

Impact of it on journalism media essay



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The evolution of technology continues to revolutionize the journalism industry. Television, computers and the internet are among many technologies which have significantly impacted the way in which news is researched, written and published. This report will analyse the impact of IT on journalism over the past four years. It will look particularly at how recent web technologies have impacted journalists' research techniques and affected the expectations of readers. It will further look into the ethical implications such technologies have brought to journalism and the sustainability issues pertinent to the industry.

Researching news

Web 2.0 technologies have had significant influence on journalists' researching techniques. They have impacted the ways in which journalists find story ideas, make contacts and acquire information. The 2009 Arketi Web Watch Survey revealed journalists' sources of story ideas (Figure 1. 1). The results demonstrate a considerable reliance upon Web 2.0 technologies, including blogs, Wikis, RSS feeds, podcasts and social networks.

Figure 1. 1 – Sources of Story Ideas

Neumeier's article reviewing the 2007 Arketi Web Watch Survey suggests that the connections Web 2.0 technologies enable, allow journalists to make contacts and ultimately acquire information. Such virtual networking means journalists can obtain information, including opinions, quotes and photos, without personally knowing a contact, but by contacting or following them via social media sites (Sherratt, 2010). Web 2.0 on whole, provides journalists with convenient access to a wide variety of both primary and secondary information sources.

Reader expectations

Recent technology influenced trends have impacted the expectations of news readers. Unlike a newspaper, if an online reader is dissatisfied with a news source, they are able to easily and freely switch to another. According to a 2010 survey, 57% of online news seekers visit between two and five sites a day; while only 21% have a single site they routinely visit (Pew Research Centre, 2010). Journalists are hence forced to meet the expectations of online news seekers in order to capture and maintain their readers' attention and ensure their stories are read. Social news, citizen journalism and mobile internet are all recent trends influenced by technology which have impacted the expectations of news readers.

Social news

News consumption is a 'socially-engaging and socially-driven activity' (Pew Research Centre, 2010). Tom Regan describes online journalism as a 'two-way one-to-one model' in contrast to conventional, one-way, 'we write, you read' journalism. He claims in his article, *The Digital Journalist* written in 1997, that there is a strong demand from readers to be able to interact with the writer and other readers of news stories. In 2010, with Web 2.0 technologies, which encourage participation and interaction on the internet, an even greater expectation is held by readers to be able to contribute to and share news. The Pew Research Centre (2010) survey revealed that most readers believe that 'keeping up with the news is a social or civic obligation.' The survey also highlighted that '37% of online news readers have contributed to the creation of news, commentary about it, or dissemination of news via social media.' These trends have been influenced

by advancements in web technologies which allow readers to comment on stories, participate in forums and easily share links. The impact of social news consumption means that successful news stories encourage and facilitate reader participation.

Citizen journalism

Citizen journalism is a growing trend influenced by widespread individual access to cameras and online publishing platforms. Nine percent of news readers surveyed in 2010 revealed that they have contributed to the news by ‘creating their own original news material or opinion piece’ (Pew Research Centre, 2010). These amateur news pieces can include reports, pictures, videos or audio and are usually published on blogs or social networking sites. Twitter, a micro-blogging site established in 2006 (Lur, 2010), is one such example of a site where citizen journalism is widespread. Twenty-six percent of its US users say they primarily use the site for news seeking (TNS and The Conference Board, 2009). On many occasions Twitter users, assisted by newswires (which monitor topic trends and divulge the latest news to a network wider than the original poster’s (Catone, 2009)), have beaten mainstream media in breaking news stories. For example, reports of earthquakes in the UK and China in 2008 were initially found on Twitter (Catone, 2009). Competing with such on-the-spot reporting is almost impossible for mainstream journalists as readers expect all reports to be equally as current as Tweets. However, Tweets are generally uninformative due to their 140 character limit and citizen reports are usually seen as unreliable (Kanalley, 2009). Professional journalists are hence expected to,

and must hence compete by, promptly reporting exclusive, informative and accurate news which citizen journalists cannot offer.

The future of citizen journalism is promising with the launch of sites such as BBC's 'Your News'. Yeon-ho, the creator of, 'OhmyNews.com', a popular Korean citizen news site, describes the future of journalism as a "pro-am" (professional-amateur) concept of combining citizen reporters with trained professional journalists and editors' (O'Connor, 2007). This is backed up by BBC's claims that 'Your News makes use of a huge range of material being sent to the BBC by the public, some of which has provided real newsgathering value' (Hoffman, 2006).

Mobile internet

The continuing increase in the use of mobile internet devices, such as Smartphones, has a corresponding affect on the number of readers accessing news via mobile internet (Diaz, 2010). The number of US mobile internet users is expected to rise from 89.2 million in 2010 to 134 million in 2013 (eMarketer, 2009), inevitably leading to a further increase in mobile news readers. The nature of mobile news will affect the expectations readers have on how news is presented. On the internet, readers tend to scan pages; similarly, or to a greater extent, they will do so on their mobile devices. Well written information for the web is said to have 50% less words than a print article and should ensure information can be easily extracted through scanning (Thomas, 2010). Journalists will hence need to ensure their works can be easily scanned. News organizations' websites will also need to be compatible with, and easily accessible and appealing on, mobile internet browsers and devices with small screens.

Ethical Implications

Integrity of information

Among the Australian Journalism Association's Code of Ethics is an obligation to 'report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts' (Australian News Commentary, 2010). The integrity and accuracy of the information journalists provide to their readers can be tainted when sourcing information from the internet. One such example of inaccurate journalism is that of a quote believed to be by Maurice Jarre, reported after his death by newspaper websites in the US, Britain, Australia and India. The quote was published on Wikipedia by a university student in Dublin, who later confessed the information to be a hoax (Pogatchnik, 2009). This story highlights how a lack of consideration of the integrity of sources can result in inaccurate reporting. Consequences of such can include damaged reputations, misled readers and law suits.

Using 'privately' published information

Information found on the internet can often be publically published without the creator knowingly doing so. A survey on internet users found that out of those surveyed, '78% of the adult online population would change information they publish about themselves online if they thought the material would later be reproduced in the mainstream media' (Press Complaints Commission, 2008). Using information found on social networking profiles, may therefore be considered breaching journalists' ethical codes which aim to respect personal privacy and fairly, responsibly and honestly obtain material (Australian News Commentary, 2010).

Writing for a global audience

The internet is a global community; therefore, news published online can be accessed by readers from around the world. Journalists must hence consider the different cultural interpretations of the language, imagery and particularly humor and slang contained within their news stories. A Michael Jackson skit performed on Australia's Hey Hey It's Saturday program in 2009 is one such example of humor which caused international offence because of different cultural background and interpretations. The US and the UK believed the skit was racist and disgraceful; while the majority of Australian audiences enjoyed the lighthearted humor (Duck & McCabe, 2009). A 1998 article titled 'Writing for the Web' reiterates the point that humor is prone to 'elude, and possibly offend, a percentage of the audience.' The article also makes references to the differences in how dates are written, which may result in inaccurate reporting, and alternative meanings of words and hand gestures, which may be insulting in some cultures (Morelli, 1998).

Sustainability issues

The impact of online news has resulted in a continuing drop in newspaper sales which positively affects the sustainability of journalism (Malik, 2010). An audit revealed that The Age newspaper consumes approximately 146kg of paper, per year, per subscription (Monday – Friday) (House in Harmony, 2009). A 2010 comparison of The Age sales shows a 4.1% drop to 189,500 since 2009; a figure attributed to an increase in online readings (Malik, 2010). If these newspapers were not printed, approximately 3250kg of paper would have been saved in the year, along with reductions in carbon emissions produced by printers and other publishing machines. This decline

in sales also reduces the emissions produced by deliveries to homes and retailers and reduces the consumption of plastic used to wrap delivered papers (House in Harmony, 2009). However, reading news online will increase the time readers spend on their computers and consequently produce more computer-generated emissions. Nonetheless, the consumption of news will be less wasteful as readers selectively view articles online, instead of purchasing an entire newspaper. Furthermore, increasing developments in Green IT improving energy efficiency and aspiring to reduce e-waste mean that a complete conversion to online publishing is a sustainable initiative for the future.

Conclusion

Technology, particularly the internet has had a significant and continuous impact on the journalism industry. Web 2.0 technologies have made it easier for journalists to find news stories and acquire information; while the expectations of news readers have been impacted by recent technology influenced trends including social news, citizen journalism and mobile internet access. The use of the internet to research and publish stories means that journalists must ethically consider the integrity and privacy of information they exploit and the obligations which come with writing for a global audience. Publishing news online also proves to be a sustainable initiative for the future as it reduces paper consumption and carbon emissions.