evening	Total
2014	36,765	3,655	40,420
2013	36,975	3,737	40,712
2012	38,723	4,710	43,433
2011	40,321	4,100	44,421
2010	NA	NA	44,100
2009	40,269	5,383	45,653
2008	42,757	5,840	48,597
2007	44,548	6,194	50,742
2006	45,441	6,888	52,329
2005	46,122	7,222	53,345
2004	46,887	7,738	54,626
2003	46,930	8,255	55,185
2002	46,617	8,568	55,186
2001	46,821	8,756	55,578
2000	46,772	9,000	55,773

Figure 2 Newspaper circulation decline from 2000 - 2014. Adapted from *Newspaper Circulation Volume*, by Newspaper Association of America. Retrieved May 6, 2015.

Radio statistics offer slightly more positive outlook for traditional broadcasts – in the sense that they aren't losing revenue. They, however, losing the race. Radio has been losing listeners for many years now, and the decline hasn't stayed its hand; this past year, FM radio hit a record low audience of 15 percent (Wolbe, 2014). In Figure 3 we find that Podcast audiences are steadily gaining listeners, and in Figure 4 we see how online radio media are gaining revenue far faster than broadcast radio.

Podcast Audience Growth Sees Little Change in 2011

Percentage of Americans Who Have Listened to a Podcast

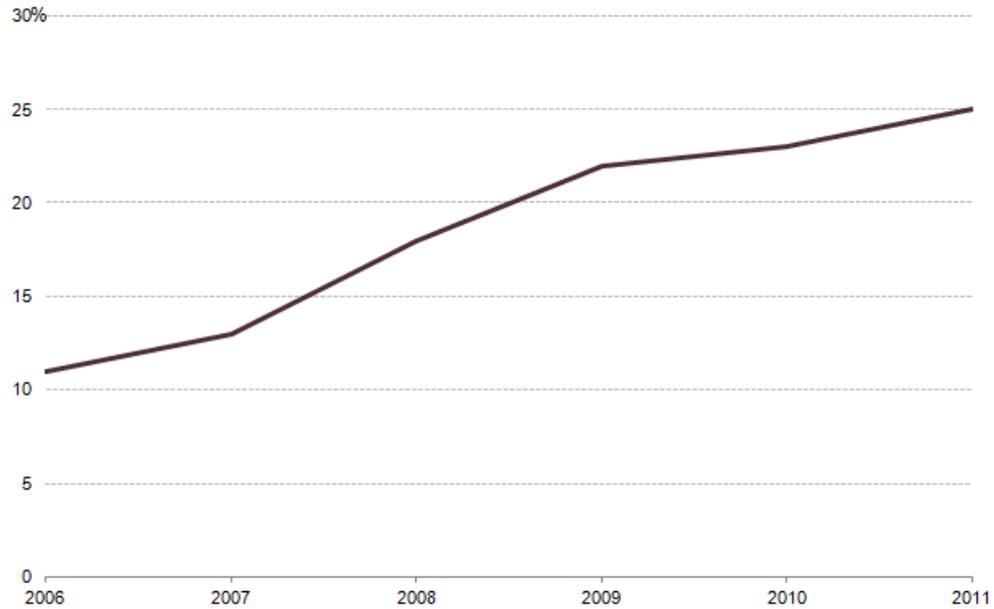


Figure 3 Podcast audience growth from 2006 - 2011. Reprinted from *Audio: By the Numbers*, by Pew Research Center. Houston-Santhanam et al., 2012. Retrieved May 6, 2015.

Online and Mobile Radio Expected to See Richest Revenue Gains

In Millions of Dollars

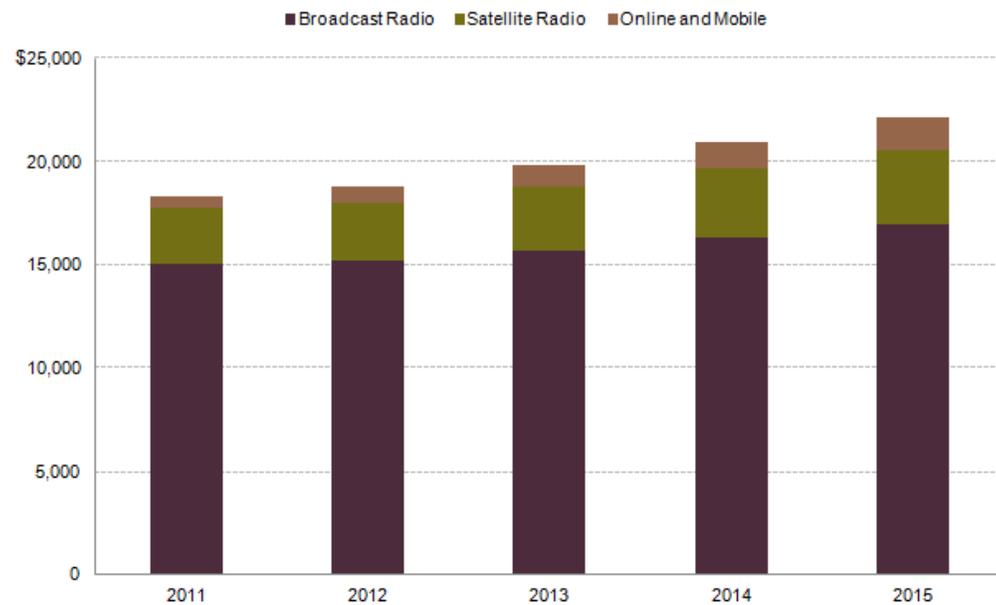


Figure 4 Online radio revenue growth from 2011 – 2015. Reprinted from *Audio: By the Numbers*, by Pew Research Center. Houston-Santhanam et al., 2012. Retrieved May 6, 2015.

What has caused this reversal of fortune? For Kevin Roose of New York Magazine, the answer is simple: cars.

The secret to radio's success has always been the drive-time commuter. An estimated 44 percent of all radio listening takes place in the car, and that's the way the radio industry likes it. Car-based listeners are captive, they tune in for long stretches at a time, and they're valuable to advertisers (2014, para. 13).

Now that cars are becoming more in tune with technological advances – offering access to wireless internet, or at least wired connections to phones who can access podcasts – users have other options in cars besides traditional broadcast radio, and they are taking advantage of them.

Television has followed a path similar to that of its two traditional media cousins. Cable news is losing its, despite many different attempts at internal evolution in the past. Figure 5, below, emphasizes this trend.

Cable TV Viewership

Cable news median prime-time viewership

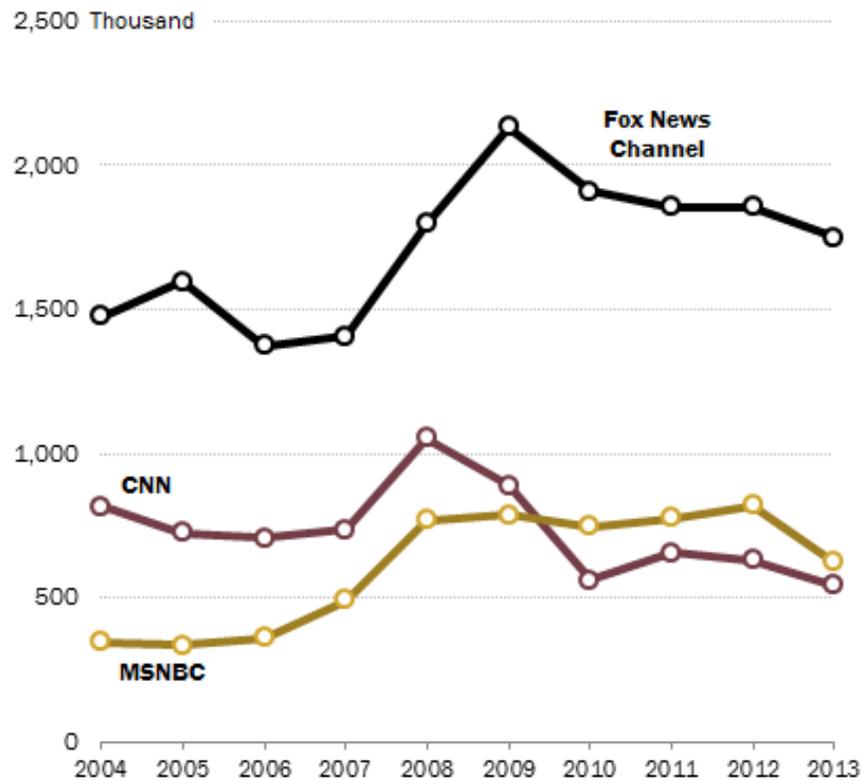


Figure 5 Cable TV viewership decline from 2004 - 2013. Reprinted from *Key Indicators in Media & News*, by Pew Research Center: Journalism & Media staff, 2014. Retrieved May 6, 2015.

Combined median prime-time viewership of the three major news channels—CNN, Fox News and MSNBC—dropped 11% to about 3 million. MSNBC, which lost nearly a quarter (24%) of its prime-time audience. CNN, had a 13% decline in prime time and Fox was down 6% (Pew Research Center: Journalism & Media staff, 2014).

In this way, we can see how all the three main traditional media – newspapers, radio, and television – are in decline. Some would say that these statistic spell the death of these mediums. This is not the case. That argument is no more coherent than the rants of the Abbot of Sponheim

those many centuries ago. As with the introduction of the radio and the television into the journalistic sphere, what's happening today isn't the death of journalism; it's the evolution.

Convergence

Jane B. Singer, in her work *Strange Bedfellows? The Diffusion of Convergence in Four News Organizations*, created an operating definition of convergence for use when discussing media: "Some combination of technologies, products, staffs and geography among the previously distinct provinces of print, television and online media" (2004, p. 1). Applying this retroactively to the history of traditional media, we see how radio and television were both technologies that converged with journalism and become integrated into the field.

Just as with the radio and the television before, social media are approaching a moment of convergence with traditional media. News organizations, which up until this point had been fighting the introduction of social media into their sphere of influence, have already begun folding them into their profession.

Social Media Editors. In 2009, the BBC News put out a press release in which they described their creation of a brand new position that they then filled: Social Media Editor. Traditional news media have begun hiring 'Social Media Editors,' officially creating positions for people within their organizations to dedicate themselves to working social media into the news cycle (FishbowlNY, 2010).

As we are in the beginning stages of the convergence, these social media editor positions are not fully established, and their place within the news conglomerates has not been cemented across the board. One social media editor described her job as "Tweeting for my newspaper... setting up Twitter accounts for reporters who wish to tweet and teaching those that are reluctant to jump, handling all things Facebook, and coordinating all of the blogging that we do" (2010,

Stephanie Romanski section, para. 1). Another described his job as simply “It’s about humanizing the brand, allowing readers to feel like they are not just receiving the news, but also have the ability to respond to us, engage with us” (2010, Greer McDonald section, para. 2) – or, to connect with previous sections, increasing the level of interactivity that traditional media can maintain.

Increasing reader and user involvement in the news coming out of news organizations is one of the key elements of social and traditional media convergence. In 2012, Tim Currie looked into the growth of social media editors in Canadian newspapers, which were adopting them at the same rate as newspapers in America, by interviewing the reporters holding those positions in major organizations. In his findings, he discovered that one of the main functions that social media editors had given themselves was “representing audience interests in the newsroom” (p. 1). One editor styled herself as a sort of “reader champion,” who worked in meetings with traditional reporters to talk about “what is tracking well with our readers. What readers are interested in. What readers are talking about” (p. 10). Users and readers of today also expect a convergent news organization to be able to interact with them on a very personal level – “audience members wanted [social media editors] to be a window into the organization, available to answer questions about editorial content” (p. 11).

This also relates to increasing interactivity. Social media editors want to get readers and users engaged in conversation, not only with the news organization, but with each other – just as in the functions of web forums and Facebook.

Editors described the goal of a community built on trust: one where members share information with editors and add their own content... two other editors saw engagement

occurring when a reader didn't just communicate with them, or with the institution generally, but when they began talking to each other. (Currie, 2012, pp. 15, 19).

Social media editors are also working to smooth out the rougher areas of social media journalism, so they can incorporate new technology responsibly.

When using Twitter and its ilk to collect and disseminate news in real-time, another word is becoming just as important: corroboration... [social media editors are] finding that it's not enough simply to share accurate information. They also must try to stem the flow of inaccurate information (Myers, 2011, para. 1, 3).

One of the issues that social media journalism faces on its own is a marked increase in 'fake news' – or, news stories that have been carefully crafted to appear real, but are in fact “semi-sophisticated efforts to dupe people during breaking stories” (Breakingnews.com, 2011). After one 2011 earthquake on the East Coast of the United States, for example, videos circulated around Twitter of buildings swaying in New York (which were actually buildings swaying in Tokyo due to an earthquake several months previously), a joke photo was distributed throughout social media of the 'earthquake damage' (a photo of a tipped lawn chair, actually taken a year before), and rumors spread of how the Washington Monument had tipped – it hadn't (Sonderman, 2011; Breakingnews.com, 2011).

One of the most important aspects of this convergence is perhaps recognizing that a social media editor is only an intermediate step in the evolutionary process. The goal of appointing a social media editor is to kick-start the progression of change, where you can begin to have the news organization interacting with users and readers and start to coach other journalists to do the same. In 2011, the New York Times decided that they were far enough along in this process that they eliminated the social media editor position, calling it “an

acknowledgment that social media needs to be — and is already — a shared responsibility” (Tenore, 2010, para. 3).

The Evolution of Journalism. Besides the newsroom, one can notice the beginning of the convergence already in every area of traditional journalism. On television news, for example, broadcasters have already begun integrating Twitter into their programming. News programs will sometimes incorporate scrolling bands of tweets, or pick out tweets relating to the news topic and host them on screen; to this end, Twitter has released guidelines for broadcasters on how to host and attribute them. Facebook has also worked to coordinate with news organizations. In March of 2015, news broke of talks that Facebook was undergoing with various media companies to host news content directly on Facebook, so that users could more easily and quickly access it (Somaiya et al., 2015).

YouTube is also becoming an important partner for some news companies. One media organization that has made a point of integrating itself with YouTube is Vice Media – most especially, their branch Vice News. The fastest growing news channel on the social media service (and one of the fastest overall), the Vice News YouTube channel already has over a million subscribers – bolstered by 414,000 Twitter followers, and 1.3 million fans on Facebook – and their videos have accumulated hundreds of millions of views (Griffith, 2014; Sweney, 2014). Indeed, one of the main stated goals of Vice News is to be different from traditional media broadcasters.

Our approach and the way we are trying to package what we do is radically different to what we see in terrestrial TV... Vice News isn't TV news. We are building it out of an already engaged online audience in their 20s. We are in a different space. Response to people moving away from the old fashioned forms of TV news, whether that's news

bulletins or 24-hour [rolling news] TV (Sweney, 2014, ‘Vice News isn’t TV News’ section, para. 5).

In turn, YouTube is responding to work cooperatively with Vice News. YouTube has worked to promote the channel through various other media, traditional and otherwise. It has placed advertisements on Television during the 2014 World Cup, in theaters before films, and even on billboards in high-traffic areas (Griffith, 2014). YouTube has also gone to promote the Vice News content directly on media such as: “ESPN.com, Fox.com, Pandora, Hulu; and connected devices like Xbox, Playstation and Roku” (2014, para. 7).

This isn’t to say that there isn’t pushback still amongst traditional media journalists. Researcher Jihyang Choi explored this in his study *Another Challenge of Convergence: The Impact on Newspaper Journalists of the Convergence of Print Journalism with Social Media*, where he interviewed journalists who were in the midst of converging news organizations. His findings indicated that, as with the technological changes of the past, there is still fear that the values of the news are being compromised by social media. Journalists remarked that social media has too many limitations for “the deliverance of in-depth reporting, hard news, and accurate news,” and that this would result in a severe quality dip in their content (2012, p. 21).

What they don’t understand is that they are trying to fit an old definition of journalism onto a new reality. They say social media as the only option in the future, instead of a new tool to incorporate into their profession. Because, just as journalism is changing with this convergence, so is its very definition.

A Convergent Definition of Journalism

When Arianna Huffington declared, in the 2009 US Senate Hearing on the *Future of Journalism*, that “the future of journalism is not dependent on the future of newspapers” (p. 56),

she gave a glimpse into what journalism would be in the present, and in the near future. Print journalism may disappear in the future, or it may not. But journalism itself won't go with it.

Clay Shirky declared the death of journalism as a profession, because with social media anyone can be a reporter. This has appeared to not exactly be the case. Journalists have found themselves in the position today where they are not only collecting information, but are “directing the social flow of information and public debate” (Dimitrov, 2014, From Watchdog to Guide Dog section, para. 4). This is a job that requires delicacy and knowledge. When you have traditional media adopting the practices of social media and social media embracing the practices of traditional media, one finds that there is still a place for the reporter and a newsroom. In the words of Roumen Dimitrov in *Do Social Media Spell The End Of Journalism As A Profession*, “The new role is not less exclusive; it is not less professional, it is just different” (2014, From Watchdog to Guide Dog section, para. 6).

Conclusion

In 2013, Cision conducted a survey of 3,000 journalists, asking them how they felt about social media. In response, about 600 of them – 20% - said that they thought social media would “kill journalism” (Hanson, 2013, para. 2). Over the years, this has been the attitude of many in the media field; journalism is in a battle for its life, and the invaders are winning.

It's possible that all the effort journalists put into looking toward the future has made them forget their past. Journalism has not held the straight and narrow path through its many centuries of existence. There have been key moments, crucial points in history where a sudden insertion of technology has swiftly and unequivocally changed it. Never has journalism died. It has adapted. It has evolved.

Social media has proven itself to be the next ignition for this punctuated equilibrium. The two paths are converging already, and there is more to come in the future. It's difficult to predict exactly where this evolution will take us. The earliest of social media aren't even two decades old, and some of the most ever-present have existed for less than ten years. It is, however, very exciting.

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