

Has there been a shift from 'fortress' to 'networked' journalism?

This essay will concentrate on this question over history, focusing on two technological developments: the growth of online journalism and social media journalism, in order to assess how journalism has changed over time.

Nowadays, anyone being in the right place at the right time could become the most important journalist in the world. Since all the digital and technological developments that occurred throughout the end of the 20th Century, journalism has seen lots of changes. Technology has radically changed the lives of journalists. The definition of "journalism" itself is being re-examined. What it is, how it is practiced, which role journalists have in this modern society? These are some of the main questions for journalism studies in the early 21st Century.

Life in the newsroom has become completely different. Journalists have now to learn how to face these developments in order to keep their role in an ever-changing society. Some have described these changes as being a transformation from 'fortress' journalism before, to 'networked' journalism. (Beckett, 2010)

Life before the creation of the Web 2.0 was completely different and especially for the media industry. Since the creation of the printing press in the 1850s, newspapers were the only reliable source of news. According to Schudson (2003), people have relied on traditional media for nearly a century. At that time, information was gathered by journalists, people trained to go out and watch an event in order to do researches, collect information, find witnesses, ask questions and then write or broadcast about it. It was their profession, therefore they were the only reliable source of news.

People did not have any other way to get information, they did not have the opportunity to look at what was said on the internet and social media in order to compare and make their own opinion, the only information they had were the one that media accepted to show them.

Murdoch (2005) said, "I grew up in a highly-centralized world where news and information were tightly controlled by a few editors, who deemed to tell us what we could and should know". The big media firms had control over everything that was said. Editors were gatekeepers who filtered every word, all the information being published, and people did not have any other choice than relying on what was said in the newspapers because it was their only source of information.

According to Murdoch (2005), from the birth of the printing press to the rise of radio, newspaper enjoyed information monopoly. In the old journalistic world, they controlled the context, the background, everything (Marsh, 2009). They took advantage of that position during one century, then their monopoly began to slowly fade away with the creation and democratisation of television.

This has marked the beginning of a new era, it was the first step which led to journalism in the way it is today. Once the evolution started it slowly continued until it reached its peak at the beginning of the 1990s with the creation of the World Wide Web by the British scientist, Tim Berners-Lee. The democratisation of the internet in the 1990s offered a platform where people could have the opportunity to express themselves, thanks to that they could have a voice and finally be heard.

Journalists were not the only source of information anymore and the reader was no longer a passive receptor (Mersey, 2010). It became possible for people to get information somewhere else than in

newspapers and it has changed everything. After that, it also became easier to reach journalists thanks to emails, whereas before the only way to get in touch with media firms was to have contacts in order to be able to send a letter and hope that they would take time to read it and give an answer.

Since this creation, things started to evolve faster than before and then arrived the Web 2.0, quickly followed by the invention of smartphones and social media. This is the beginning of a new form of journalism, everybody is now able to report news from their own phone without even being a journalist, it is called user-generated content. The idea that journalism was facing a change came around 2004, it can be noted from Gillmor (2004) “News was being produced by regular people who had something to say and show, and not solely by the “official” news organizations that had traditionally decided how the first draft of history would look. This time, the first draft of history was being written, in part, by the former audience. It was possible—it was inevitable—because of new publishing tools available on the Internet.”

As Gillmor noted, ordinary people began to use platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, in order to share live news. This is the beginning of a new era for journalism, which will be called “Networked Journalism”. This term was first introduced and defined in 2009 by Professor Charlie Beckett. Then academics and journalists started to talk about these digital developments and what it might mean for journalism in the future. “By ‘Networked Journalism’ I mean a synthesis of traditional news journalism and the emerging forms of participatory media enabled by Web 2.0 technologies such as mobile phones, email, websites, blogs, micro-blogging, and social networks.” (Beckett, 2010).

This new wave of citizenship journalism allows the public to be involved in every aspect of journalism production. As said by Hammond (2011) “Digital media technology allows many more people to enter their version of events into the pre-production phase of journalism.” Now the audience has total control over things and traditional news organizations really do not know how to respond (Mersey, 2010). They no longer have the influence that they used to have in the previous century. Today, citizens want their news on demand, when it works for them. They want control over their media, instead of being controlled by it. They want to question, to probe, to offer a different angle on what is said (Murdoch, 2005).

However, the advantages of this evolution may be disputed, as in every development it can have good but also bad aspects. First of all, the internet has completely changed the functions and nature of journalism by eliminating the role of gatekeepers editors which used to filter the news before their publication. Citizens have now full access to unfiltered information via the internet and nobody can control that. Horrocks (2009) said, “Fortress journalism has been wonderful. Powerful, long-established institutions provided the perfect base for strong journalism. Internet-based journalism may be the most significant contributor to this business collapse.” In the fortress world, the consumption of journalism was through clearly defined products and platforms, television or radio programmes, magazines and newspapers.

Now with this new form of journalism, the reader might never know from which media firm the information has come. The issue is that by not knowing where the information comes from, how could the audience know if those people trying to be journalists are unbiased or have integrity? How could people make the difference between news produced by actual journalists and citizen journalists? As a digital journalist, Pool (2015) said, “Right now the key thing that media companies need to be doing is making news from noise. We are seeing all these different puzzle pieces drop

off, these photos, these tweets... Journalists have to figure out what happened, take all these pieces, put them together and here is your story.”

According to Pool (2015), journalists and citizen journalists have to work together in order to create a new form of journalism. There is a limit to what an average citizen journalist can do, they are not going to investigate, only professional journalists are able to find sources, make researches and find stories. That is why it can be stated that this is not the end of the journalist profession. The challenge today for journalists and media firms is to adapt to the new age of journalism in order to stay relevant in an ever-changing society.

To conclude, the creation of the Internet and social media has significantly changed the face of journalism. This essay would argue there has been a real shift from Fortress to Networked Journalism. All these digital developments and the fact that they began to be used for journalism purposes have completely changed the nature and functions of journalism. The roles have been reversed, the audience who has been subjected to the media monopoly of information during a century has now become completely free and independent. People have been relieved from the veil that was put on their heads to prevent them from seeing the information that gatekeepers decided to avoid. This is a completely new form of journalism, which if not misused could make an incredible evolution.

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