

The challenges and obstacles faced by those in journalist field

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A few years back, Felix Salmon, contended that the present was the worst time to be a journalist. His advice for aspiring reporters — don't become one! It is true that in some ways it is perhaps a bad time to be in journalism — there is little job security and stability, incidents of journalists being threatened or even attacked are on the rise, and perhaps most importantly, journalists who as students are taught to pursue the truth end up working in agencies which churn out “ content”. As Emily Bell wrote, “ Where once we had propaganda, press releases, journalism, and advertising, we now have ‘ content’.”

In many ways though, I think it is also the best time to be a journalist. Never before has a journalist have had so many tools at his disposal with which to report or enjoyed the incredible access to both sources and readers, viewers of listeners that s/he has today. Reporters today can use drones to take aerial photos, interactive maps to mark out sites of interests, virtual and augmented reality to provide the viewer with an immersive experience, or even crowdsource information, audio clips or videos from regular citizens like The New York Times did in their coverage of the shooting at the Pulse nightclub. The possibilities and modes of journalism today are endless and infinitely exciting.

The internet has ensured that news, in other words, the article or video that a reporter produces has the highest possible reach and impact. Increased accessibility goes both ways. Today, news consumers are also much closer to journalists than ever before — a boon not a curse. Journalists get direct feedback of their reports almost instantaneously through “ likes”, “

retweets”, or comments. They can then use the feedback to hone their skills or improve their work.

Social media has also been a blessing for smaller, newer publications. While it has become easier for “fake news” to be disseminated through social media, it is also true that in many respects the platform has equalized the playing field. No more do smaller agencies have to always play second-fiddle to the established powerhouses.

Rapid advances in technology also means that now anyone based anywhere in the world can get details and facts about an event within seconds. One of the elements of the “5 Ws and H” — the “what?” — is now becoming increasingly redundant — the consumer already knows it. What has gained currency in its stead is an analysis of the event — what it means in the larger context of things, what can happen next, and so on. Perhaps this is the reason why despite all speculation that the internet has made long-ish articles “out of vogue”, long-form articles are doing better than ever before and has even branched out into other formats, like podcasts.

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke had once said, “And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.” The journalist today has to “live the questions now” and constantly examine all assumptions, biases, and meanings.

Analyzing a news event is always a challenge — a journalist has to both know all about the event itself and also understand the larger context

surrounding the event. While this may sound daunting, it really isn't! All it demands is that a journalist keep up with the happenings in the world as much as possible. Most people who take up journalism as a career are curious by nature and learning about new things and subjects will, if nothing else, provide an enriching experience.

We are living through a period defined by staggering political shocks and an increasing rupturing of society. Making sense of a moment and its implications while in the midst of it can often be difficult. According to the American Press Institute, the purpose of journalism is to “ provide citizens with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, their communities, their societies, and their governments.”

Just a couple of days ago, France celebrated the 229th anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. The French Revolution had spread throughout the world the idea that ordinary people could face down the powerful and win. In an increasingly fractured and almost dystopian world, the role played by journalists has perhaps never been so important, and never before has journalists been equipped with so many tools through which he can speak truth to power.

It is challenging to be a journalist at present. Yet in many ways, journalists are also in the frontlines of the fight to preserve truth, justice and democracy. Journalism is a noble calling and I wouldn't choose any other time than the present to be one.