



THE FUTURE OF QUALITY JOURNALISM: IMPERILED

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Journalism and factually correct information is not only declining, but under attack. There is an unprecedented and unnoticed revolution happening in the world of journalism and communications, and all media in which they can be found. Since the invention of home-based internet in the early 1990's, new generations are being born into a world that is more technological than human. Today we use phones as computers, communicate with hardly any physical contact, and have a constant urge to talk to and connect to complete strangers in what is called the social media cyber world. This generational shift from human contact to having a technology as a middleman in communication has initiated the decimation of newspapers.

Newspapers are known as the protectors of democracy; the freedom of the press is protected under the American Constitution. The job of a journalist is to give the public, its readers, the news of their government, their community and to inform them of what is going on in the world that may affect them. This is a noble cause for which journalists around the world risk their lives to bring a story to light, and who dedicate their energy and effort to seeking the truth.

Thanks to dedicated investigative reporters, we have uncovered the truth in the former President Nixon Watergate scandal, the nonexistence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq during former President Bush's administration, the housing bubble collapse of 2008, and the National Security Agency's invasion of our civil liberties thanks to whistleblower Edward Snowden, among many other revelations.

In the book, *You Decide! Current Debates in American Politics* (2012), the debate being discussed is, "The Future of Quality Journalism: Imperiled or Secure?" David Simon, creator and executive producer of HBO series "The Wire" and former Baltimore newspaperman advocates that it is indeed imperiled. He lists several catalysts of why newspapers around the country are closing their doors and stopping their presses.

David Simon believes internet technology alone cannot be blamed for newspapers' demise, but also corporate greed, focus on profits, downsizing and the slow disappearance of content, the underestimation of technology, and the slow, if not nonexistent, adaption to the new media environment.

Arianna Huffington on the other hand believes in survival of the fittest; she believes the future of quality journalism is secure with the "democratization" of news, "citizen journalism," constant updates on news stories and believes content should not be copyright protected in the new media environment.

These opposing views all have good points, such as more news dispersed quicker and technological advances and adaptation to bring the news to consumers, but Huffington's view is deeply flawed for one reason: she focuses on news corporations and not news consumers, or the everyday citizen. Unfortunately, Arianna Huffington has what journalists call a "conflict of interest;" she owns a news aggregation website, the Huffington Post, and seems to be defending her corporate appetite.

The internet, especially its sharing technology, has made leaps and bounds in the last three years, and appropriately so, Huffington has invested in incorporating original online content rather than aggregating everyone else's news on her website. This change is appropriate and this is the problem with online news. Reporters who spend weeks, months, and sometimes years researching, writing, and sometimes risking their lives on a story have it "stolen" and plastered everywhere on the internet.

To read a news story in the traditional print method, you have to buy a newspaper or magazine to read that reporter's voice. On the internet, it is mostly free, making it the new Wild West. In the new Wild West of the internet world, there is no law. There is no law protecting an individual's right to privacy, no law of compensation for someone's time and effort, no law protecting someone's property,

no law protecting anything from anything; the true Wild West. Beware of rattlesnakes and tumbleweeds. This is why the future of quality journalism is imperiled.

On the internet, abuse is rampant. A good case to bring up is the copyright lawsuits musicians brought against companies and people who illegally downloaded their songs and albums without paying. Fortunately for them, a law was put in place to protect the artists' earnings and they were compensated for their monetary loss. This is exactly what is going on with newspapers' contents. They are being illegally read, even stolen and placed on other web sites.

Another problem with content aggregation is that journalist who wrote that article is not being additionally compensated for his or her article shares, besides his or her regular salary from the news outlet he or she writes for. Journalists are arguably the largest group of victims of plagiarism on the internet.

An additional problem that the evolution of news seeking brings is the fact that content is not protected. According to the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, in 2012 it was found that newspaper advertising revenues had been falling dramatically, while online ads, like display banners, are hardly climbing in comparison, although the latter is a growing trend. Display advertising is the bread and butter of newspaper websites just as print advertising is what kept papers lucrative and alive. The problem with this scenario is, as newspapers migrate their content online, it is no longer protected from news aggregators who disperse that content into cyberspace. This makes companies wearier of advertising on a newspaper website because that content might be elsewhere and not unique or attractive enough to entice clicks. This results in loss of revenue for the newspaper.

These problems in cyberspace, lack of compensation for the journalists' reproduced work, loss of revenue for newspapers, and nonexistent laws to protect newspapers and reporters from copyright infringement is what is imperiling the quality of journalism.

Arianna Huffington also defends “citizen journalism,” which is defined as regular citizens who bring content and play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news. This concept is a noble one, especially if you live in a democratic country. Huffington feels the future of journalism lies in people’s hands, but this is a dangerous premise. What she fails to mention and leaves out of her comments are the plagiarists, the liars, the fake profile impersonators, and internet trolls, which are anonymous people bullying everything and everyone in cyberspace. In addition, it is easy to ask that people contribute to your website for free, adding traffic to it and resulting in revenue for your company while not having them on payroll.

The cyber world is not an honest world. It is a place where people steal others’ works, illegally impersonate others, and many times fabricate information. Yes, there are honest people in the internet with great ideas, but according to my analogy and analysis, those talents should seek a journalism degree if he or she wants to be taken seriously in the news-making business. One must learn about the ethics of journalism and learn how to be a reliable journalist by seeking out sources, fact-checking, seeking the other side of a story and giving people the opportunity to opine in a controversial topic. One does not simply become a journalist if one simply writes about a story or worse, rely on other journalists’ sources and quotes.

A case in point of this topic is the April 5, 2015 New York Times article titled “In Report on Rolling Stone, a Case Study in Failed Journalism.” This article talks about why and how Rolling Stone magazine was forced to retract its article published in November 2015 entitled “A Rape on Campus” and how it made the infamous list of journalism scandals. The report in The Times concludes that the story about the rape on campus should have never been published because they relied on a singular, anonymous source. If you attend journalism school, you will learn how to fact-check an event and seek other sources who can corroborate or disprove the event in question. The Times concluded this was a case of gross negligence of not only the author of the story who believed a single source and did not

fact-check or dig up any indiscretions, but also of the editors who authorized this story to print. Former executive editor of The New York Times Bill Keller told The Times, "As an editor, it's one that really leaves you feeling you've failed at your job." In journalism, quality journalism, a story goes through many editors and fact-checkers before it goes to print. Keller put it best, "The job of editors is to be the last line of defense against reporters who get carried away by an unreliable source, or stampeded by their zeal to break a big story, or who fall for a pat narrative," Keller said.

If a multimillion-dollar magazine such as Rolling Stone, which has hundreds of employees and a well-defined chain of command of reporters, writers, fact-checkers, editors, and legal team can make a mistake as simple as this, what gives a "citizen journalist" any credibility or the trust that they, a single or small group of untrained individuals, are the future of quality journalism?

What cannot be denied is the lightning fast pace of evolution of technology. One cannot reverse the damage the internet has done to newspapers or even to television or prevent it from continuing. What must be done to save quality journalism is lassoing the Wild West and setting ground rules. Instating a Sherriff, a deputy, and writing laws is the only thing that can save the internet from itself. Today, online news sources hardly claim a profit not only because this is a transitional period in news, but also because there is no way to protect your content from internet thieves, or content aggregators. While many newspapers are making their transition to the cyber world, new native online news websites are popping up and competing against them by bringing in original content and programming. This is the future of journalism.

Original web content should be protected under the law just as products are protected within the walls of a grocery store and books are protected in libraries. There is a face and a life behind who created that content and that person needs to make a living. Democracy is sacred, but capitalism is not only killing itself by greed, but it is taking its citizens' jobs with it. According to the annual American

Society of Newspaper Editors Survey, in 2007 there were 52,600 full-time newsroom employees. Two years later, that workforce had been pruned by about 20 percent, and this does not count the dozens of thousands of jobs lost in the magazine business. These people are the professionally trained watchdogs of our society who have for centuries protected us from tyrannical governments, assisted us through hard times, and unearthed the truth no matter where it was found. They use century-old tried-and-true methods to bring us the news around us every day. If you think content should be free, as Arianna Huffington does, I ask you to do an experiment. Go to work as usual, whatever that job may be, refuse payment for one year, and then rethink your opinion on copyright and content protection. Another experiment is to go to the Huffington Post website, find local news from your neighborhood, and compare it to your print newspaper.

The future of journalism is imperiled if we do not take a Keynesian approach and protect our policing entities from this technological and greedy attack. We must not stand back and watch this fiasco, but we must act to protect what benefits society. We must stand by our principles of professionalism and protect those who live by the highest standards of them all. Newspapermen have been in our lives throughout our human history, and cannot be left behind as a relic of the past, as we clearly need them in our future, and the future is what we make it.

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