

**Spring 2010
Industry Study**

Final Report
News Media Industry



The Industrial College of the Armed Forces
National Defense University
Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. 20319-5062

NEWS MEDIA 2010

ABSTRACT: The economic landscape has changed drastically for the news media industry. We gleaned two truths: the disruptive technological shift causing the upheaval is just beginning; and, no one has devised a business model to cope with the new reality. We focused on three facets: First, a strategic view of the industry. Second, the issue of resources, the central challenge faced by the industry. Third, to understand the national security implications of the changes in the news. News organizations that improve content should prosper in this information age. They just have to remember the business they are in: The information business.

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 Mr. Michael Lawrence, National Security Agency, Faculty
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PLACES VISITED

Domestic:

ABC News, NY, NY
 Al Jazeera, Washington Bureau, Washington, DC
 American Press Institute, Reston, VA
 Associated Press, Washington, DC
 Bloomberg News, NY, NY
 CBS Radio Network, NY, NY
 C-SPAN, Washington, DC
 City University of New York, NY, NY
 The Colbert Report, NY, NY
 The Daily Show, NY, NY
 Director of National Intelligence, Washington, DC
 Discovery Communications, Silver Spring, MD
 Federal Communications Commission, Washington, DC
 Fox News/News Corp, NY, NY
 Freedom Forum/Newseum, Washington, DC
 Gannett Company, Inc., Washington, DC
 The New York Times, Washington, DC and NY, NY
 Nielsen Corporation, Tampa, FL
 Office of the Secretary of Defense/Public Affairs, Washington, DC
 Office of the Speaker of the House, US Congress, Washington, DC
 PBS NewsHour, Arlington, VA
 Poynter Institute, St. Petersburg, FL
 Project for Excellence in Journalism, Washington, DC
 Voice of America, Washington, DC
 Washington Post, Washington, DC
 WTOP Radio, Washington, DC
 smallwarsjournal.com, Washington, DC
 St. Petersburg Times, St. Petersburg, FL

International:

AKP (Justice and Development Party), Istanbul, Turkey
 Hurriyet Daily News, Istanbul, Turkey
 Ihlas News Agency, Istanbul, Turkey
 KONDA, Istanbul, Turkey
 NTV, Istanbul, Turkey
 Samanyolu TV, Istanbul, Turkey
 Show TV, Istanbul, Turkey
 Taraf Newspaper, Istanbul, Turkey
 Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, Istanbul, Turkey
 U.S. Consulate General, Istanbul, Turkey
 Zaman, Istanbul, Turkey

Al-Sharq al-Awsat, London, England
Jane's Information Group, London, England
SKY News, London, England
The BBC World Service, London, England
The Economist, London, England
The Financial Times, London, England
The Guardian, London, England
Thomson Reuters, London, England
U.S. Embassy, London, England



ICAF

INTRODUCTION

“How bad is it? One journalist reports that the independent contractors that deliver the newspapers complain that the Monday edition of the paper does not have enough throw-weight to get it up to the porch.”

*State of the News Media 2010
Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism*

As the United States creeps out of the deepest economic downturn since the 1930s, the news media industry understands that the economic landscape that existed just a decade ago has changed irrevocably and that even with an economic recovery of indeterminate strength in the offing, there are no assurances that the industry will also find its way into the black.

The search for viable business models continues and there is no one path. Non-profit? Web only? Some, with dramatic fanfare, have declared that we are nearing the end of the “dead tree” editions of newspapers. In an age when the thirst for information seems greater than ever and Americans are spending more than ever to obtain information, the adage that if there is a demand for a product you should be able to make money from it is being severely tested. The countervailing force is that in the age of the Internet we are also in the age of “free” and free does not pay the bills.

The numbers are stark. In 2009, newspaper ad revenue fell 26 percent, including online revenue, making the cumulative drop over the past three years 43 percent. Local TV revenue fell 22 percent, radio 22 percent, magazines 17 percent, network TV 8 percent, and even online revenue fell 5 percent. Only cable news did not suffer a revenue decline because of its subscription revenue. The Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Poynter Institute estimate that American newspapers have lost \$1.6 billion in annual reporting capacity since 2000, or about 30 percent, and they predicted more cuts in 2010. In addition to the declining ad revenue, the long steady decline in newspaper print circulation continues, and not many expect those under 25 to ever subscribe to a newspaper printed on paper. However, newspapers bravely argue that the combination of print and online readers yields the highest number of readers ever. Overall in the U.S., 142 daily and weekly newspapers ceased to exist in 2009, triple the number of the previous year.¹

As students in the News Media Industry Study at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, we have had the opportunity to look at the industry in depth and to meet with industry leaders as well as some of the quickest minds trying to make sense of the changes that have rocked the industry. As befitting the orientation of ICAF, we have paid special attention to three aspects of these issues: First, to take a strategic view of the industry and try to gain some understanding from the 10,000-foot level. Second, to focus on the issue of resources, which is most certainly the central challenge faced by the industry today. Third, to understand the national security implications of the changes in the news media – from the shuttering of foreign bureaus to the battle of ideas that is one of the fundamental challenges in our struggle against terrorism.

Even defining the industry is a troublesome proposition. In the early 1980s, the press secretary for President Reagan said that he could reach more than 80 percent of Americans by talking to just a dozen news outlets – three major TV networks, two wire services, three national news magazines, and a few key daily newspapers such as the American paper of record *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal*. What have been called “legacy media” are still vitally important but it is clear that the news media industry has become more fragmented because of cable TV but primarily because of the Internet. In addition, it does not matter if a media outlet is an industry leader. For example, staffing at *Time* and *Newsweek* are down 47 percent since 1983, and *Newsweek* is now up for sale and its survival is in doubt.² The Internet does not just impact newspapers, but television, radio and wire services. The Internet has created such low barriers to entry, that virtually anyone can offer a journalistic product in the “blogosphere”.

One of our favorite expressions from our study is the “pajamahadin” to describe the lone commentator in slippers and bath robe pontificating from his/her kitchen table. In reality, the majority of the most successful, influential, and most-read blogs come from legacy media. However, this explosion of new media entities makes it increasingly hard to define the media in any concrete manner. Thousands of new online sites are blossoming, but most offer opinion and commentary as opposed to factual reporting or well-researched and reasoned analysis. As such, most of the traditional media still dominate – newspapers, TV, radio, wire services, and now Internet – but it is certainly clear that new forms, platforms, and vehicles are changing news delivery and news consumption habits. Think of the Global Post,³ which has brought together a group of foreign correspondents who cover stories in cooperation with a variety of media outlets, or Pro Publica,⁴ which relies on grants to fund investigative reporting that is not for any one particular media outlet.

The two central truths that we have gleaned from our studies are that the disruptive technological shift that has caused the upheaval in the industry is really just beginning and, second, that no one that we met with – when they were painfully honest – could come up with a business model that would replace the long-standing model dominated by advertising. While we will look at all segments of the media in this paper, there will be an emphasis on the situation for newspapers. There are two reasons: First, newspapers are the dominant segment of the news media. Some 90 percent of all journalists work in newspaper newsrooms and produce the vast amount of enterprise journalism.⁵ Even TV stations with smaller newsrooms depend on newspapers to help them cover the news and the blogosphere would have little to comment on if not for the reporting done by newspapers. Second, newspapers have been hit harder than other media by the changes in the industry.

This paper will emphasize the dominant trends that we have identified in our studies that have and will continue to have a profound effect on the industry. The best place to begin is a look at the disruptive technologies that represent the central trend in this narrative.

DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

“He would plug in his foolscap-sized Newspad into the ship’s information circuit and scan the latest reports from Earth...”

Floyd sometimes wondered if the Newspad and the fantastic technology behind it was the last word in man's quest for perfect communications. Here he was, far out in space...yet in a few milliseconds he could see the headlines of any newspaper he pleased...one could spend an entire lifetime doing nothing but absorbing the ever-changing flow of information from the news satellites."

Arthur C. Clarke: "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968)

We are living in an age of information enabled by the Worldwide Web and a growing number of technological platforms. It was almost shocking to hear one of our interlocutors suggest that email is now passé when one can text or use social media like Facebook or RSS feeds. The explosion of information on the web is a great enabler for the news media and a great challenge on several levels – from the management of this information to finding ways to monetize this information flow. In the past year, the web has become the major news source for Americans, passing television.⁶ Consider for a moment the scoop by *Washington Post* investigative journalist Bob Woodward of the report by General Stanley McChrystal concerning the situation in Afghanistan and the proposed way forward. In the traditional print edition of the *Post* was a story outlining the main points in the report. However, on the *Post's* web site readers could access that story as well as the entire redacted 76-page report, links to maps of Afghanistan, earlier related stories, and background information.

Yet the ads in the print edition brought in far more revenue, based on total circulation, than did the ads that a reader may encounter in going to the same story on the web edition because the charge for those ads is based on the actual number of “clicks” by readers. One survey showed that 77 percent of online readers either never or hardly ever clicked on an online ad. Less than five percent of online readers said they clicked on ads frequently. While part of the economic challenges faced by the news media stem from the overall economic downturn, the fundamental problem is that advertising dollars are flowing from traditional media to other forms of reaching customers. Best Buy might continue to include a printed advertising supplement in the Sunday paper, but it now has its own web site where consumers go directly to find out what is on sale and a detailed description of products.

This shift in advertising spending has hurt newspapers, magazines, television and radio, but it has been particularly acute for newspapers. It is not just that newspapers were particularly dependent on ad revenue – the traditional model has been 80 percent revenue from ads and just 20 percent from subscriptions and street sales – but the Internet has meant the end of newspapers' virtual monopoly for several kinds of advertising revenue. Web sites such as Craig'sList have greatly diminished classified advertising revenue. Newspapers could have prevented this situation by forming a consortium to put classified ads on line and share information, but that did not happen. As a result, classified ad revenues have fallen from a high of \$20 billion nationally in 2000 to less than \$7 billion a decade later.⁷ Now, newspapers are fighting the movement by state and local governments to place legal ads on the web – at a significantly lower cost for taxpayers – as opposed to placing them in newspapers.

In addition, newspapers began putting their content on the Internet at the dawn of the Internet age and conditioned their readers to receiving this content for free. Television and radio

stations have done much the same. A few newspapers erected paywalls from the beginning and have been able to maintain them, but newspaper attempts to erect paywalls after the fact have largely failed. As this is written, several major newspapers – *The New York Times*, for example, and Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp. papers – are poised to try again to erect certain kinds of paywalls, such as a metered system that would allow access to some basic content but charge for volume or premium content.⁸ Experience suggests that up to this point that papers will make more money by opening up all their content for free and selling ads than by erecting barriers and collecting subscriptions.⁹ The coming year will be crucial as these experiments unfold.

If the challenge of the Internet were not enough, a new challenge has appeared with the arrival of increasingly capable “smart phones” and, now, digital readers. Apple’s iPhone has been joined by a number of phones that can access data and provide a screen of adequate size to read a short basic news story. Pew’s Project for Excellence in Journalism’s “State of the Media 2010” report found that 26 percent of Americans accessed news from their mobile devices in 2009 and that is bound to accelerate.¹⁰ The launch of the iPad along with a host of other digital readers implies that consumers can enjoy many of the qualities of a traditional newspaper – its portability in a small, light package with its wide variety of news (politics, sports, lifestyle) with all the advantages of Internet-based news. One of the major newspapers we visited reported that the diminished ad revenue earned from its print edition now equals the amount of money it costs to print and distribute the product.¹¹ Clearly there will be a future tipping point.

Television is not immune to the challenge of the Internet, first because a younger generation is watching television on their laptops and because the posting of videos can be done by anyone, particularly newsmakers, thus bypassing traditional TV stations. Even newspapers are leveraging the Internet to encroach on the television audience. The *Chattanooga (Tennessee) Times Free Press* is producing and streaming a 15-minute newscast from its newsroom at 4:45 p.m. to pre-empt the 5:00 p.m. local TV news, catching people before they leave their offices.¹² Thomson-Reuters reports that subscriptions for TV footage are growing, primarily from traditional print publications, because they need to make their web sites more attractive and one way to do that is by adding video.¹³

Newspapers and other media know that the use of mobile devices used to access the news present yet another opportunity to monetize their product. It is not that simple. Stories now need to be edited for the print edition, the web edition, and now differently for the mobile edition putting more pressure on newsrooms. However, if this opportunity is missed, the news media will have no one to blame but themselves.

Social Media

“If the information is important, it will find me...”

Anonymous U.S. college student

Three years ago, the most popular social media site was MySpace. That has now been eclipsed by Facebook, which ambitiously has sought many different ways to connect people.¹⁴ It even has its own foreign policy experiment, trying to bring together Israelis and Palestinians or Pakistanis and Indians. Also this year, Twitter burst upon the scene and, in the parlance of the

Internet, has gone “viral”. The small 140-character bursts of comments – often mundane and anything but informative – were mocked by the cartoon strip *Doonsbury* as journalist Roland Hedley became consumed with the Twitter platform. Yet when Iranian protestors started to communicate with the outside world via Twitter followed by Haitian earthquake victims, no one laughed.

What media are finding is these social media are not only another vehicle for transmitting information, but also a way of spreading their content. When a celebrity notes in a Twitter message they have read a particular blog or viewed a particular video it can drive traffic in greater numbers than an old-fashioned promotional ad. This dovetails with the concept advanced by Google executives that the individual story is now the basic unit of news, not a brand such as a particular newspaper or TV or radio news program.¹⁵

The news industry has had to try to figure out how to use these new social media, understanding that their explosive growth has created pools of potential news consumers. They are being compelled to think differently about their products. Instead of the broad sweep of a newscast or newspaper, social media concentrate on narrower topics, but in greater depth. In like manner, everything from commercial firms to U.S. government departments have tried to figure out how to use social media to communicate with all the readers/viewers/listeners who use these sites on a regular basis. A good example is the Department of Defense. Working with social media networks is a little like exploring the American Wild West for the first time. It is an adventure, unpredictable, and sometimes hostile. There are few laws or restrictions and people often rely on family and friends to guide them. Needless to say, U.S. government officials, particularly at the Department of Defense, have not always been comfortable with social media.¹⁶ The concerns are real. Social media are portals that open a network to outsiders and cyber vulnerabilities. The other danger is that the message will become muddled in the cacophony of voices – thousands of DOD personnel now operate Facebook pages, “Tweet” or post videos on YouTube – and trying to control all of those is virtually impossible. Initial attempts by the U.S. Army to compel personnel to “clear” everything have had to be loosened.

Despite these difficulties, DOD has come to see social media as a huge strategic asset. They understand that “participants are not necessarily networking or looking to meet new people. Instead they are primarily communicating with people who are part of their extended social network.”¹⁷ That engenders trust and that is a valuable asset in trying to communicate with targeted audiences. As communicators learn more sophisticated online techniques, they will be able to initiate dialogues and deliver pinpoint messaging to strategically selected audiences avoiding the loss of time and effort that comes with mass delivery. This is just as true for the news media as it is for government departments.

Social media emphasize the phenomenon that news is increasingly an interactive “conversation” between the journalist and the audience or among a variety of individuals who contribute bits and pieces to the overall story as well as commentary. This further accentuates the move from a news organization as the most important news unit to the individual story as the primary unit of news. Legacy media are still vitally important, but in the online world readers search for information about individual stories as opposed to seeking a particular news site with a well established “brand.” This situation has been further exacerbated by the phenomenon of

news aggregators, such as Google News, and the love-hate relationship that has developed between content providers and aggregators.¹⁸

Often referred to as “frenemies,” aggregators argue that they drive traffic to legacy media sites because they only offer a headline and perhaps the first sentence or two of a story – which they regard as fair use – and then a link to the entire story and the news entity that produced the story. However, content providers argue that the aggregator’s site also sells advertising and they do not share in this revenue. Moreover, one study shows that 44 percent of visitors to Google News just skim the headlines, but never click to a link to visit the site of the original story. Still, legacy media continue to dominate. Nielsen has identified more than 4,600 news and information web sites and found that the top seven percent attract more than 80 percent of the traffic, and that legacy media dominate the top sites. Still, A.C. Nielsen Company found that of the top six sites – Yahoo, MSNBC, AOL, CNN, NYTimes, and Google – three are aggregation sites.¹⁹

WHAT BUSINESS ARE YOU IN?

“In times of change learners will inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to work in a world that no longer exists.”
Eric Hoffer, American social writer and philosopher (1902-1983)

One of the most striking statements we heard is that we might not always need newspapers, but that we will always need newsrooms. This cannot be comforting for owners of newspapers – which are overwhelmingly owned by chains. Indeed, there is one line of argument that newspapers have created a significant portion of their own problems by becoming large chains that are increasingly detached from their readers and dependent on Wall Street financing – and the inevitable demand for short-term profits – rather than remaining family-owned firms rooted in their communities with business plans designed for the long haul. Several of the most prominent newspaper bankruptcies in the past year – The *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and *Chicago Tribune* Company – occurred because of an inability to service their debt loads.²⁰

A number of the analysts we encountered suggested that if you think you are in the newspaper business or the TV news business you are not thinking properly about your enterprise. They argued that news executives have to understand that they are in the information business and that they are trying to connect their clients to a variety of information, particularly commercial information that helps them meet their needs and solve their problems. Local TV news might have help lines and units that sort through issues with governments and commercial firms, but newspapers have lists of subscribers and a great deal of information about their readers that can be of significant value to businesses and the online connection between the media and readers/viewers allows even more information to be collected, though there will be limits as the collection of this data will trigger push-back from privacy advocates.

News organizations are being compelled to think anew about the value that they supply to their customers – both consumers of news and commercial businesses seeking customers. At Thomson-Reuters, our hosts referred to themselves as “professional information organizers.” In more prosperous times, revenue from big advertisers – car dealers/companies, real estate firms,

and department store chains – flowed easily to print and broadcast media, but the auto industry stood on the precipice of bankruptcy, the housing market cratered, and department store chains have consolidated, reducing regular sources of income.²¹ As newsrooms have been pared back, a number of local governmental entities are no longer covered and, as the late Texas commentator Molly Ivins once observed: “I don’t so much mind that newspapers are dying – its watching them commit suicide that pisses me off.”²² And it is not just the local library boards that go uncovered. From the foreign bureaus once operated by large media organizations to the Washington bureaus once common to even medium-sized dailies, one after another they have been shuttered.²³

Into this void some new news entities have formed, but as Clay Shirky of New York University has observed, in this process of creative destruction, the old stuff is being destroyed faster than the new stuff can be created.²⁴ Consider the *Voice of San Diego*, a web-based news organization that concentrates on local news in San Diego and that has done award-winning investigative journalism. Its business model is closer to National Public Radio as *Voice of San Diego* relies on a mix of foundation grants, wealthy donors, smaller contributions and some online advertising. It has been the model for a number of other online journalism experiments from Seattle to Minneapolis to Chicago. Hailed by some as the future of journalism, others wonder if this model is sustainable or if the model will support professional journalists and give them a sufficient wage that allows them to develop the sources and expertise to provide the kind of reporting and analysis that really makes a difference for their readers/viewers/listeners.²⁵

In finding ways to add content and cover the local news that is going uncovered, news organizations are exploring “hyper-local” models that rely more on stringers and so-called “citizen journalists” to find and cover news at the grassroots level. Some of these journalists are not professionally trained, but are overseen by professional journalists. This pro-am model gives news organizations more reach and more content. The newspaper chain Scripps is increasing its stringer budget substantially in the coming year to try to stretch its newsroom payrolls. In like manner, news organizations are going after smaller businesses that never would have been able to afford certain kinds of ads. The combination of segmented editions, online editions, and free local papers such as the *Gazette* distributed by the Washington Post Company in Montgomery County, Maryland, has allowed newspapers to work with a new group of customers.

Our Industry Study team could not help but notice that even a paper like the *Post*, with its dominant position in the Washington, D.C. designated market area and strong national web presence (its web site ranks ninth nationally) still would have lost money in 2009 except for its ownership of Kaplan Educational Services. In like manner, Scripps found that the most profitable parts of its business were the syndication of a number of cartoon strips and features dominated by *Peanuts*, with all the ancillary revenue that flows from the myriad of products connected to that beloved cartoon strip, as well as its ownership of web sites such as *Cars.com*.²⁶ Newspapers are also finding other ways to leverage existing capabilities. The *Arizona Republic* has offered its distribution system to other publications – even those with which it competes – in order to generate more revenue.²⁷ Those distribution systems might become more important as the U.S. Postal Service curtails Saturday delivery to save money. One magazine (although it calls itself a “newspaper”) *The Economist* is experimenting with hand delivery in the U.S. to assure that its readers will have the latest editions in their hands for the weekend when

studies show that their readers have the most time to read the magazine. News organizations, in rethinking their models, will be looking at businesses that will create synergies and allow them to offer their customers new services that can be monetized.

There is one other aspect of the question “what business are you in?” that has been apparent in our study, particularly in the medium of cable TV news and that is the political orientation of a news organization. Certainly, there is a long history of partisanship in American news organizations – primarily newspapers – going back to the founding of our country. In the last 50 years news organizations were increasingly owned by corporations that sought to portray themselves as more neutral in order to maximize eyeballs. Yet, the rise of cable channels such as *Fox News* and *MSNBC* and by a myriad of partisan web sites – the *Drudge Report* on the right and the *Huffington Post* and *Daily Kos* on the left, for example – not to mention incendiary talk radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh have injected some strong partisanship into the journalistic stew. The point should not be over-stressed. Bill O’Reilly, the most popular of *Fox News*’ evening commentators, reaches a nightly audience of about three million viewers. In contrast, Katie Couric, in third place among major network news anchors, reaches double that number.²⁸ Still, the rise of these more partisan sources of news and information have fed the impression among the public that the news media is biased in one direction or another. That goes to the heart of the relationship between the news consumer and the news organization and raises the question whether consumers of news are following news sources that are unbiased and balanced or news sources that agree with and validate their own points of view.

All of these issues figure into the planning exercise that today’s news media organizations need to go through in constructing some kind of revenue model that will acknowledge the loss of advertising revenue is permanent and higher subscription revenue along side of new sources must be found.

THE NEW REVENUE MODELS

“Flat is the new up.”

Rob Flynn, Vice President, Marketing & Communications, MacNeil/Lehrer Productions

With the important exception of cable television news, there are three key truths about current media revenue models: The old model, if not dead, is mortally wounded. There is no clear new model. There are many new ideas, but these ideas are inevitably followed by the word “but”...as in, more than 60 percent of American adults access news online, BUT would move to another news site if there was a charge.²⁹ Even cable TV news, which has turned a profit and seen a growing audience includes an important “but” as was alluded to earlier. Cable’s combination of advertising revenue and subscription fees has allowed it to remain fiscally healthy, even in the face of the economic downturn, but this growth is driven by channels that present news and information through an ideological prism and there is a question if a cable television news channel can prosper if it tries to actually be “fair and balanced.”

Because of the fragmentation of the industry, even the three major television networks’ news programs have seen a steady decline in audience. NBC has been able to weather this

downturn better than the other two networks because it did not hesitate to move to a multimedia platform that includes cable channels and a robust web site. ABC and CBS are moving in this direction, but new challenges, brought on by disruptive technological change, continue, including the streaming of video online, mobile television, and other media entering the realm of video because of the lower barriers to entry.

Once again, however, it is print journalism that faces the greatest challenges in finding a viable revenue model. The 80/20 advertising/subscription ratio of the past will not return. Something more akin to 60/25/15 with revenue coming from new sources such as event marketing is probably more realistic. Even as online audiences grow, raising subscription revenue will be extremely hard because consumers have been conditioned to expect information on the Internet free and advertising revenue online remains so low. Newspapers still get 90 percent of their ad revenue from print versus online, even with a strong online presence. City University of New York professor Jeff Jarvis has argued that it is the very nature of the Internet that information should be free and not caged behind paywalls.³⁰ And yet...

The *Wall Street Journal* has successfully kept all its content behind a paywall and charges online subscribers \$79 a year. One can argue the *Journal* is a special case because of the financial information it supplies, the character of its readership, and its national reach. Successful full and partial paywalls at the *Financial Times* and *Consumer Reports* fall into similar categories, but there are examples of more pedestrian newspapers that have successfully maintained paywalls. The *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* has always maintained a paywall primarily to protect its print edition. *Democrat-Gazette* publisher Walter Hussman was once seen as a crank, but now is seen as a visionary by many.³¹ Led by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. and major newspapers such as the *New York Times*, a number of newspapers will try again this year to institute a paywall and the industry will be watching carefully and holding its breath.³² Moving in this direction would be more effective if newspapers acted in concert, but that raises anti-trust issues that will be addressed again later.

Paywalls can take a number of forms. Time Magazine Publisher Walter Issacson argued for an "iTunes" model where consumers would make a micro payment for each story that they consumed.³³ If the story truly is the new unit of journalism – as opposed to the brand of the newspaper, magazine or TV station – then this makes some sense. But news is not like songs. When a story breaks, consumers will return to the web time and again looking for the latest update and we believe there would be resistance to being nickled and dimed to death. There would seem to be more of an opportunity to do this with stories accessed on mobile devices and some journalistic entities have charged for their "app" but there is no consensus yet on how to charge for content from these mobile devices.

There are a few who suggest that print should be able to adopt the same model that has made the cable industry so healthy. When one pays their cable television bill, the lion's share goes directly to cable channels. ESPN gains the most, with more than \$4.00 per cable subscriber per month, although the average channel gets just over 20 cents per subscriber³⁴ and CSPAN, the public affairs cable channel family created by the cable industry, gets just six cents per subscriber, but that raises more than \$60 million a year in revenue, which is enough for CSPAN to maintain three cable channels, a radio station, a web site, and a staff of about 270.³⁵ It is true

that CSPAN has low production values – often a single camera in the chamber of the House of Representatives – but one of the phenomena of our information age is that the news consumer is being conditioned to accept lower production values and a product that is less polished as long as it gets to the consumer fast and is accurate.

For print entities, a similar fee could be enacted through Internet Service Providers or ISPs and this has been considered. A \$5.00 charge each month per cable subscriber could raise \$6 billion a year nationally. The question would be how to distribute the money and, as such, the idea remains hypothetical at this point. In 2008, Clickshare Service Corp. received a patent on a system for managing information transactions on the web and the company, which has been serving newspaper and other clients for more than a decade, believes it can implement a service in which consumers have an account at one service – such as a news, cable or ISP site – and can be periodically billed for access to a plethora of other affiliated content sites.³⁶

In the near term, news organizations are doing a number of things to improve their web sites that begin with fully integrating the sites into their print newsrooms, as the *Washington Post* has done in the past year.³⁷ News organizations are also trying to achieve more “stickiness” or getting the news consumer to spend more time online once they get to a news site. One research finding is that the younger generation tends to seek out news through search first – as opposed to going to a favorite news site – seeking news about a particular topic. That is why search advertising is projected to grow modestly this year. Still, there is some indication that even in the online world that there is a preference for the content to be edited and organized given the popularity of the general interest news sites over niche sites.

Some believe that news is a public good that should enjoy non-profit status and Senator Ben Cardin’s “Newspaper Revitalization Act” seeks to make that easier as well as a hybrid L3C or Low-Profit Limited Liability Corporation model.³⁸ This has several advantages over non-profit models, including the ability to editorially endorse political candidates. A number of states are instituting this model. However, at the federal level, Cardin’s bill is stalled and, truth be told, the industry has been wary of government involvement and there is little consensus that his bill would actually help. Still, the non-profit model exists – think of the *St. Petersburg Times* owned by the Poynter Institute. The *Baltimore Sun*, its newsroom decimated by cuts over the past several years, is exploring this option.

Mr. Murdoch is also leading the fight to obtain more revenue from the content that is produced by newspaper and aggregated by companies such as Google and Yahoo. Yahoo and the Associated Press have a financial arrangement, but newspapers generally are not sharing in the revenues generated by the aggregation sites and Murdoch – along with many other newspaper owners – think they should.³⁹ A software program being developed which can track stories with an unseen watermark in the computer code to insure the content is not stolen and that the originators do receive some revenue.

Some newspapers have chosen to reduce the number of days that they print, eliminating those days that are least profitable in terms of advertising and allowing their web sites to carry the breaking news. This has happened in the economically depressed Detroit market. However, many of the publishers we spoke with were loath to go this route: “Don’t give them a chance to

see that they can do without you” was the response we heard from these newspaper owners and editors. Newspapers also recognize that in reducing staffs they are reducing the amount of original content that they are producing and that this can quickly become counterproductive. As this recovery inches forward, some papers – the *Dallas Morning News*, for one – have started to invest in their newsrooms again.⁴⁰ Other papers have sought to stretch staff dollars by expanding the pro-am model and using more “citizen journalists” to cover local news. This “hyper-local” approach provides more unique content at lower costs, but does not provide the same level of expertise a veteran journalist can offer with years of experience and well-cultivated sources.

Even these veteran journalists who have survived the cuts are finding that they need to train for a new journalistic reality with the increasing emphasis on web sites and video. Today’s journalist not only needs to be able to gather facts and write a story well, but they also need to be able to create and edit video from small, hand-held flip cameras, take their own still photos, and edit and post all these elements – including tweets and blogs – as quickly as they can given the immediacy of the web.⁴¹ In the past, it was only the wire service reporters who had to cope with instantaneous deadlines while their print and broadcast counterparts had some time to make an extra phone call, write and polish the story, and send it through several layers of editing. That process, increasingly, is part of the past.

There will be many attempts to try to do “more with less,” but generally, one can only do less with less. Some have looked to the government to help this ailing industry, while others, mindful of their watchdog role are less sanguine concerning increased government involvement.

GOVERNMENT GOALS AND ROLE

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

The news media industry – or “press” – is the only industry explicitly mentioned in the Constitution of the United States. As such, it has always had a special status and there has always been some level of government support, beginning with postal subsidies that allowed early newspapers to be mailed at subsidized rates. George Washington and James Madison wanted to ensure the existence of a robust press and they did not believe this could “just happen naturally by the free market.”⁴²

However, these subsidies have been reduced through the years, particularly as the U.S. Postal Service has struggled. Once as high as 80 percent, the postal subsidy today is just 11 percent.⁴³ In like manner, government legal ads once contributed five to 10 percent of newspaper revenues, but government entities are finding they can save a great deal of money by placing these legal notices online at government web sites.⁴⁴ There are still special postal rules for the return of unsold magazines, representing a subsidy of \$150 million a year for the magazine industry. Many states have enacted favorable tax treatment for ink and newsprint, but

one has to question how long such subsidies can continue as states struggle with unbalanced budgets.

The openness of the Internet has challenged existing copyright law and the Congress has looked at the idea of updating current law to bring it in line with current technology. We have spoken of aggregators as “frenemies” that earn commercial advantage from content produced by others, but also drive a good deal of traffic to the sites of news providers. However, a study of these aggregators shows that there are two kinds of aggregators – pure aggregators that do link to the news sites and only use a headline or, at most, a sentence or two of the original content, and parasitic aggregators – *Newser* and *The Daily Beast* are examples – that reproduce large chunks of original content without linking to the original site, without payments, all for commercial purposes, i.e. they sell ads on their sites.⁴⁵ Editor and Publisher summarized the key factors to consider in determining if a copyright had been violated: Does it compete with the original work? Is the use commercial? How much of the work was taken? What is the effect of that use in the marketplace? While this seems cut and dried, interpreting these factors is not always easy, particularly when they run up against the concept of fair use.⁴⁶

One possible fix that has been suggested would be an update of copyright law to bar aggregators from “commercially exploiting the substance of the originator’s news reports in direct competition with the originator, but only for a brief duration.” This concept, supported by the Newspaper Association of America, would protect so-called “hot news,” though defining “brief duration” might not be that easy. It could be 24 hours or even less.⁴⁷

Another possible area of federal government intervention could be an anti-trust exemption that would allow news companies to legally “sit down and negotiate an agreement on how to scale prices and, then, to begin imposing them simultaneously” either in the form of paywalls or in working out deals with online aggregation sites. It could even be used to negotiate fees with Internet Service Providers to work out the same kind of deal that the cable industry now enjoys. For some, granting such an anti-trust exemption does nothing more than bring the legal landscape in line with today’s publishing technologies and would allow publishers to act collectively to break the expectation of free content on the Internet. There are other voices that oppose this kind of action because it would inevitably raise prices for news consumers and some commentators have reminded the industry that it was not long ago that the news industry, and particularly newspapers, were reaping double digit profits.⁴⁸

In the fall of 2009, John F. Sturm, the President and CEO of the Newspaper Association of America was clear that the industry was not asking the Congress for a “bailout” but he did suggest changes to current law that would help newspapers weather the current economic storm. The first would allow newspapers to carry back net operating losses for five years instead of the current two years. In applying these losses to taxable income, the change in the tax law would provide newspapers with a much-needed infusion of cash. Second, he asked Congress for a change in the law that would allow newspapers to spread out future contributions to defined employee benefit plans. Sturm noted that the decline in the market – at that point in time – had caused a precipitous fall in the assets of pension plans and would compel newspapers to reach into operating funds to meet their legal obligations to maintain the funds. However, as Sturm noted, that cash could be used now to allow people to hold on to their jobs.⁴⁹

It is not just Congressional action that can have an impact on the news media industry. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) began its review of ownership rules in 2009 and is supposed to finish this year. The FCC's rules have been in limbo since 2003 when the Third U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals acted to block an FCC plan that would have allowed the common ownership of newspapers and local TV stations in the same market. Under a "failed station" clause in its rules, the FCC has permitted the transfer of financially distressed stations even if that further consolidates media ownership in a market. But station owners argued the dire financial results of 2009 meant that further deregulation was needed to save weak stations *before* they failed. There is no indication which way the FCC is leaning or how the courts would react.⁵⁰ In addition, the FCC has announced an ambitious broadband plan for the country that could accelerate the technological change the industry is already struggling to cope with, while creating new possibilities for the development of digital content.⁵¹

Some have suggested the government become even more aggressive in helping journalism make the transition to its future. Others have suggested the federal volunteer organization Americorp create a corps of local journalists. In a lengthy report in the *Columbia Journalism Review* – "The Reconstruction of American Journalism" – the authors make a number of suggestions, including the expansion of public radio and public television to provide more local coverage, the creation of more robust news-gathering organizations at universities, and the creation of a national fund for local journalism created by the FCC with money it now collects or could collect from telecom users, broadcast licensees or other sources.⁵²

There is an urgency in all these ideas because of the fundamental connection between a well-informed public, our democratic form of government, and – ultimately – our national security.

National Security and the News Media

*"Americans seem to know less about Sunnis and Shites
than we do about Angelina and Brad..."*

Ann Curry writing in "The Quill"

We are all aware of the statistics that show how few Americans hold passports, or the percentage of high school graduates who cannot find the United States on a world map. The problem begins with our educational system, but surely the news media plays a crucial role, particularly after Americans leave school and go out into the "real world." Certainly, news organizations should work with schools to teach students how to find credible and accurate news and information. Traditionally, news organizations provided its consumers with a stew of things they wanted to see and read – sports scores and lifestyle – and things they should see – the latest developments concerning an arms treaty or an analysis piece on the tribal areas in Pakistan.

That mixture has been eroding over the past several decades. In the two decades prior to September 11th, newspapers and television stations reduced their foreign coverage by 70 to 80 percent⁵³ and there has been very little bump since then despite the fact that there are more than 200,000 American servicemen and women abroad fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. For

news organizations, the cost of maintaining foreign bureaus has become increasingly prohibitive. For example, the Washington Post has reported it cost \$1.5 million to maintain its Baghdad bureau at the height of the Iraq War. Cable news channels – principally CNN – still maintain a large number of foreign bureaus as do wire services, but even cable news channels have tended to favor domestic news stories over foreign news stories for the sake of ratings.⁵⁴

So, for the average consumer of the news there is less chance they will “bump into” a foreign news story while waiting for the sports report. Is there reason for hope? There are a few silver linings despite this cloudy forecast. First, as demonstrated by our example of Bob Woodward’s Afghanistan story, the web provides the space for extended coverage of foreign news. It also provides access to sources readers rarely had access to in the pre-Internet past whether it is the BBC or foreign newspapers – many that have English language editions – which offer a decidedly different perspective.⁵⁵

We are also seeing some creative ways of dealing with the reduction in foreign bureaus. The afore-mentioned Global Post is one example. Another is the establishment of cooperative relationships between American media companies and foreign TV stations and newspapers. Information is a powerful force and when American news organizations offer as part of these relationships training and transmit the values of professionalism, balance, and fairness the news media companies around the world have an opportunity to benefit, particularly in developing countries that are many of the global hot spots in the news. We can also note that National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting System still provide a high percentage of foreign news coverage to their listeners/viewers and so there continue to be some bright spots for foreign news coverage. Getting Americans to pay attention is not a new challenge, but it is one that will change as the news media evolves into different forms.

CONCLUSION

“What is under threat is independent reporting that provides information, investigation, analysis and community knowledge, particularly in the coverage of local affairs.”

Leonard Downie Jr. and Michael Schudson

“The Reconstruction of American Journalism”

As the Industry Study Team finished this paper, the latest edition of *The Atlantic Monthly* arrived with the cover story: “Inside Google – The Company’s Daring Plan to Save the News.” In our studies we have encountered numerous reports that provide blueprints to save American journalism and the news media industry, and all seem to come down to one central theme: Create content that the consumer of news will want and learn to monetize that content. James Fallows, who authored the *Atlantic* article described it this way:

“The three pillars of the online business model...are distribution, engagement and monetization. That is: getting news to more people, and more people to news-oriented sites; making the presentation of news more interesting, varied, and involving; and converting these larger and more strongly committed audiences into revenue through both subscription fees and ads.”⁵⁶

News organizations that can strengthen their reporting and improve their content should be able to prosper in this information age. They just have to remember the business they are in: The information business.

ESSAYS ON MAJOR ISSUES

“The theory of free press is that the truth will emerge from free reporting and free discussion, not that it will be presented perfectly and instantly in any one account.

Walter Lippmann

“Press and Speech Freedoms in America”

American News Media During the 20th Century **LtCol Douglas S. Mayer, US Marine Corps**

Tracing the evolution of the American news media during the 20th century allows us to understand how history shaped, formed, and delivered the news media industry of today. In reviewing twenty-year time periods: the 1940s and 50s; 1960s and 70s; and 1980s and 90s; we see clear and definitive shifts in the context in which news organizations operated. These shifts are evidenced in the role of media, its perceived civic utility, the technologies employed, and public support of news media.

The 1940s were shaped by the Great Depression and consumed by warfare. These experiences were reflected in public attitudes toward government and freedom of the press. During World War II, news organizations sent correspondents to Europe and the Pacific to cover the fighting, with coverage broadcast on a daily basis. The U.S. Government monitored the mass media and encouraged patriotic messages. Journalists willingly submitted stories for approval. After the war, the broadcast networks invested heavily in television, beginning a new age of visual communication. Technological advances, especially in the use of radio and television for news and entertainment forced Americans to think more about the country’s role in global affairs. The 1940s and 50s transformed the lives of millions and set the tone for future social, political, and economic reforms in the U.S.

The 1960s witnessed a counter-cultural revolution that rejected the conformity of the 1950s. The period was marked by disillusionment with government and rising power of the media. Many Americans considered the Vietnam War and Watergate as evidence of an oppressive and all too powerful federal government. The growth of in-depth investigative reporting, combined with striking images on television, led to a new era of political cynicism. The daily broadcast of footage from Vietnam by news programs provided the public with a taste of the horrors of war. Television became a powerful tool whose images of events, both home and abroad, proved capable of swaying public opinion. Coverage of the Kennedy assassination, the Civil Rights movement, and Neil Armstrong setting foot on the moon highlighted the ability of television news media to connect with the public. In 1968, at the height of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, Eddie Adams of the Associated Press photographed the execution of a captured Viet Cong leader. His picture earned him the Pulitzer Prize and inflamed anti-war sentiments. During the 1960s and 70s a cultural change took place as to the manner in which the

news media reported on the U.S. Government. Idealistic publishers oversaw many prominent newspapers and their liberal reporters sought to challenge authority and expose shortcomings. As a result, the American public developed a cynical attitude toward their elected officials, but likewise, the public also became suspicious of what had become a very powerful news media institution.

The liberal climate of the 1970s gave way to more conservative attitudes in the 1980s as activism declined and the general mood reflected a belief that earlier movements had gone too far. Trends included increased options for consumers, declining newspaper readership, and increased consolidation within multi-media corporations. In 1987, the FCC repealed the 40-year old Fairness Doctrine, believing the regulation stifled public debate. This decision gave rise to numerous partisan programs.⁵⁷ When Fox began transmitting in 1986, it was the first new broadcast network since the 1950s. Created in 1980, CNN was the first network to offer 24-hour news coverage. CNN's coverage of the 1991 Persian Gulf War proved to be a watershed moment in TV news.⁵⁸

During the 1990s, the Internet enabled people to network, work, and communicate in unprecedented ways. Reporters immediately filed stories from around the world. Consumers were no longer prisoner to the media's schedule as they enjoyed on-demand access. The growing availability of information sources diminished the power of networks and newspapers. The pattern of ownership of private-sector publishing, radio, and television entities became highly integrated, oligopolistic, and bureaucratic during the 1980s and 90s. Multi-media corporations were established as the prevailing model of development.⁵⁹ The industry began to focus more on the competitive nature of making profits and less on concepts of the public interest and service. In 1980, most media sources were controlled by about two dozen corporations. By the 1990s only five corporations controlled all or part of 26 cable channels, about 75% of all daily papers were in the hands of chains, and 90% of all international news was provided to the U.S. population by only four press associations or news agencies.⁶⁰

Reviewing these past trends and milestones informs our understanding of the current environment. Our government's increasing use of websites and social media to get its messages to the population is reminiscent of newsreels and motion pictures during the World War II era. We should remain mindful of the potential abuses of propaganda and censorship that can develop while pursuing the best intentions in the name of public service.

The Internet and social media affect newspapers and broadcast media in a manner similar to how television impacted newspapers and radio several decades ago. Advancements in news media technology are beneficial to the American public because they improve the overall access to information.

The ability of a journalist to gather, edit and transmit video reports from anywhere in the world, disseminated rapidly via the Internet and social networks, is today's version of the evening news broadcasting daily footage from Vietnam. This contextually real-time news has significant ability to influence and connect with the public. This brings both power for individual reporters and corresponding responsibility to ensure they give due consideration to what they post.

Finally, although a smaller number of entities now control a larger portion of today's major media outlets, this is adequately countered by the overall wide variety of options available to the U.S. public for gathering information. Today's news has the ability to travel via print, broadcast, cable, satellite, internet, etc. It is this multiple pathway for information that is critical to the health and viability of our democracy. Although not all information read, heard, or seen is necessarily unbiased or exactly accurate, the likelihood for the truth being available is greatly enhanced.

“Among the numerous advantages promised by a well constructed Union, none deserves to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction.”

*Alexander Hamilton
“The Federalist No. 10”*

Fragmentation of the News Media: Serving America's Interests CDR Scott B. Lemasters, US Coast Guard

The identity of the United States is closely linked to the free press in Article I of the Constitution. The democratic system rests firmly on the principle that a government “instituted among men,” derives “just Powers from the Consent of the Governed.”⁶¹ To promote the ability to make informed decisions, essential to the success of their democratic experiment, a free press must foster “good government from reflection and choice.”⁶²

With the advancement of digital technologies and the internet, the volume of content available via the free press is generating concerns about the future of American democracy. “At the heart of the discourse is whether these” innovations “will foster or hamper the proper functioning democracy” as audiences fragment and social cohesion is threatened.⁶³ Alexander Hamilton, in “The Federalist No. 10,” noted the danger that impulsive “factions” present to the “permanent and aggregate interests of the community.”⁶⁴ However, Hamilton also recognized the need for a free press, when he wrote that “destroying the liberty” essential to the existence of factions is a remedy that is “worse than the disease.”⁶⁵

To further exacerbate this situation, due to market pressures, many news outlets increasingly shape their content for “consumers with specific political leanings” as a “viable segmentation strategy.”⁶⁶ While this niche strategy may serve as an effective business tactic, it may further “fragment and divide the public” into more polarized positions.⁶⁷ Many scholars argue that such strategies have effects beyond their shareholder value, as politically oriented news media outlets incite partisans and build societal tensions.

The supposition is that Americans will be unable to adapt to the evolving news media, leading to a poorly informed, isolated, and fragmented citizenry, threatening the existence of our democratic society. Americans are currently afforded an abundance of news exposure in all aspects of their daily lives, from legacy sources like newspapers to the latest online social media.

While new digital technologies are disrupting and revolutionizing the news media industry, they are providing news consumers much greater access to information.

The overwhelming volume of news available to the American public will continue to improve exposure to the national dialogue, fostering the “shared experiences” necessary to build consensus and solve societal problems in a democratic manner.⁶⁸ While pessimists continue to purport the threats to democracy presented by media fragmentation and partisan polarization, studies indicate that the liberal-moderate-conservative demographics in the United States have remained consistent since the 1970s.⁶⁹ News consumers have grown more sophisticated in their ability to recognize partisan messages in the media, as politically ideological news sources are deemed less credible by large segments of the American public.⁷⁰

“One of the oldest questions in political communication is whether the public or voters are informed enough to make democracy work properly.”⁷¹ While pessimists continue to purport the threats to democracy presented by media fragmentation and partisan polarization resulting from the growth of digital news media, this is a devolutionary position that fails to grip how experiences can be shared over the web between communities. As partisan media outlets target viewers for the sake of revenue, they often demonstrate an incapacity to “accept frustration in political affairs with equanimity,”⁷² stirring emotional rhetoric between communities.

Focusing on specific audiences for market gain is a news media tactic that has existed in this country since the time of the Founders. In fact, new media technologies afford the next generation of Americans the opportunity to build communities in different ways beyond their “face-to-face experiences.”⁷³ These technologies will serve as another effective tool for reaching the “Governed” in order to help society make more informed decisions.

*"You better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone,
for the times, they are a changin'..."*

Bob Dylan, 1964

The Rise of Digital Journalism COL Scott F. Malcom, US Army

After surveying the landscape, only one thing remains certain about the American news media industry: accelerated change is the new norm. Dwindling resources, changes in consumer behavior, technological innovation, and an explosion of ideas are working together to make this the most significant upheaval in information delivery since the invention of the Gutenberg printing press.⁷⁴ Media professionals are racing to keep up, let alone get ahead of, the next big thing. “Where we’re going to be in five years, I wouldn’t guess,” stated one long-time journalist turned manager at the Associated Press.⁷⁵

One of the more important changes is the move away from traditional electronic news gathering to a faster, cheaper, more practical method. It is referred to as mobile, converged, digital, multi-media, multi-platform, and backpack journalism. This style is defined as: “one properly trained journalist using a hand-held digital camera to tell visual stories in a more

immediate, more intimate fashion than is achievable using a larger team...a backpack journalist shoots, acquires sound, produces, reports, interviews...writes the script and narrates.”⁷⁶

Contributing today to the burgeoning appreciation for backpack journalism is growing access to cheaper, faster, and more mobile connectivity to the internet. Consumers no longer need a TV to find and view the news they want. Consumers can access what they want from pretty much anywhere on a growing number of innovative technologies that put desktop computing power in the palm of the hand.

Two recent circumstances came together forcefully to compel its complete approval as a practice here to stay: the diffusion of news to niche providers and newsroom budget and staffing cuts resulting from the recession.⁷⁷ As a result, large organizations like *The Washington Post*, *New York Times* and *The News Hour* on PBS who maintained separate web and journalistic activities merged them to create efficiencies and improve the synergy of their news content.⁷⁸

Almost all of the media professionals surveyed in the spring of 2010 agreed on two aspects of modern journalism. First was that “News used to be a lecture but now it is a conversation,” and second was “many of today’s most popular news stories are not the most important.”⁷⁹ In other words, more people are now equipped to participate in the conversation about the world around them, in all available mediums. Further, with lower expectations for broadcast quality and the reality of increased video viewing on smaller screens – which suits the use of smaller digital cameras – consumers are able to access visual information on just about any subject they want.

Backpack journalism also fits neatly into the future described by the Director of the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism. “The future news media environment will see the rise of niche reporting; pushing content out will become more important than bringing readers in.”⁸⁰ Backpack journalists, professionalized through formal training, will push quality, contextualized news stories to general and niche sites on the net for audiences of various sizes. Where a typical consumer of news can today search Google and come up with myriad written stories about almost any topic, tomorrow she will find well-documented stories that are filmed, edited, and voiced by one person.

The potential implications of this steady improvement in the practice and application of backpack journalism for the U.S. military are also worth mentioning. In May of 2003 after the end of “high intensity combat operations,” I was amazed at how quickly the network TV crews departed the region to return to America. My colleagues at the Coalition Press Information Center spent most of the month facilitating their mass exodus. Recently, a former executive vice president of ABC News who now studies, writes and lectures on media and journalism, confirmed that the reason TV crews left so hurriedly was because of the high cost of keeping them there.⁸¹ Because backpack journalists do the work of an entire crew at a fraction of the cost, it is feasible that news organizations will begin to consistently deploy them alongside our military.

In this period of persistent conflict, one of the primary threats to our national security is a feeling of “war fatigue” by the U.S. citizenry. According to the NBC Nightly News producer

responsible for both the Pentagon and State Department beats, news viewers in America are already experiencing it.⁸² One of the factors contributing to this ambivalence is that our fighting forces are so far away. With dire problems at home confronting our population – growing unemployment, mounting deficits, and decline in education to name a few – it is natural to overlook our important national security missions abroad. However, an increase in the number of properly trained backpack journalists deployed to the war zones could provide increased access to our forces in those far off “nooks and crannies.” Pushing their content to the internet will provide compelling viewing for a growing audience of wired viewers who expect such stories to be told in an immediate and intimate way. With these gripping images before them, viewers may be more compelled to stay connected with our deployed forces and the job they are doing, and the feeling of war fatigue may be mitigated. Since sustaining the national will to conduct war is key to its success, this will be a welcome development for the U.S. military.

Done right, backpack journalism could be a useful tool to counteract enemy propaganda. Properly trained backpack journalists who spend time with security forces in the communities where they operate will naturally communicate with locals and get to know both sides of the situation. They will document the complexities and cultural and religious nuances facing our troops. By providing visual proof of the positive consequences of our being there and even our honest mistakes, a world audience will be better equipped to appreciate the mission and intent of our operations abroad. Hopefully, this audience will then be less swayed by the steady stream of anti-American images and rhetoric inundating the information environment.

The news media industry today is undergoing sweeping change, and no one seems to know where it will land.⁸³ While many observers rightly focus on the radical advancements in technology as a means to maintain a competitive edge in an era of shrinking revenue, others are using the changing times to perfect existing forms of communicating important information. Backpack journalism is an example of such opportunism.

In this modern environment of sound bytes and 140 word text messages, consumers of news will naturally search for something deeper, more contextual and intimate. With the passing of time, the skill level and professionalism of backpack journalists will improve as will the tools of their trade. Concomitantly, market conditions, hyperlocalism, and consumer expectations may very well render this emerging form of journalism the new standard. As new chapters are added to the history of its development, its impact on the news media industry will continue to be felt until the next game changing event in the ongoing information revolution.

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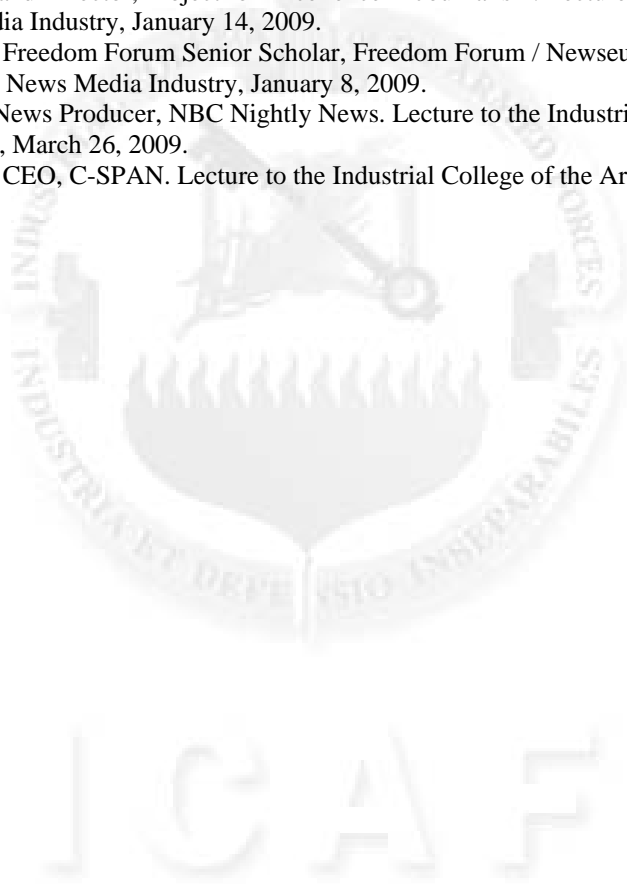
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