

Hunffington posts review

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The recent merger between AOL and the Huffington Post will surely one day stand as a watershed moment. Within hours of the news breaking, pundits were already labeling the merger as a 'sign of the times' or as a 'harbinger of things to come for the news industry'. An internet service provider and owner of various dotcoms (AOL) joined a hip and successful new-age media company (HuffPost) to create a new force in news. AOL paid some \$300 million for the Huffington Post in what has been called its "largest acquisition since it was separated from Time Warner in 2009" (Alterman 2008). This was a bit of a bold move considering the outcome AOL's previous merger with Time Warner, which ended in disaster. It is not difficult to understand the reasons for it. AOL gets access to all of the HuffPost's readers (i. e. customers) to sell its other products to and HuffPost gets the opportunity to be part of a major new media company.

In the context of the newspaper industry, I feel that this merger has both a positive and a negative aspect. As a member of the 'internet' generation, I like to see innovation and change. The internet has truly democratized the exchange of information in a way that the printing press or the telephone could not, despite their historically meaningful contribution to the same. If AOL and HuffPost can become sustainably profitable, the new company will provide a model for what journalism and journalists need to do in the future in order to not only survive but actually thrive. That of course brings me to the negative side of the merger. The merger has occurred in an environment which has witnessed the near collapse of the newspaper industry (and the homologous printed book industry). As an avid reader of both books and newspapers, I do not find great pleasure in their disappearance. The printed

word has been at the center of human cultural growth over the last few centuries. Personally I love the smell of old books and a freshly printed newspaper. That smell brings up memories of rainy afternoons spent devouring books and mornings spent watching my father read the paper before going to work. The idea that Kindles and websites will replace all that is displeasing and even frightening. You can touch paper. You cannot touch a computer-generated image.

The Dewey-Lippman debate in some ways presaged the 21st evolution of the news media. Lippman once said that the “ average American [reader]” is similar to the “ deaf spectator in the back row” in that “[h]e does not know what is happening [nor] why it is happening” because “ he lives in a world which he cannot see, does not understand, and is unable to direct” (Peters 2011). Lippman took a markedly elitist view of people which was largely critical of democracy. In his good opinion, newspapers should be directed and controlled by special elites who collect, summarize, and present stories to the public which could then, in turn, make informed political choices. Dewey did not like this and decried Lippman’s elitism. He felt that people needed to be educated so that they could engage in their own political analysis and ‘ conversation’ before making a choice. Elites were not necessary nor terribly wanted in his view. “ A class of experts is inevitably so removed from common interests as to become a class with private interests and private knowledge” (Peters 2011). I think it is pretty obvious that Lippman’s view won out until the advent of the internet, whereupon Dewey had the last laugh. The Huffingpost provides just the sort of information exchange and discussion that Dewey said was needed for democracy to

flourish. The internet, more broadly, has brought together people from all walks of life and allowed them to interact in a way that had never before been witnessed. The Huffpost brings together celebrities, news stories, and reader interaction in a maelstrom of information diffusion that could never have been realized with the brick and mortar model. The AOL-HuffPost merger is the first of the ' New York Times' and ' Guardians' of the future. One thing is for sure, the printed word is nearly dead if it is not already.

Works Cited

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Peters, Jeremy W. and Verne G. Kopytoff. " Betting on News, AOL is Buying the Huffington
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