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Fletcher, G and Greenhill, A

Title  | Self-organising digital news
---|---
Authors  | Fletcher, G and Greenhill, A
Type  | Book Section
URL  | This version is available at: http://usir.salford.ac.uk/37121/
Published Date  | 2015

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Self-organising digital news

Gordon Fletcher and Anita Greenhill

We have to understand news not as a separate force, outside the social relations it seeks to report, but very much part of them. Part of what determines the discourse of the news is the way the news-makers themselves act within the constraints, pressures, structures and norms that bring the larger world of social relations to bear on their work. News is just one social agency among many - news organisations are themselves determined by the relationships that develop between them and other agencies. Like signs, news organisations are largely defined by what they are not (Hartley 1982, 47).

Abstract

This chapter examines the business challenges faced by journalists and traditional news reporting organisations in light of the increasing presence and rising popularity of multiple, personal and ‘amateur’ digital news channels. Our discussion focuses on the differences in value creation that are found in the contrasting ‘traditional’, ‘digital’ and self-organising models of news reporting. The aim of this discussion is to identify the ways in which news reporting organisations have previously and can continue to create value in light of the challenges brought by social media technologies. We argue that it is the popularising of digital channels including the increasing realisation and legitimation of crowdsourcing, co-creation and user generated content that directly threatens the traditional practices of news reporting organisations, and therefore the business models of these organisations. The threats posed by digital media technologies to traditional news reporting is further reinforced by popular acceptance of specific social media actions including ‘tagging’, ‘re-posting’ and ‘liking’. In light of these activities we consider the shifting role that audience-contributed and non-traditional content - what we describe as ‘non-news’ and ‘anti-news’ - plays in relation to news reporting. We argue that two pivotal aspects of value creation for news reporting organisations has been, and continues to be, their ability to efficiently synthesise diverse sources of complex information and their ability to construct legitimacy and authority around the brand of the news reporting organisation itself.

What is the News Reporting Organisation?

In this chapter we ask two closely related questions; how do news reporting organisations create value? And; What is the impact of self-organising digital news on news reporting organisations?

While traditional news reporting organisations, especially newspapers, are experiencing a declining readership and a loss of advertising (Mahdian and Tomak, 2008), organisations with a web-based business focus are seeing an increase in revenues (Hume and Gill, 2013). Social media as a vehicle for distributing user generated content has taken the social and cultural role of the Internet to a new level (Dutton, 2009) as a ‘co-mingling of electronic and physical space’ (Page & Phillips, 2003: 73). A circumstance and experience that is popularly labelled Web 2.0.
The technologies of Web 2.0 are themselves claimed (Grewal et al., 2010) to have evolved Web-based practice from the under-engaged and near-passive consumption of information to the creation, linking and inter-relating of content by multiple users (Cormode and Krishnamurthy 2008). These practices can be readily evidenced on social networking sites (SNSs) where people create digital profiles of themselves in which interests and friends are intertwined with messages, photographs and video (boyd and Ellison 2007) enabling an active or writerly mode of interaction. The changing media landscape has also seen traditional news reporting organisations bringing their materials online. Since 1980 newspaper publishers have had their own websites or have had their reporting available online (Shedden 2004), with the hope of persuading visitors to purchase the print newspaper for access to more details of the limited set of stories on the site. However, as increasingly more people utilise web-enabled communication devices and online tools there remains little clarity or certainty about the role and purpose of traditional news reporting media and organisations within this new media landscape.

Our starting point is recognition of the significance of this shifting media landscape and the increasing separation of news - in its broadest sense - from news reporting organisations. Traditional news organisations not only reported and presented the news but also contributed significantly to what was defined as news (Shaw, et al 2008). An ability to control the definition of the news was itself a consequence of the closely tied association of news reporting to the organisational ownership of the media actually used to present and distribute news, particularly newsprint and free-to-air television broadcasting (Doyle, 2002). The ability to buy and sell news distribution media, such as newspapers or magazine, as a cheap consumer commodity also enabled the concentration of ownership around a small elite with broadly common interests further refining and controlling the purpose and focus of news and news reporting (Arkhavan-Majid and Wolf 1991). Extensive exclusive economic control of media and news distribution infrastructure then enables the agglomeration of ‘national’ (or super-regional) print and broadcast news networks to become the defining parameters for reporting and ‘newsworthiness’ at all levels including the regional and local. This ‘big’ economic perspective regarding what constitutes important news is still largely preserved within corporatised national television and newspaper agendas. Some anomalies and exceptions to this monolithic economic agenda do exist among local and community newspapers and radio where the cost of entry is generally lower. Although, in the case of radio, broadcasting stations are still controlled centrally through government licensing of the radio spectrum. The business (and sometimes anti-business) models found among smaller independent local media outlets can be regarded as the earliest formations of self-organising news activity and community journalism. This development of self-organising news is further encouraged by the rising popularity of social networking services. Among the many lauded triumphs of Internet technologies is access to tools of public inscription and distribution that have become largely costless and consequently enables still further separation of news production and distribution technologies away from the control of corporate news reporting organisations. An observation that largely explains the rationale behind News Corporation’s purchase of MySpace in 2005 and earlier the purchase of AOL by Time Warner in 2000. Changing social and technological practices have necessitated significant shifts in practice among traditional news gathering organisations. But even with these seismic changes the capabilities offered through the web and social media presence of news reporting
organisations lags significantly behind the expectations for engagement of writerly audiences.

**Models of News Reporting Organisations**

The figure below (Figure 1) shows a simplified entity diagram of the key relationships in the traditional news reporting organisation. Prior to the recent shifts in news production and consumption, the source of value creation lies with the journalists as a product of their labour. Value is realised through the journalist’s synthesis of multiple sources for which, in turn, they are rewarded by wages provided by the news reporting organisation. The journalist’s ability to craft ‘the news’ both benefits and is exploited by the news reporting organisation. In turn the news reporting organisation expresses and uses the value created by the journalist as the authority and reputation of ‘news’ or more specifically their ‘brand’.

The organisation then interacts with its audience and advertisers through the intermediary of the actual media that is produced. In effect audiences produce income for the news reporting organisation by purchasing a single instance of the news (Keng and Teng 2009). The audience, within this traditional perspective, are associated and defined by the class of media that they consume (i.e. a newspaper reader, radio listener or viewer of television broadcasts). Advertisers also produce income for the news reporting organisation by purchasing part of the class of media itself (e.g. newspaper columns inches or 30 seconds of air-time).

![Figure 1: The Traditional News Reporting Organisation](image_url)

This model (Figure 1) of news reporting and news consumption represents a traditional business model that can be traced to the earliest periods of mass-produced newspapers. It is a
significant observation that there are only three external inputs into the entity diagram with a clear separation and mediation of these inputs from one another by the news reporting organisation. In the case of the sources employed and synthesised by journalists there is an assumption that there is either a reward involved (a payment) or that a similar model of news reporting is replicated at this point, constructing journalists themselves as a particular type of audience. The other external entities are the audience and advertisers. The nature of their relationship could be claimed as ‘entertained by’ or ‘informed by’ in the case of the audience and, more amorphously, ‘increase sales’ or ‘increase awareness’ for the advertiser. The benefits for the audience and advertisers are potentially and notably ill-defined in this model although undoubtedly benefits do arise for both entities. However, the presence and realisations of these benefits relies on the existence of a limited and controlled number of options for accessing news and relatively weak mechanisms for testing and quantifying advertising campaigns success (Nel, 2010). The traditional model or news reporting is clearly threatened by the ubiquity of digital access and its capacity to draw these external entities more closely together.

The Transitional News Reporting Organisation

![Diagram of The Transitional News Reporting Organisation]

The changing contemporary media landscape is represented (Figure 2) as the transitional news reporting organisation. The most significant alteration from traditional news reporting organisation (Figure 1) is the role and relationship of the audience and their ability to access sources as well as the introduction of the additional mediations of social media. The audience is now able to interact with other media and directly with the source of news stories - with Twitter currently the premier example for this form of direct access. The relationship of audience to social media and other sources is also importantly defined as ‘access’ rather than ‘purchase’. While many social media, such as Facebook, do utilise a newspaper-inspired advertising model and advertisers do purchase screen real estate this is the current tendency for the most popular
social media rather than being the only model (Arakj and Lang 2010). Facebook as the most successful advertising supported social networking site is also importantly not a news reporting organisation but instead only facilitates access to a medium that enables news reporting.

Other social networking sites, such as Tumblr, are exploring different and sometimes more subtle revenue generation models while the vast majority of social media in the form of personal, group or corporate blogs are not ‘monetised’ at all. Wikipedia, which is also claimed as a social media, has been the focal point of many controversies, the veracity of its articles (Bruns, 2008), its uncritical use by students and journalists (Kittur, 2007) and its sometimes obscure editorial policies (e.g. wikipedia.org - the three revert rule) but it steadfastly refuses to accept advertising or to charge access fees (Giles, 2005). Where a newspaper model of advertiser support is employed the financial barriers to entry for any social media advertiser are significantly lower than those found in the traditional model (Figure 1) with the value that an advertiser is able to extract out of their spend being significantly higher with online tracking and reporting tools enabling high levels of accuracy and control over the many individual parameters of a campaign. The separation of ownership of the delivery platform from the news reporting organisation also means that social media advertising is conducted in a far less controlled environment with the removal of any potential editorial influence and nor is it premised on the authority of a news reporting organisation’s brand.

The transitional news reporting organisational also creates an altered and somewhat problematic relationship between the journalist and social media (Alqudsi-ghabra, Al-Bannai & Al-Bannai, 2011). The relationship varies between organisations. In some it has become an additional expected tasks while in others it is more of a personal initiative that blurs the divisions between public and private as well as between reporting and comment. These relationships are problematic for value creation within the news reporting organisation. The presence of a masthead on a blog is a potentially weak association in an environment with so many competing voices. The danger - for the news reporting organisation - is that the blog ultimately creates value for the individual journalist’s personal brand. The consequences is a weakening of the audience’s relationship with the overall organisation and it’s brand presents opportunities for a bi-directional communication with an audience that can become exclusively loyal to an individual journalist. The largely personal format of social media prioritises the journalist as a blogger over organisational reputation or presence. However, the need for the transitional news reporting organisation to create value necessitates labour. Furthermore attempting to balance issues of value and authority within a transitional news reporting organisations raises the far more reflective question of what makes something become news.

**Reporting the news and ‘owning’ the news**

The following time honoured list has been called the factors of news judgement, and you can use this to help you assess the newsworthiness of a story or story idea. Timeliness, audience, impact and proximity, significance/importance, magnitude, prominence, disaster/tragedy, the odd or unusual, conflict and controversy, human interest, humour (Lauterer 2006, 102).
News is conventionally defined as newly received or noteworthy information for communities (Hartley, 1982). A definition that is especially reinforced when it concerns recent or important events. The news appropriate to an audience is predominantly situated within a physical location and has a pivotal role in defining and representing a sense of community (Greenhill & Graham, 2011). Those who are closer to the specific community’s location are a key source of newsworthiness as well as being representative of the potential audience. Disruptions to the flows of everyday life, events of personal significance to many people, events that mark the progress of time and changes to the physical, economic, political or social situation are all newsworthy in this sense. But on a cautionary note this definition only provides indicative guidance rather than a definitive binary of what is news and what is not news. The presence of news reporting organisations - introducing a type of Hawthorne effect - presents a still more complex set of influences that could be taken at an extreme to mean that the news reporting organisation determines what is news. This observation itself provides a tentative indicator for gauging the extent and scale of the continuing influence of traditional news reporting organisations in defining the contemporary news agenda. This dominant news agenda reflects prevailing political attitudes of a perceived audience as well as those specifically of editors and owners (Castells, 2009). For example, women were generally absent from Victorian-era newspapers - except as partners to men, and until recently ethnic minorities are absent from most broadcast media as a focus for news reporting except in generally negative tones of fear, accusation and blame (Hartley, 1982). The politics of newspaper ownership in the UK is also regularly cited (Doyle, 2002) as holding significant influence on the popular opinion and political voting patterns of readers (Castells, 2009).

In contrast to the problematic series of issues surrounding news itself, the news reporting organisation is only a problematic concept in the already observed sense that news reporting through the twentieth century increasingly coalesced around a small numbers of owners. This network of corporate control introduced a form of obscurity around the ultimate controlling ownership for any specific organisation and a question mark around the degree of editorial influence that ownership could exert over news reporting itself. The tendency of capitalism to consolidate ownership has been balanced with increasingly visible government policies and intervention, in Europe and Australia for example (Castells, 2009), that seeks to control and regulate broadcast media as a focus for news reporting except in generally negative tones of fear, accusation and blame (Hartley, 1982). The politics of newspaper ownership in the UK is also regularly cited (Doyle, 2002) as holding significant influence on the popular opinion and political voting patterns of readers (Castells, 2009).
News, Non-news, Anti-news

Discussions of social media and the news have tended to focus on the influence and impact of two inscription opportunities; to feedback and to contribute to the narrative of a story (Edral, 2009). Both actions are generally presented as a desirable additional contribution to the traditional presentation and representation of news (Carpenter, 2010). However, we argue for the significance of a further parallel process; the emergence of non-news and anti-news as competing influences on the news reporting organisation (Figure 3).

Non-news competes for attention and comment with similar degrees of volume and presence within digital channels as news itself. If news is the presentation of significant events of relevance to the audience, non-news is represented by the reporting of the mundane aspects of life and is exemplified by microblogging through Twitter and status updates on Facebook. Non-news has the ability to distract from news and ultimately from the value creation activities of the news reporting organisation. While the activities being reported are mundane and often microscopically detailed they have bearing and relevance to an audience who has actively chosen to consume this channel through following, friending or a similar action. Microblogging in this way becomes the technical achievement that has eluded mainstream news reporting organisations - the entirely personalised, customised and contextualised news channel. The mechanism of receiving a direct tweet from a celebrity does not require the mediation of the news reporting organisation to clarify or simplify the original statement. Twitter (or one of the many application that provides Twitter feeds) also removes the need for the controlled - and owned - distribution channel of news reporting organisations.

Non-news has the ability to become news when the documented outpouring of everyday life transcends the mundane with a statement or image that has meaning amongst a wider audience. The best examples of this shift from non-news to news is the use of Twitter by ‘celebrities’ or varying degrees of notoriety. However, simple use of Twitter by a celebrity does not rise the activity from the level of the mundane. News is only achieved through microblogging when extremes are reached. For example on Twitter, Stephen Fry’s high volume of tweets and his significant number of followers, the outspoken former English Premier League footballer Joey Barton’s sometimes unintentional but often offensive rants or the referral to the last tweets of a missing or deceased person. For example, Megan Stammers’ tweets were elevated to news as part of the development of the news story in the UK of this missing schoolgirl in September 2012 as was her subsequent ‘quitting’ of the site (www.theson.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/4572714/Megan-Stammers-is-driven-off-Twitter-by-attackers.html).

News also competes for attention and consideration from the presence of anti-news. The rising popularity and use of social media has enabled home-made social satire and parody to be applauded as entertainment, as well becoming a successful business model (e.g. lolcats and icanhascheezburger), and less commonly as incisive political commentary. Popular exploration of the potential of social media to offer satire and parody has enabled specialised forms of humour to emerge that challenges news reporting organisation’s exclusive ability to present
critical commentary and self-critique. The @DaveCameroon and @Queen_UK Twitter accounts and The 6th Duke of Devonshire’s Facebook account are specific examples of innovative approaches to the creation of anti-news that fully exploit the ability of social media to craft personas with an anti-news intent.

Anti-news has the ability to become news but is always in danger of being reduced to non-news through sheer mundaneitity or longevity. For example, @Queen_UK observed late on the 26th August 2012 (during the UK’s last bank holiday weekend of 2012), “On the bank holiday gin”. However, much of anti-news’ ability to become newsworthy rests heavily on the mistaken reporting of the parody as news and highlighting the sometimes tenuous parameters that define news. The fact that this mis-reporting of anti-news as news occurs regularly further reinforces anti-news as a competitor to news reporting within digital media. Anti-news reported as news also highlights the increased pressure that news reporting organisations are under when fewer traditionally-trained or specialist journalists are working within the newsroom. The promotion of anti-news to news also emphasises the tension within the transitional news reporting organisational model (Figure 2) where the human resources for value creation in these organisations is reduced (through the reduction of journalist roles in the organisation). The consequences are ultimately damaging to the organisation’s reputation and supports the development of personal journalist brands.

The presence of anti-news and non-news represents a political and economic threat to news reporting organisations. Non-news and anti-news introduces and highlights the potential for personal and professional information overload and stresses the ability for the audience to only consume a finite quantity of media in a single day.
Hartley describes ‘news’ as being grouped around six major topics: politics, the economy, foreign affairs, domestic news, occasional stories and sport (Hartley 1982, 38-39). The impact of social media and an ability to self organise news can be seen in the shift from traditional definitions to a broadening of value in a producer/consumer context to include notions of the reporting of the mundane as well as satirical or humourous representations through social media updates. These shifting relationships from entirely discrete producers and consumers to a combination of these roles within individuals highlights the significance of the relationship between the co-creation of content and of value creation within news-reporting organisations.

**Co-creation and journalism**

Co-creation is an increasingly significant concept for business. Co-creation occurs when the customer become involved with the business in the shared creation of value (Payne et al. 2008, 83) Co-creation exists in a variety of forms determined, in part, by the type of business and the extent to which it is applied across an organisation’s activities. The potential and ability for co-creation is not consistently experienced across organisations with the extent of workflow digitisation strongly influencing where and when co-creation can be explored. The ability to co-create is also linked to parameters such as the expected consumption experience, the scale of consumption, the degree to which an organisation’s products or services are consumed over a period of time and the visibility with which the consumption occurs (Figure 4).
This complex interlinkage of issues has resulted in news reporting becoming engaged with varying interpretations of co-creation while, for example, medical treatment or supermarket items seeing little direct influence from this perspective. The significance for news reporting in moving from traditional to digital forms has also been a movement from the realm of a mass-produced consumer item to a digital artefact with the capacity to become highly specialised and customised. Acknowledging the influence of this change necessitates still clearer articulation of the distinction between news creation and news reporting and represents a significant challenge to the profession of journalism. Co-creation also introduces a distinction to be drawn between the digital news reporting organisation and self organising digital news. As with the majority of professions with significant levels of digitised workflow, questions and threats are also raised around the credentials and legitimacy of those employed by the profession. The “do-it-yourself” ability that is provided by access to digital tools of inscription and distribution mechanisms threatens the role and authority of a number of professions. This change can already be identified in the fields of higher and adult education, graphic design and musicianship. In all of these examples the ability to access the tools of the profession does not automatically equate with professional ability even if this is sometimes the popular assumption. The threat to professions that have become overly tied to traditional tools and business models is made more complex by the institutional protection provided to these professionals. This protection is synthesized in the news reporting organisation through the interchange between value creation and wage payment (Figures 1 and 2). The relationship results in skilled and knowledgeable individuals being offered security, opportunities and career progression in return for the value that is created, the profit that is produced and the capacity for the organisation to be a locus for hegemonic power. As a result, a form of negotiated tension is ever present and highlighted by individuals who rise to the height of their profession. Ultimately, as employees they are financially rewarded and enjoy a degree of fame (at least within their profession) but without any real power which ultimately remains vested with their employer.

Without the umbrella of a profession and all of its benefits, self-organising digital news, in
contrast, entirely benefits from co-creation. This model of self-organising news reporting benefits from multiple digital channels that enables anyone to publicly inscribe (Figure 5). There is a shift in the locus of hegemonic power that enables self-organising news reporting with an expanded range of potential news stories to redefine what constitute news and a relocation of authority and reputation to the social media itself. A variety of social and organisational filters are also consequently removed that do not restrict news-reporting to being only those actions, statements or events that occur in the presence or awareness of an organisation’s camera or journalist. The phone-hacking scandal that identified illegal practice and systematic invasions of privacy by mainstream UK newspapers can be explained, in part, by this observation. The practice of accessing voicemail boxes of celebrities and newsworthy individuals is one example of the many attempts by traditional news reporting organisations to look beyond the public sphere and garner private insight. Insights that appear temptingly accessible with digital technologies. These illegal and ethically questionable efforts balanced the risk of reputational damage - and a consequent loss of institutional authority that itself goes to the heart of a news-reporting organisation’s ability to create value - with the need to ‘break’ news and succeed over competitors. These arguments could be taken further to suggest that what occurred as ‘phone hacking’ was a harbinger of current practice brought about by practices of co-creation. The previously constituted separate spheres of the public and private are now blurred and made less distinct by practices such as micro-blogging. ‘Private’ (but public) Twitter statements that reveal the intimate personal thoughts of celebrities now redefine the category and scope of imagined and real indiscretions that may have been previously reported through traditional news journalism.

Self-Organising Digital News

Advertisers

Authority/Reputation

purchase

embedded in

Social Media (as source and platform)

access

inscribe to

Audience/Citizen Journalist

Figure 5: Self-organising digital news

For news reporting organisations, co-creation is a balanced choice. Exploiting the availability of multiple sources and the input of a variety of voices potentially changes the emphasis of the profession from a role of reporting and composition to that of finding and reframing. Or stated
alternatively, co-creation induces a movement in professional emphasis from traditional journalism to content management. This shift in the nature and form of reporting is not unexpected as all professions must always address continual changes in the social and technical environment and shifting definitions in the nature of their own work. Such changes were first felt in the context of digital media by professions such as typesetting and librarianship where the fundamental skill set and focus shifted with the earliest popularisation of personal computers. Co-creation significantly contributes to the range of voices employed by the news reporting organisation and represents a shift in organisational bias and preferences that determines authority as well as the relationship to the hegemonic basis of power. Traditional journalism defined the voice of the reporting and this mediation was a key basis for the authority ascribed to the news reporting organisation. Co-creation enables the celebrity who shouts loudest on Twitter to receive the greatest attention when they are reported verbatim.

Our discussion so far has focused on consideration of audience inscription and co-creation as textual. Self-organised news reporting also takes benefit from the ability of digital media to use visual sources and further shifts hegemonic authority away from traditional and transitional news reporting organisations.

Curation vs reporting

The ability to post images and videos directly to the public Web from smartphones with relatively high resolution increases the forms and frequency by which the reporting of news is visualised. Popular and accessible visual archives such as Flickr, Vine and YouTube predate the recognition of co-creation as an important force in news reporting. Further developments that benefit visual reporting techniques include the defunct Qix.com and “direct to Youtube” features on mobile phones enables video to be sent directly to the Web without any intervening processing or editing. The result is that the Web becomes a direct archive for raw visual materials accessible to news reporting organisations as required. The availability of visual materials through social media and directly from individual devices also further reinforces the shifting emphasis in the role of journalism to content gathering and management that is supported by the need for post hoc journalistic commentary. Gathering of visual materials is further facilitated by being tagged with geographical data that is accessible through systematic search (Friedland and Sommer 2010). High levels of data transparency then raises privacy issues and specifically those of personal locational privacy that further blurs the division between the realms of public and private experience (Blumberg and Eckersley 2009).

The need to gather and manage news, in many ways summarises the role of journalism in all forms, however the act of ‘journalism’ is now competing with the activities of bloggers, Tweeters and Facebookers with a degree of similarity that makes one action almost indistinguishable from another. These competing actors do not necessarily claim that they are undertaking journalism but the plethora of competing voices that they create significantly blurs the boundaries of what is or what is not journalism.

The popular preference for the visual - exemplified by visual blogs on platforms such as Tumblr
and Wordpress further problematises the boundaries of journalism with the capability for images to be digitally altered. The result is the creation of a tension between the assumed evidential aspects of an image and the uncertainty regarding its authenticity. The Examiner (www.examiner.com/article/media-caught-manipulating-image) reported an example from the Syrian civil conflict in July 2012 and cites the reasons for the use of images with questionable provenance as the pressure on traditional news-reporting organisation to compete with citizen journalism because the latter is seen as, significantly for this discussion, more trustworthy and reliable. With the ability to ‘photoshop’ an image traditional news reporting organisations can draw upon their existing resources of imagebanks and feed services such as Reuters to present any image required to fit a story without having to have a representative physically present. The potential for this practice to become increasingly widespread is revealed through a 2011 video of what Fox News’ claimed to be part of their report of Russian election riots (www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FwYQLKK98). Upon closer examination the videos were shown to be riots from Greece that had been fuelled for entirely different reasons. The increasing regularity with which these errors of reporting and judgement are revealed is almost entirely due to the presence and pressure of self-organised news reporting and is a hallmark of its inherent tension with traditional models of news reporting. Prior to the widespread availability of social media the mechanisms for the critical examination of poor or questionable news reporting activity was confined to relatively low circulation and often privately funded magazines, with arguably the notable exception being Private Eye in the UK. The increased frequency with which manipulated or incorrect images are identified is itself a reflection of the wide geographic distribution of individuals with sufficient knowledge and access to social media who can identify these errors. Any misreporting of a conflict in Africa by a European news agency can receive immediate rebuttal from those involved - a capability only seen rarely prior to the widespread adoption of social media channels by mainstream media. Comments, rebuttals, critiques and the reporting of errors are all actions that extend the news conversation and take the privilege and power of the ‘last word’ away from the news reporting organisation. Each of these critical actions then has a consequence for the authority of the news reporting organisation and the controlled medium they employ, have enjoyed and have exploited. For the traditional news reporting organisations the source and capability for value creation is founded upon the construction of the organisation as an authoritative voice - with this effaced the ability to create value is compromised. Significantly too many errors and rebuttals are not reported as news but rather are taken up by individuals, in the terms that we have employed here, as anti-news.

This further complexity reveals that the tension and discussion is not simply one of a binary relationship that positions citizen journalism against traditional media outlets. The continuum of news reporting is multi-dimensional and extends to incorporate traditional media outlets, digital news reporting organisations and citizen journalists acting individually or collectively.

**Models for funding**

The result of the challenge to traditional news-reporting organisations brought by self organised news reporting activity coupled with the traditional news reporting organisations’ own erosion of their authority through the reduction of professional journalists creating value and, arguably,
poor journalistic practice has direct consequences upon the organisational ability to create value and generate sales. Poynter’s blog summarises the issue, “For every $US 25 lost in print advertising only $US 1 is recovered as a digitally based ad.” (www.poynter.org/latest-news/business-news/the-biz-blog/187577/newspapers-print-ad-losses-are-larger-than-digital-ad-gains-by-a-ratio-of-25-to-1). The move to social media for news reporting is not just a process of changing to a new medium but should be regarded as a systemic change in the form and nature of news reporting. This change problematises the foundational business model for traditional news reporting (Figure 1) and its ability to create value.

The individual inclination to pay is similarly reduced with the embedded attitude towards freeness and access that the underlying philosophy of the Web engenders. This has the consequence that the presentation of pay walls - used as an alternative source of revenue for print newspapers’ online presence - involves a calculation of value by the potential subscriber in which they must balance the potential authority and legitimacy of the content presented by a specific news brand against the real likelihood that an equivalent story or set of news reports will be freely available elsewhere. In this way the previous practices of news-gathering organisations actively works against business models built for digital media. The concepts of syndication and newsfeeds from aggregation services relies on a traditional news reporting perspective in which each organisation works within specific, discrete and relatively well defined geographic territories. Reading a newspaper report from New Zealand would previously have required that the story was of sufficient merit to a UK audience to appear in that territory (through a traditional news reporting organisation’s output). The intermediary and editorial role is no longer required to read the article although the editorial decision regarding the worth of the story may itself still have value. The authority of one news reporting organisation in relation to another territory is similarly questionable in comparison to a locally based organisation that potentially offers its content freely. Reading news stories from New Zealand is not determined by the authority or reputation of the news reporting organisation but instead largely by criteria such as findability, search engine optimisation and keyword matches. In the same manner the value produced by aggregation of traditional news reporting is minimised as increased findability reduces each story to a discrete entity accessible through a specific search engine query. Aggregation then becomes reduced to a menu of relevant links to other stories connected through a programmatic and automated identification of similarity. The individual labour of retrieving multiple news sources is reduced to a set of bookmarks and, for more sophisticated users, a personal feed aggregator. Both actions undertake and complete a task that could formerly only be reasonably undertaken in a newsroom.

The challenge of becoming a digital news reporting organisation centres on retaining the ability to create value while continuing to generate income through some form of sales (Figure 6). While not generally identified as a news reporting organisation the example of the humour magazine and website Cracked is instructive. As a specific niche publication and often regarded as a ‘rip-off’ to the better known Mad Magazine the need to evolve was forced upon Cracked earlier than more general newspapers and magazines. Declining sales coupled with management and organisational change had an impact with the ultimate result that the print magazine is now no longer produced. Cracked.com, however, continues with a different editorial
policy than its former print parent. Three key observations can be made of Cracked.com that reveals the potential for digital news reporting organisations. As a magazine aimed at a youth market the style of communication reflects changing preferences and tastes. Cracked.com effectively speaks to a generation who has grown up with ubiquitous computing and text communication in terms that they understand. The website has made the ‘list of’ its defining feature to the extent that all of its main articles are presented in this format. The result are articles such as “7 Creepy Video Game Easter Eggs You Wish You’d Never Found” and “6 Insane Discoveries That Science Can’t Explain” and in a moment of possibly ironic self-reflection, “The 25 Most Popular Cracked Articles of 2011”.

The magazine links into key concepts of co-creation by, for example, embedding a Facebook stream that points to more lists created by readers and takes co-creation to the logical conclusion by encouraging writers to contribute to Cracked.com. By fully engaging in social media Cracked.com is also represented through other channels such as Stumbleupon where individual feature lists are promoted by readers.

Significantly, and in contrast to the former print version, Cracked.com is free to access. There are no subscriptions and the magazine’s income is derived entirely from advertising.

**The Digital News Reporting Organisation**

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 6: The Digital News Reporting Organisation*

These three observations from Cracked.com mirror the relationships between journalists, audience and advertisers for the digital news reporting organisations (Figure 6). Value is being
created through the synthesis of sources from the web and elsewhere and in return Cracked.com's writers are being paid (www.cracked.com/write-for-cracked/). The authority and reputation of Cracked.com is built upon a clearly defined and tightly focused style of representing content through lists. The audience access the magazine freely and advertisers are prepared to pay for access to this large audience base that Alexa's consistently calculates to be between the 800th and 1000th most visited website in the world (www.alexa.com/siteinfo/cracked.com). While these changes were forced upon Cracked in order to ensure its continuity the pressures experienced by the humour magazine through the decade from the year 2000 are the same pressures now being experienced by all news reporting organisations. The potentially radical change experienced at Cracked may appear unpalatable to newspapers with established traditions but this reluctance should only be founded on the understanding of their 'tradition' as the consolidation and representation of value. However, if this perceived tradition does not express contemporary value its benefits may be illusory and ultimately represent significant barriers to change.

Conclusions

This paper identifies the ways in which news reporting organisations have previously and can potentially continue to create value in light of the challenges brought by social media technologies. We have argued that with the popularising of digital channels and user generated content the practices of traditional news reporting organisations are being threatened. This threat comes from the direct challenge of social media to the process of value creation in these traditional business models. The result is an increasing separation news - in its broadest sense - from the news reporting organisations. Traditional news organisations not only reported and presented the news but also contributed significantly to what was defined as news but without direct control over popular (social) media channels this monopoly on 'news' is lost.

To appreciate the impact of the change to news organisations it is important to recognise the significance of the changing media landscape and the increasing separation of news from news reporting organisations. These shifts have meant that traditional news organisations no longer have exclusive collective control over the authoritative reporting and presentation of news. Through the shifting importance of audience-created and non-traditional content - what we have describe as 'non-news' and 'anti-news' - a disruption to traditional value creation in news reporting has occurred.

We have identified the importance of alternative forms of 'voices' in the form of non-news and anti-news as newly competing influences on the news reporting organisation. This often user-generated reporting has not previously been regarded as competition to the value creation capabilities of news reporting organisations. But in this light it is worth considering the dual tendency of social media to influence and impact. Abilities that are generally presented as a desirable additional contribution to the traditional presentation and representation of news. However, simultaneously, social media removes the need for the controlled - and owned - distribution channel of news reporting organisations.
The documentation of a model for the digital news reporting organisation (Figure 6) shows the complexity brought by the existence of writerly audiences is not simply a binary relationship that positions citizen journalism against traditional news reporting organisations. The significance for news reporting in moving from traditional to digital forms has also been movement away from a mass-produced consumer item to a digital artefact with the capacity to be highly specialised and customised.

The challenge in becoming a digital news reporting organisation remains centred on the ability to create value in order to generate income. For the news reporting organisation - in whatever form it takes - the ability to create value remains firmly anchored in its ability to efficiently synthesise diverse sources of complex data and to construct legitimacy and authority around the brand. How this value creation is achieved, however, will increasingly look very different from the age of Victorian newspapers or the television news broadcasts of the mid-Twentieth Century.

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