Case study 1.1

ON 2 February 2011 News Corporation and Apple Computer launched a collaborative venture. Rupert Murdoch, the foremost media mogul of the late 20th century, and Steve Jobs, boss of the coolest tech company on the planet, mounted the stage at New York’s Guggenheim museum to announce The Daily, an iPad-only news app.

Reaction varied from ‘It could easily become a best friend to commuters, airline travelers, even people out for a stroll’ (Tim Molloy in The Wrap), through ‘While the initial results are impressive enough to justify the hype, they fall short of what Steve Jobs has called “redefining the news experience”’ (Paul Burkey for McPheters & Co), to ‘The Daily represents a complete failure of imagination’ (Shane Richmond in the Daily Telegraph).

Clearly, whatever The Daily was, it was neither the saviour of the newspaper industry nor the future of what had been print journalism (not that anyone was making those exact claims). This was unfortunate as by February 2011 print journalism generally and the newspaper industry in particular desperately needed both a saviour and a secure future.

The reasons for such desperation were easy to find. Anyone looking at the first page of a research paper published in 2008 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – a body whose mission it is to promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world – would have found the following:

- After very profitable years, newspaper publishers in most OECD countries face declining advertising revenues, titles and circulation. The economic crisis has amplified this downward development.
- About 20 out of 30 OECD countries face declining newspaper readership, with significant decreases in some OECD countries. Newspaper readership is usually lower among younger people who tend to attribute less importance to print media.

This chapter will cover:
- The development of print media
- Business structures of print media companies
- An overview of regulatory and legal frameworks governing print media companies
- Current problems facing print media
- Journalism training and education
The regional and local press are particularly affected and 2009 is the worst year for OECD newspapers, with the largest declines in the United States, the United Kingdom, Greece, Italy, Canada and Spain.

Employment losses in the newspaper industry have intensified since 2008, particularly in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Spain.¹

Depressing as this may have been (for newspapers in Western economies at least; elsewhere in the world they were still thriving), it was not exactly unexpected since in 2007 a National Readership Survey (NRS) report commissioned by the House of Lords communications committee⁵ found that newspaper readership had declined by 5 million over 15 years.

What was shocking about this catalogue of decline was the speed with which it had happened. After all, newspapers had been in existence for over 500 years, had been commercially successful for 300 years and had been a significantly profitable industrial sector for 150 years. Almost overnight, it seemed, print newspapers were toast.

Toast still capable of generating billions of dollars in turnover, it is true, but much less thickly buttered with profit. One indication of how good the good times had been can be found in traditional profit margins. For much of the 20th century the newspaper industry was expected to return over 20 per cent, and routinely did so, year after year. By comparison, a highly efficient volume car manufacturer such as Nissan or Toyota might achieve between 8 per cent and 10 per cent in a good year; in 2010 Sony – the giant Japanese electronics and entertainment conglomerate – achieved minus 1.38 per cent.⁶

A double shock then, comprised of a rapid slump and the confounding of expectations. How had print media reached this point?

### INTRODUCTION

Karl Marx suggested (in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, 1852) that history repeats itself first as tragedy, then as farce. To understand where the print media industries are going and which of those two options the destination will be, it is necessary to understand where they have come from. This is best done with a brief look at the aspects of their history and evolution that will allow informed discussion of their likely future development – and perhaps even survival.

We should also remember that print itself was once a highly controversial and massively disruptive new technology, with significant parallels to the ways digital media are seen today. Because print is so absolutely taken for granted now it is difficult to imagine it as something that threatened to turn the world upside down, but the analysis found in Elizabeth Eisenstein’s classic The Printing Press as an Agent of Change is well worth reading for anyone who wants to be reminded of just how powerfully print has changed the world we live in:

- Political power – kings, emperors, despot, popes, archbishops, generals, all have feared the power of the press to influence the people they rule over (a power that was symbolically transferred first to television and now to the internet). One result of this has been the imposition of systems of regulation, to govern who is allowed to own what media and what they can and cannot show or tell. In many countries around the world there are still very strict restrictions
– covert, overt or both – on the ownership and operation of print media but a glance at the history of newspapers and magazines in the UK shows that our monarchs, clergy and politicians have not been shy about interfering with and exercising influence over the press.

- Financial power – with great power comes great responsibility, of course, and also the opportunity to make great fortunes. The history of print media is littered with examples of people who have profited greatly from their ownership – Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Northcliffe, Lord Rothermere, Robert Maxwell, Rupert Murdoch, Felix Dennis – but how did newspapers and magazines come to be such cash cows? And has this record of success actually damaged their ability to survive in the future?

- Social and cultural power – the shortlist of press magnates above contains three peers of the realm as well as a man who is courted by politicians of all persuasions who hope to gain his – and his newspapers’ – approbation. Clearly this indicates a link between social power and the print media, but owners and their organisations also exercise significant cultural power, with the ability to affect, at least marginally, the attitudes of their readers. How is this governed? How should it be governed?

This chapter will show how historical development, financial structures and regulatory powers have defined and shaped the print media, what this might mean for their future and how best to prepare for a career in print media today.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PRINT MEDIA

The print journalism industry in the UK has a history that stretches back to at least 1620, when the first English language ‘coranto’ was published (in Amsterdam). The ‘coranto’ was an early form of newspaper that contained summaries of stories about battles and other events of greater or lesser immediacy; the example mentioned was published in Holland because the laws of England were very restrictive about what could be printed in the country. Indeed, in 1632 the Star Chamber (which was essentially the king’s private law court) outlawed the production of any kind of news publication.

The first milestone on the route to press freedom came a few years later when the government allowed news to be published under licence (1638) and then in 1641 King Charles I abolished the Star Chamber and ended the licensing of publications.

In 1665 the government of the day adopted the power of the press for its own ends by publishing the *Oxford Gazette*, widely recognised as the first proper newspaper in England. It soon changed its name to the *London Gazette* and is still published as an official record of government events.

Early in the 18th century the first daily newspaper arrived, the *Daily Courant*. Other ‘firsts’ include

- the first provincial daily (*Norwich Post*, 1701);
- the first evening paper (*Evening Post*, 1706);

Some familiar newspaper titles also have long histories. The *Times* first appeared in 1785 as the *Universal Daily Register* but changed its name after three years. The *Observer* appeared in 1791, the *Manchester Guardian* in 1821, the *Sunday Times* in 1822, the *News of the World* in 1843, the *Daily Telegraph* in 1855, the *Evening Standard* (London) in 1860, the *People* in 1881, the *Daily Mail* in 1896, the *Daily Express* in 1900 and the *Daily Mirror* in 1903.

Print magazines also go back a long way. Some scholars claim that *Gynasceum*, a collection of pictures of contemporary fashions published by Josse Amman in 1586, was the first fashion
magazine – and thus the first specialist publication – while many others nominate the Journal des Scavans, published by Dennis de Sallo in 1665, as the first science magazine. In the UK, the Athenian Mercury of 1690 provided a clear prototype for the type of magazine that answers readers’ questions, while the Ladies Mercury of 1693 holds a good claim to be the first British women’s magazine. The Tatler (1709) and Spectator (1711) added to the variety of magazines but the first product to actually use that word in its title was the Gentleman’s Magazine, published from 1731 to 1914.

After that the number of magazines expanded as social and cultural changes brought more leisure, more hobbies, more clearly defined trades and professions and a richer, better educated population. Today there are over 8,000 magazines published in the UK, most of which are business-to-business (B2B) rather than consumer titles – this is the main division of types of magazine.

In the newspaper world there has historically been a clear division between local or regional papers and nationals. The Newspaper Society, which represents the interests of local/regional publishers, was founded in 1836, 70 years before the Newspaper Publishers Association was formed (1906) to represent the owners of national papers.

Although several newspaper businesses own both national and regional titles (for example, DMGT and Trinity Mirror) there is still a strong and distinct regional press sector (including companies such as Archant and Johnston Press) and there are still a number of very small publishers that produce a single paper for a single town.

Magazines and newspapers have co-existed within the same companies but the trend in the latter part of the 20th century was for companies to specialise in one print platform or the other. Recent developments in bringing the two forms back together again have had mixed results. News International, publisher of the Sun, set up a magazine division in 2007 and closed it again in 2008, while the Guardian Media Group (jointly with venture capitalist Apax Partners) acquired Emap’s B2B magazines in 2008.

All forms of print journalism, whether magazines or newspapers, have been affected in various ways and to various degrees by the rise of the internet, and not just because of a generalised drift of display advertising to online platforms. The decline is easiest to diagnose in the local and regional press, where classified advertising, once the never-ending stream of gold that ran through the inner pages, has begun to dry up alarmingly.

Why? In the USA it is widely attributed to the rise of craigslist.org, which is easier to search and free, but craigslist.co.uk is a shadow of its American counterpart. It could be because eBay.co.uk is more fun and has an automated charging system or because FreeCycle is greener, free and is based on an ostensibly beneficial social idea. Perhaps there are many more car boot sales now. Perhaps newspaper classifieds are seen as too downmarket in an affluent age.

A CLOSER LOOK

A couple of personal anecdotes might help to explain this phenomenon. When I had a range-style oven to sell I put an advertisement in the local paper, naming the very reasonable price of £100 or offers. It attracted precisely one response, a young couple who came and looked, went away and never returned. I took some photographs and listed the oven on eBay. There were bids immediately – £100, £200, £300. It seemed to stall at £350 but a last-minute bidding war raised the final price to over £500. You have to ask – why would anyone choose to advertise in a local newspaper and risk a complete lack of interest when for about the same price it is possible to reach a national audience that is eager to buy?
This of course raises some rather fundamental questions about what readers value in their print publications – how many people bought their local newspaper because of the classified advertising rather than because of the news? If so, what was wrong with the news that the readers did not value it? Was it not local enough? Too parochial? Just not interesting enough? Too far removed from the readers’ real interests?

There is another aspect to this generalised decline too – most newspaper groups have become manufacturers. They own large industrial printing plants and large distribution organisations. They do not just provide content, they are vertically integrated commercial structures with capital tied up in manufacturing and distribution; if they have to manufacture less and distribute less that has a considerable effect on their financial structure – and on their profit margins.

Print-based B2B magazines have also been affected quite radically, but the demand from their readers for constantly updated news and analysis, along with archives of data that can be ‘drilled’, has meant that agile publishers have been able to develop digital alternatives and augment their brands with exhibitions or other face-to-face events. As Gary Hughes, former CEO of business publisher CMPi, told *Press Gazette*: ‘We like markets rather than media formats. We like to be in markets and then work out how to make money in that market rather than say here are magazines and websites, [now] make money even though you have no face-to-face assets.’

In fact ‘events’ – exhibitions, trade or consumer shows, special reader opportunities – are a key part of every successful magazine’s business plan. Not only can they be extremely profitable in themselves, they allow direct interaction with both readers and advertisers, including the opportunity to gather data on both.

Print publishers have also started to harness the potential of digital communications, with innovations to be found in newspapers and magazines. The regional press has been among the most adventurous, with the *Liverpool Post*’s experiment in ‘broadcasting’ one complete working day a notable milestone. The paper’s staff recorded what they did minute by minute on a live blog, they streamed video of news conferences from mobile phones, they invited readers to submit questions for reporters to ask their interviewees. In Greater Manchester, the *Manchester Evening News* uses social media tools to cover the local authority; Martin Belam reported from the news:rewired conference in May 2011 that the paper ‘live blogs a lot of council meetings, bringing together tweets from councillors in the chamber, activists in the viewing gallery, their journalism and comments from the community’. As ways of making the processes of publishing and of local democracy very much more transparent these are significant successes. Whether they provide any generally workable models for future development will only become apparent in years to come.

Among national newspapers, the *Telegraph* and the *Guardian* led the way in developing digital versions, though they took different routes. The *Guardian* became very reader-focused, encouraging interaction within the Comment Is Free section, while the *Telegraph* developed new working methods and moved into an expensively designed new working space to facilitate
the convergence of print, online and broadband television. But despite these trailblazers, the
Daily Mail, whose editor Paul Dacre once condemned the internet as ‘bullshit.com’, quickly
became the most popular newspaper site when it released a revised and much enhanced version
of Mail Online in April 2008.

Given that much of what has been dubbed Web2.0 centres around social and community-
forming activities (sharing photographs or music, keeping up with friends, creating, uploading
and watching video), magazines should have been in prime position to take advantage of the
new digital opportunities. But, like the future in William Gibson’s cyberspace (‘The future is
already here – it’s just not very evenly distributed’), online developments have been unevenly
distributed. Some titles have augmented the print version with what amounts to a rolling news
operation (featuring news limited to the magazine’s specialism); some are broadcasting via a
broadband tv channel; many are offering blogs and forums, or developing YouTube channels.

A few print publishers have decided to launch digital-only newspapers and magazines that
have the ‘look and feel’ of a print title (i.e. there are ‘pages’ that ‘turn’) but which offer inter-
activity on every page and run advertisements that automatically play video. Dennis Publishing
was the first major magazine publisher to make a mark in this field, with the ladmag Monkey;
since then it has launched a gadget mag (iGizmo) and a motoring mag.

And in February 2011, News Corporation launched The Daily, which brings us back to the
need for a saviour.

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**remember**

- Print has a long history and will not disappear overnight; text (writing) has an
even longer history and will survive for as long as we need to read.
- Regulation will affect future development – but history shows that regulations
will change as circumstances change.
- Good publishers will use the different strengths of print and digital media to
complement each other.
- Journalists must be prepared to meet the challenges of new working
environments and changing expectations from readers.

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**PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE**

The print press has a long and honourable history. Newspapers and magazines
have helped to shape and even change society for the better. Journalists and the
publications they work for have, over the years, campaigned for any number of
good causes, reported on any number of bad practices and resisted legal and
governmental pressure to conceal rather than reveal.

However, just like coal mining and steel making, the commercial and industrial
processes of print publication are changing and this will have an effect on the way
journalists do their jobs – and also on the jobs they are expected to do.

Knowing about the historical development of print media will help young journalists
not only to appreciate the value of freedom of expression but also to understand the
best aspects of the tradition they are working in – aspects it is too easy to overlook
when journalism is brought into disrepute by shady practices such as unauthorised
phone tapping and bribery of public officials.

Nevertheless, despite these fine traditions it is equally important to be open to
change and flexible about learning new ways of doing things.
CHAPTER ONE
STRUCTURE OF THE INDUSTRY

THE COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRINT MEDIA

In June 2009 the Welsh Assembly government published a report on the Welsh newspaper industry.\(^{12}\) In many ways it was typical of this kind of report, rehearsing well-known arguments about fewer readers, less advertising, the threat/challenge of the internet and the precarious financial position of publishers.

Also typical were the contributions from the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and media academics. The union was concerned about redundancies and the effect that declining numbers in a newsroom would have on their ability to do a good job. The media academics repeated well-worn tropes about the pernicious effects of capitalist ownership on fourth estate journalism: ‘newspapers have been treated as a milk cow by the major news corporations and the regional and local news companies,’\(^ {13}\) Dr Andy Williams of Cardiff University told the Assembly members.

In this instance it appeared that the representatives of the industry had a firmer grasp of both reality and the history of the newspaper industry:

‘we are businesses and there is no public element in that sense. Everything has to fit the model of profitability. To date, it suited that model of profitability to get the most credible and quality based journalism that we could, because the more quality-based journalism that we get, the greater our audience and therefore the more advertising we get.’\(^ {14}\)

The basic business model of the print press, whether newspaper or magazine, is very simple. On one side you have advertisers with goods and services to sell, on the other side you have readers in need (or want) of those goods and services, and in the middle you have the newspaper or magazine introducing one to the other and pocketing the introduction fees – advertising charges and cover price respectively.

This arrangement did not spring into being of its own accord as a fully perfected business model; advertising as a system required other developments, such as the industrial revolution – which both increased the production of consumer goods and the ability of consumers to purchase them – before it evolved and expanded. But the print media had never been \(noli me tangere\) instruments of public service and ‘news’ had been a commodity for as long as there were traders who could profit or lose by it. Shakespeare knew this in the 16th century – there is a news-mongering ‘gossip report’ in \(The Merchant of Venice\) (act 3, scene 1). Harris and Lee point out that by the 1700s most papers were owned by printers and ‘Throughout the eighteenth century the English newspaper remained locked into the dominant economic system’ (Harris and Lee, 1986: 19).

Something else endemic in the 18th century was political bribery. In his history of the British press Harold Herd notes that newspapers were often subsidised by the government:

‘Sir Robert Walpole systematically employed bribery to secure a favourable Press: during the last ten years of his administration [1732–1742] over £50,000 of public money was paid to newspapers and pamphleteers. This practice of bribing newspapers continued until the early part of the nineteenth century . . .’. (Herd, 1952: 64)

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

**Activity:** Read up about a successful press campaign – for example, W T Stead and the white slave trade\(^ {10}\) or the \(Sunday Times\) and thalidomide\(^ {11}\) – and sketch out how you could use digital media to support or strengthen the work.

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Proofs: File not for distribution. This file is provided for Pearson Education.
It may be an irony of history that a series of parliamentary acts intended to quell political unrest and quieten the press appear to have positively encouraged the growth of the news media, once they had been repealed. The Six Acts of 1819 included the Newspaper and Stamp Duties Act, which imposed a tax on the publication of newspapers and periodicals, the so-called ‘tax on knowledge’. It never fully achieved the political effect its sponsors hoped for, as news still circulated in a variety of forms and formats, but it did (along with a tax on advertisements and a tax on paper) put a brake on the commercial development of the newspaper industry.

After the final abolition of Stamp Duty in 1855 there was a ‘dramatic increase in the number of titles published . . . In 1854 only five dailies were published outside London. Ten years later the figure had risen to 51 and by 1889 it was 155. The five years following repeal also saw 120 papers established in 102 towns where none had existed previously’ (Nevett, 1986: 152).

Was this dramatic increase purely the result of a demand for news that could suddenly be satisfied? In part it almost certainly was, and a newspaper’s general social or political complexion would help to give it a particular appeal that might help differentiate it in an increasingly competitive marketplace. However, as noted above, there are two forces that drive the print media – readers and advertisers – and those who have written about the history of the British press are in no doubt about the importance of the latter group:

‘Newspapers were bought for their news, but often what determined the choice of paper was the sort of advertisement the reader could expect to find there. This applied particularly to those in search of employment’, (Lee, 1976: 38)

Thus the *Morning Post* was the paper for gentlemen and gentlemen’s gentlemen, ladies and ladies’ maids; the *Daily News* for journalists; the *Daily Telegraph* for lower middle class employment and the *Daily Chronicle* and the *Echo* for the working class. Communities of readers began to cluster around particular titles because they published certain types of advertising:

‘the predominantly commercial position of the press was emphasized by a continuous and increasing involvement in advertising . . . The English newspapers needed advertising, not only to supplement income but also to balance their appeal and relate to the communities they served’. (Harris and Lee, 1986: 19)

The beneficially circular nature of this arrangement was understood well in the 19th century but rather than the usual and somewhat over-simplified explanation that readers attract advertisers it was entirely possible to see it the other way around. Terry Nevett quotes from a contributor to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* to make this point:

‘To a large extent it was advertising which made possible an expansion on this scale. Firstly, advertisements attracted readers. According to Daniel Stuart, “Numerous and various advertisements attract numerous and various readers, looking out for employment, servants, sales, and purchases, &c &c. Advertisements act and react. They attract readers, promote circulation, and circulation attracts advertisements”’.


And there was another, unintended, benefit derived from this new stream of revenue – it was advertising that freed mass-circulation newspapers from the kind of political patronage practised by Walpole. Once this stream of revenue had been tapped, newspaper owners and editors were free to reject bribes and slush funding, as first Harold Herd and then Francis Williams pointed out:

‘The Press was not able to gain its independence until the growth of commercial prosperity consequent on the Industrial Revolution brought a large and increasing revenue from advertisements, and allowed the newspaper to stand on its own two feet financially’. (Herd, 1952: 64)
‘[o]nly through the growth of advertising did the press achieve independence . . .’
(Williams, 1957: 51)

Where there is one unintended consequence there are likely to be others. Once it has been established that money can be made from a particular kind of enterprise the way opens up for opportunists to enter the market in search of profit and a human form of Gresham’s Law comes into play. It may well have been that when newspapers were only marginally profitable, or were in fact cross-subsidised by other activities such as printing, they were owned by people who cared about holding power to account; as their commercial potential grew, however, a new type of profit-oriented proprietor appeared. Coupled with this, when advertisers realised their contributions were vitally important, they could begin to demand changes, perhaps not to content but certainly to appearance, as Terry Nevett observes: ‘Gradually publishers were forced to allow advertisements which were several columns in width, breaking through the column rules which had traditionally contained them, and to permit the use of bold display types and eventually of illustrations’ (Nevett, ibid.: 153).

Increased competition in the newspaper market had two other major effects: behind the scenes there was increasing centralisation of ownership as commercial organisations sought to build national networks, while the actual surface of newspapers changed as a result of the pressure on publications to make themselves positively attractive to potential readers. As seems to be the case down the years, some of those most strongly opposed to these changes were the journalists, as Herd notes:

‘When innovators came along in the eighties and ’nineties who strongly urged that the primary task of a newspaper was to get itself read, and that there was a whole range of human interests that found no reflection in the columns of existing journals, the reaction of the majority of journalists was violently unfavourable’.
(Herd, 1952: 223)

In some respects the journalists may well have had a point. Not only was the very nature of the press changing, those innovators were drawn from a diminishingly small group. Mark Hampton summarises the situation thus: for most of the 19th century the British press could be understood as a force for education, ‘part of a broader commitment to a program of elevation for the working-class’ (Hampton, 2004: 10) but by the end of the century it had changed to what he calls a ‘representative’ model in which the press did not influence readers or public opinion but reflected their concerns and interests.

Thus in the mid-Victorian period press ownership was relatively widespread: ‘newspaper ownership was diffused widely enough and the spectrum of political views was diverse enough that the educational ideal could seem plausible’ (ibid.) but after the 1880s newspaper ownership began to consolidate in larger press groups, as a result of ‘the emergence of a mass readership, the reliance on ever more expensive machines, and the increasing dominance of advertising revenue’. Mass readership is also credited with changing the look of newspapers, including, ‘the introduction of headlines, shorter stories . . . a simplification of prose, and eventually photography’ (ibid.).

It seems safe to say, then, that commercial forces had begun to dominate community needs well before the 20th century and that the Welsh Assembly government’s committee of enquiry was revisiting old ground: subjection to commercial pressures only becomes a problem when the commercial foundations shift, as Barrie Jones indicated above. The media academics and union officials who gave evidence to the committee did, however, have one valid point – the newspaper industry has grown used to profit levels and returns on investment that make most other industries look puny by comparison. Once those returns dropped towards more normal levels, levels that would seem normal to a profitable supermarket, for example, proprietors and shareholders appear to have taken fright.
According to journalist and NUJ organiser Martin Shipton, ‘This is particularly true in Wales. Take Media Wales as an example. Over the 5 years between the start of 2003 and the end of 2007, Media Wales’ profit margins averaged 34.13 per cent, peaking at 38.21 per cent for the 12 months to the end of 2005.’

In 2011, Trinity Mirror’s gross margin of profit was 48.37 per cent; by comparison, Sainsbury’s was 5.45 per cent.

Remember:

- News is a commodity that historically had a market value because it was scarce – this is no longer the case.
- News is also a key component in democracy because citizens need reliable information on which to base rational decisions.
- Newspapers only achieved independence when advertising revenue reached significant levels.
- The ownership of newspapers has consolidated into large, increasingly centralised, corporations that, arguably, are more concerned with profit than keeping people informed.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Even struggling newspaper groups seem to be able to generate large profits. In his MediaGuardian column of 16 May 2011 Dan Sabbagh noted that Independent News and Media, whose Independent has the lowest circulation of the UK’s daily broadsheets, was trading ‘at a 13 per cent margin that widget manufacturers would never even hope to aspire to’.

At first sight it might seem somehow wrong that news, which is generally considered a vital element in the effective functioning of democracy, should be treated as a commercial commodity. However, the question that really needs to be asked is: if newspaper publishers were not allowed to operate in a free market, why would they bother with news at all? And if they didn’t publish it, who would?

Furthermore, if we consider that at certain points in their history newspapers have been directly controlled by the government or known to take government bribes, the current situation would seem to be infinitely preferable. Surely it is far better to have rich but independent publications than have them subject to government control? On the other hand, if newspapers become too dependent on advertising revenue, the advertisers might start to exert undue pressure for favourable reviews or even on the news agenda.

Activity: Think of new or different ways that newspapers could be supported financially; write out a list of pros and cons for each method you devise.

REGULATION OF THE PRINT MEDIA

Ownership patterns of the newspaper industry in the UK have not become more diverse since consolidation became the norm at the end of the 19th century. The market today is dominated by 10 national papers originating from London with a combined daily circulation of over
11 million and almost 12 million on Sunday. National newspaper ownership is concentrated in eight companies – News International, Daily Mail & General Trust, Trinity Mirror, Northern & Shell, Telegraph Media Group, Guardian Media Group, Independent News & Media, and Pearson. Of these, the first four control over 85 per cent of the national market (35.5 per cent, 19.3 per cent, 20.3 per cent and 11.9 per cent respectively).\(^\text{18}\)

Regional and local press ownership patterns are a mix of corporate concentration and small-scale operators – the Newspaper Society represents 87 publishers who produce 1,195 titles.\(^\text{19}\)

Thirty-nine of these publishers produce just one title but overall the market is dominated by four giants who between them control around 70 per cent of the market – Trinity Mirror, Johnston Press, Newsquest Media Group and Northcliffe Media/Associated Newspapers (the last two are separate companies but both owned by the Daily Mail & General Trust).

It is important to realise that almost all of the companies that publish national newspapers have many other business interests. A daily newspaper is clearly a major commercial operation but it is usually one among several. Strict ownership rules in the UK, intended to ensure a variety of social and political views in the media, prevent straightforward cross-ownership of both a national newspaper and a national television station but newspaper groups do have stakes in television and radio in the UK and overseas. An obvious example of this is News International, which is connected to the BSkyB satellite channel via its corporate owner News Corporation.

The Communications Act of 2003 set out the limits of cross-ownership, summarised in a report by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission thus:

‘In every local area, there must be three separate media companies supplying radio, TV, and newspaper services. Nobody controlling more than 20% of national newspaper circulation may own more than 20% of an Independent TV license. Nobody owning a regional ITV license may control more than 20% of the newspaper market in that region. Nobody owning a regional ITV license may own a local radio station with more than 45% coverage of the same area. Nobody owning a local newspaper may own a local radio station where the newspaper accounts for more than 50% of the circulation within the station’s coverage area.’\(^\text{20}\)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, especially given the downturn in the fortunes of local newspapers, regional publishers have campaigned to have these rules changed. Their efforts have met with some success: in November 2006 Ofcom suggested that some changes in cross-ownership rules might be justified.\(^\text{21}\) Then a committee of the department of Culture, Media and Sport issued a report on the Future for Local and Regional Media (June 2010) that noted:

‘The evidence we have heard from local media groups about the need to modify the merger regime and cross-media ownership rules is persuasive. We welcome the recommendations made by Ofcom in their report to the Secretary of State on media cross-ownership rules, and urge the Government to implement them. However we believe more far-reaching reform is needed. In order for local newspapers to survive in a changing economic and technological world, they need to be regarded as competitors in a multi-media landscape. Despite the evidence given by the Office of Fair Trading, we believe that the current media merger regime does not fully reflect this. We recommend that the Government re-examine the arrangement by carrying out a consultation on a possible multi-media merger regime.’\(^\text{22}\)

The Welsh Assembly Government committee looking into the future of regional newspapers made very similar recommendations:

‘Recommendation 1: The Welsh Assembly Government should make representations to the UK Government seeking assurances that cross media rules are relaxed to allow exploration of new partnerships.'
Recommendation 2: The Welsh Assembly Government should make representations to the UK Government seeking assurances that any move to relax regulations relating to cross-media ownership should be accompanied by measures to protect plurality of local media.223

Beyond these measures to control ownership, however, there is no single body of law that controls the press in the UK. There are, for example, laws that govern various aspects of the ways in which newspapers can report court and parliamentary proceedings, laws to protect a person’s reputation (defamation, libel) and laws to protect privacy. All laws are subject to interpretation, and understanding of the extents and limitations develops over time; this has been particularly the case with privacy cases in recent years, and European legislation has an effect in all of these areas. There is, however, no general press law of the kind found in many countries. (Freedom House publishes an interesting annual survey of international press freedom.)224 As Perry Keller explains:

‘Governments in Britain have generally been reluctant to impose regulatory controls over the press. Direct government controls over newspaper content would give an appearance of state censorship that is unwelcome in a liberal democracy and would antagonise the press industry.’225

One result of this was that newspapers were allowed to regulate themselves through first the Press Council (1953–1991) and then the Press Complaints Commission (PCC, 1991–2012). As evidence put to the Leveson Inquiry of 2012 demonstrated, there were major problems with this system. Firstly, although there was a majority of members with no connection to the press, the council was perceived to be dominated by editors; secondly, it was funded by Pressbof, an industry body; thirdly, membership was voluntary – so when Northern & Shell withdrew the Daily Express and other newspapers and magazines there was nothing the PCC could do to prevent them. In March 2012 the PCC was closed, pending formation of a new regulatory body after Lord Leveson had reported.

By contrast, television and radio stations are far more rigidly governed by the Independent Television Commission, the Radio Authority and the Broadcasting Standards Commission, as well as Ofcom to look after the overall regulatory and competitive framework.

One of the most striking differences between newspapers and broadcast media as far as regulation goes is that the former are free to be as politically partisan as they like while the latter are under an obligation to be fair and balanced in their coverage and this may be seen as both an advantage and a drawback for newspapers. The advantage is that it more or less guarantees a lively and diverse selection of newspapers, and this is certainly true of the UK where all mainstream political opinions are covered from the Morning Star on the hard left to the Daily Mail or Express on the right. The only limitations have been those covered by laws governing personal defamation and social issues, so an extreme right-wing newspaper that published material likely to incite racial or religious hatred could be prosecuted under the Race Relations Act or the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act.

The drawback may be that newspapers taking a particularly partisan political stance may face diminished levels of trust in their reporting. Those that focus on soft news items such as celebrity gossip and/or that have been shown to fabricate interviews, for example, or participate in underhand and illegal practices such as phone hacking, are likely to forfeit almost all trust – and trust is a major issue for newspaper journalism in the UK. In September 2010 Prospect magazine published the results of a YouGov survey into how much the public trust various groups to tell the truth – and journalists did not fare well. In 2003, ITV journalists had a trust rating of 81 per cent but seven years later that figure had fallen by 33 points to less than 50 per cent. BBC news journalists did marginally better even though trust in them dropped 21 points from 81 per cent to 60 per cent.
Newspapers followed an interesting hierarchical pattern: broadsheets (*Times*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Independent*) suffered a 24 point reduction to 41 per cent, mid-markets (*Mail*, *Express*) were down from 36 per cent to 21 per cent and the red-tops (*Sun*, *Mirror*, *Star*) were down from an already very low 14 per cent to 10 per cent. Looking at the full results (and methodology) reveals the even more worrying corollary: lack of trust. Broadsheet journalists were not trusted by 51 per cent, mid-market journalists by 71 per cent and tabloid journalists by 83 per cent – even worse than estate agents (79 per cent). To summarise, no category of newspaper journalist was trusted by a majority of those surveyed.

It is difficult to imagine a bigger problem than that for the future of print journalism in the UK.

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**remember**

- There is no general press law in the UK but there are a multitude of other laws that have a direct bearing on journalism (see also Chapter 9).
- It is likely that ownership rules will be changed to allow more cross-ownership of print and broadcast outlets – and whatever new medium comes next.
- Newspapers are subject to less direct regulation than television and radio.
- Journalists have lost the trust of large sections of their potential readership.

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**PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE**

Current regulations mean that no-one can own both a local newspaper and a local television or radio station. The reasoning behind this is to try to ensure a plurality of opinion in the local media – that is, no one person’s or organisation’s political or social views can dominate.

However, newspaper groups now appear to believe that it would be commercially beneficial to relax these rules and allow a multimedia mix of print, broadcast and online platforms. On this point, the Welsh Assembly government’s committee on the future of local newspapers appeared to want to have its cake and eat it, recommending that cross-media regulations be relaxed but at the same time wanting to ensure a plurality of views in the media. Given that local media of all types seem to be struggling, it is possible to argue that economies of scale might reduce costs but by the same token they would also reduce plurality.

On the national and international level News Corporation – which controls many newspaper publishers and has significant holdings in several satellite broadcasters (it owns Sky Italia outright) – wants UK ownership regulations to be relaxed so it can buy a controlling holding in BSkyB, and thus Sky News.

At the same time, public trust in journalists has sunk to a very low point, not helped by widespread evidence of illegal phone tapping by journalists on the News International-owned (and now closed) *News Of The World*. Would combining all news journalism into one corporate body tend to increase trust or not?

**Activity:** Think of useful combinations of media that would support local communities and increase trust in journalists.
JOURNALISM EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The YouGov figures cited above may look both disturbing and depressing but lack of trust in journalists and journalism is nothing new. Apart from any political regulation of the type already discussed, the distrust has also been reflected in popular culture – both Ben Jonson, in his play The Staple of News (1631), and William Congreve, in The Way of the World (1700), portrayed newsmongers and shorthand takers in a very poor light. On the other hand, no matter what the historical era, critics always see journalism as being in decline from some mythical golden age: Adrian Bingham gives a good corrective to the perceived loss of serious newspaper coverage in his paper Monitoring The Popular Press: A Historical Perspective (http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-27.html).

After the Stamp Duty and its associated ‘tax on knowledge’ had been repealed, governments never again tried to regulate the press in the same way or to the same degree but there were still very real concerns about political bias in the newspapers and the power of the press barons. This came to a head after the Second World War, when a Labour government was returned with a landslide victory despite almost unanimous newspaper support for the Conservatives and their leader Winston Churchill, the Daily Mirror being a notable exception. In 1947 a Royal Commission on the Press investigated the way newspapers were financed and run. After taking evidence the Commission recommended that an external body should be established to regulate the press and in 1951 the Press Council was established (it would later morph into the Press Complaints Commission).

The Royal Commission also looked at the recruitment and training policies of newspapers and made a further recommendation that this area be tackled in a more comprehensive and rational manner, ‘because on the quality of the individual journalist depends not only the status of the whole profession of journalism but the possibility of bridging the gap between what society needs from the Press and what the Press is at present giving it’. The outcome of this was the creation of the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) in 1951. Although the Commission saw a need to train journalists on every type of newspaper, resistance by the Newspaper Publishers Association (NPA), the trade body for national papers, meant that in effect the training only applied to recruits in the local and regional press. However, a restrictive agreement between the NPA and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) ensured that only university graduates could get a job on a national newspaper without having first served an apprenticeship (called indentures) in the regions – and given that at the time less than 10 per cent of the population went to university this measure excluded a significant number of people.

Founding the NCTJ was a positive response to the Royal Commission’s criticisms by a large sector of the newspaper industry and because it imposed certain standards it could also be seen both as a means of shoring up trust in journalists and as a step towards making journalism a profession. But for all that it aspires to the condition of a profession, like medicine and the law, journalism can more accurately be categorised as a craft, not least because there are no formal qualification requirements: anyone can become a journalist regardless of whether they have a PhD from Oxbridge or left school with no GCSEs. There is no equivalent of the Law Society or the General Medical Council to impose standard conditions of training – in fact there are four different bodies that accredit journalism courses, each recognised by different sectors of the media industries. This can cause some confusion and certainly gives rise to competition, not always helpful or useful, between the bodies:

- NCTJ – established to oversee newspaper journalism training, the National Council for the Training of Journalists sets its own prescriptive curriculum and exams. There are modules
covering all aspects of newspaper practice and the NCTJ has added modules in an attempt
to extend its coverage to magazine and broadcast journalism.

- PTC – the Periodicals Training Council is the training arm of the industry body for
  magazines, the Professional Publishers Association. The PTC does not set a prescriptive
curriculum or run its own exams; it audits courses thoroughly and accredits only those
that meet its standards.

- BJTC – the Broadcast Journalism Training Council represents the main employers in the
television and radio industries, from the BBC to BSkyB. The BJTC operates like the PTC
in the way it audits courses and accredits those that meet its standards.

- Skillset – a slightly different kind of organisation from the three above, Skillset is the Sector
Skills Council for the creative media industries. This covers a much wider range of business
types – TV, film, radio, interactive media, animation, computer games, facilities, photo
imaging, publishing, advertising, fashion and textiles. It is more concerned with influencing
policy, including training policy across the whole range of educational qualifications, than
with specific curriculum development.

As noted above it has been possible to become a journalist without having any formal quali-
fications at all but the reality is that having some training under your belt gives you a much
better chance of getting a foothold in a highly competitive work-market. Employers will
naturally tend to prefer someone who knows the laws of libel and defamation, someone who
can find their way around the law courts, a local council or national government, someone
who has acquired the basic skills of interviewing and reporting, to another candidate who
may have a flair for writing but none of the craft-capital – the skills and knowledge specific
to journalism.

Newspapers used to offer extensive in-house training opportunities, but now would-be
journalists are largely expected to bear the costs of training themselves by taking journalism
undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. A few companies still offer traineeships or graduate
schemes, though numbers are limited and competition is fierce.

On the other hand, an increasing number of media companies offer internships, paid or
otherwise, to those looking for a foothold in the industry. There is a good deal of controversy
around this subject as some observers believe that companies are simply taking advantage of
interns rather than offering them any useful training or a realistic prospect of getting a job.
However, it is still a good idea to undertake work experience placements as a way of prepar-
ing yourself for the workplace or for a journalism course. Just being in an office watching
journalists at work should provide a realistic understanding of what the job actually entails, as
opposed to any romantic notions you might have, and a good placement will almost certainly
result in your getting work published, even if it's something short and simple. Nothing beats
the feeling of seeing your words on a page and it will all add to the portfolio you should be
compiling to support job or course applications.

So many courses claim to offer some sort of journalism training it can be confusing, but there
are a number of ways to filter out the also-rans from the possibles. Any course worth doing
must offer a thorough grounding in practical journalism techniques, rather than a critique
or theoretical overview. This should include plenty of practice at writing in different genres
(news, features, online), effective interviewing techniques, production skills from sub-editing
through page design to uploading via a content management system, use of audio and video
(even for print journalists): in fact, anything and everything that a modern journalist has to
be able to do.

Beyond practical skills, the course must be bang on top of media law concerning privacy,
libel, defamation and reporting privileged information from courts and parliament.
The need to understand parliamentary privilege and how to report it was brought into sharp focus at the end of May 2011. Once again a footballer was rumoured to have been having an affair with a model but a superinjunction prevented both the media and his paramour from naming him. This gave rise to the very strange situation wherein Imogen Thomas, one half of the equation, could be interviewed but was not allowed, under threat of legal sanction, to mention her lover’s name, while simultaneously that name was being spread virally via Twitter. Nevertheless, both print and broadcast media stuck by the letter of the law until on 23 May John Hemming MP took advantage of parliamentary privilege to name Ryan Giggs and then the name was everywhere, reported under the qualified privilege that parliamentary proceedings allow, even though the court orders were still in place.28

Another important area that journalism courses should cover is what the Americans call civics; in the UK it tends to go under the name public administration. The subject covers knowing what you are entitled to know, as a citizen and as a journalist, about government, governance and governors, whether that is a local council, the Privy Council or the Council of Europe. This has an obvious application for those who have to cover those bodies, but it is relevant to every journalist, whatever their specialism, for who knows when a council will reject, or approve, a planning application for a music venue, a football ground, a restaurant, business premises and so on.

Finally, a good course will go beyond the bare remit of teaching journalism practice and consider the ethical implications of journalism and its effect on individuals and society. There may be some reactionary journalists, old in heart if not in age, who scoff at this venture into philosophy, but it is impossible to be a journalist for any length of time without coming across some situation that requires you to make an ethical judgement, even if it is about whether to accept a free meal at the restaurant you are reviewing.

A checklist applicable to courses might look like this:

- Accreditation – is the course accredited by the BJTC, PTC, NCTJ or Skillset? This does not guarantee absolute quality (there will always be a range of provision) but it does mean essential standards have been met. The NCTJ accredits far more courses than the other industry bodies, but if you really want a career in broadcast or magazine journalism look for the industry-specific stamp of approval; their websites will provide up-to-date lists of accredited courses.
- Industry reputation – if you include work experience placements in your preparation (as you should), talk to other journalists, editors and publishers about the courses they rate highly. If they did a course themselves get the inside story – after all, curiosity is one of the defining attributes of a journalist.
- Employment record – good course providers should be able to tell you how many of their graduates have got journalism jobs, what kinds of job and where.
- Cost – some courses, such as the postgraduate qualifications offered by Cardiff and City universities, are expensive, and this means a substantial number of people find them unaffordable. Don’t bankrupt yourself in the attempt to get qualified but do look at value for money. Ask what facilities are available to students, how much contact time with tutors there is, whether there is a full-time course leader.
- Bursaries and scholarships – does the course provider, college or university offer student bursaries or scholarships? How many, how much, how are they awarded?
• Play the field – don’t put all your eggs in the basket of one course. Apply to several, even if you really only want to get into one of them. Not only will this broaden your chances overall, it will also mean that you might be able to use an offer from your less-favoured choice as leverage on your first choice.

Finally, never make the mistake of thinking that your course can teach you everything and once you have graduated that’s it. Even when you have acquired an accredited qualification, you will not have finished learning about being a journalist. No course, no matter how highly regarded, will be able to expose you to every situation you will meet; the law is in a constant state of revision and evolution, and new technologies and models of communication will guarantee that your career continuously reshapes itself. If you think you can stop learning, and thinking, about what you do, then you might as well give up before you start.

This section began with a reminder that journalism has a somewhat chequered history when it comes to trust between writer and reader, but now the situation is more complex than ever before – journalism today is a two-way process, so it is vital to listen to and engage with the readers. The most exciting, and the most frightening, thing about this is that no-one knows how best to do it. Journalism needs a new way to boost its trustworthiness and it could be you – not Rupert Murdoch or Steve Jobs – who discovers a route to salvation.

remember

• Newspapers, magazines and broadcasters all used to offer traineeships or graduate schemes. Now the industries largely expect would-be journalists to pay for their own training.
• Get as much work experience as you can and start to build a portfolio.
• The accrediting bodies all have slightly different emphases. Research what they represent and decide which offers the best standards for the job you want.
• Getting a qualification will not automatically get you a job; you still need to persuade an employer that you have the right mix of personal and craft skills.
• A qualification is just the start of a lifelong learning process.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Not so very long ago, newspaper journalists stuck to newspapers, magazine journalists to magazines and broadcast journalists to broadcasting. There were clear lines of demarcation and not a little looking down on each other. Now the situation is very much more fluid. Not only is it far easier and more common to move from one platform to another, both print and broadcast media have in common the need to work online.

Many journalism skills are clearly transferable – knowing how to find information, interview sources, identify the heart of a story and, crucially, how to tell the story.

That said, there are still craft-specific skills attached to each medium, whether that is the ability to create a clear news story from a jumble of background information, to write a long feature that holds the reader’s attention, to use a variety of camera shots that stitch a visual narrative together or to employ search engine optimisation that will make it easy for potential readers to find your story among the mass of material online.

Activity: If you could design a training course for journalists from scratch what would it include and why?
CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Print journalism in developed economies has been in decline for at least 15 years, though it thrives in many parts of the world.
- Nevertheless, the print media still generate substantial turnover and profit.
- Newspapers and magazines have broadened their output to incorporate websites, apps for smartphone and tablets like the iPad, and social media such as Twitter and Facebook.
- Strong democracies need a reliable flow of information to allow citizens to make decisions, but newspapers and magazines are commercial entities with no statutory duty to fulfil a fourth estate role.
- Advertising revenue allowed newspapers to free themselves from political patronage and bribery but may leave them open to other pressures.
- Newspaper journalists – in fact journalists in general – have lost a significant amount of trust from many people.
- Although anyone can be a journalist, journalists need certain skills and knowledge to work effectively and restore lost trust.

THINKING IT THROUGH

Print vs digital

To think of this as a contest is to approach the issue from completely the wrong angle – it is not a matter of either/or because journalism exists in both physical and digital formats and readers expect to access it in the medium of their choice. To reach any constructive position, that ‘vs’ must be replaced by a ‘+’ and declarations of intent must be replaced by a series of questions that cover general and specific grounds:

- What properties does print have that digital does not, and how can these properties be used to take journalism forward? (And vice versa – the answers may or may not mirror each other.)
- How can the power to measure what readers want to read be harnessed in journalism’s favour?
- What does tablet-based publishing offer that traditional print newspapers and magazines do not?
- Given the global spread of mobile phones, their increasing smartness, and people’s apparent willingness to pay for their services, how can journalism make an impact on this miniature screen-based platform?

In fact that last point can be taken even further, into an examination of what journalism means in this context. Are the mobile services that give Indian farmers or fishermen information about current market prices journalism? If you think they are not, ask yourself how they differ in principle from what the Financial Times or the Wall Street Journal do. Does it make a difference that one concerns perishable material goods belonging to poor people in a developing economy and the other (more usually) the abstract concept of share value to rich people in a highly-developed economy? Or that one concerns simple data presented in a straightforward way and the other involves simple data wrapped up in jargon and complicated syntax? If one of the things that characterises journalism is the provision of reliable or verified information then there are grounds for including such mobile services in journalism’s big tent without regard to simplicity or complexity.
But perhaps simplicity works better in some contexts than others and, when considering it in relation to the decline of print newspapers, we might be looking in the wrong direction. Rather than the form of the medium (i.e. print), perhaps it is the form of the content that should be under question. In his book *Everything Bad is Good for You*, Stephen Johnson suggests complexity is the new goal – computer games, for example, ‘have become more challenging at an astounding rate’... games are growing more challenging because there’s an economic incentive to make them more challenging – and that economic incentive exists because our brains *like* to be challenged (2005: 182).

If we accept this premise it could be taken to mean local news reporting is too simple but perhaps that is, itself, too simple an inference. Instead, it might be more helpful to think of ways in which complexity of the sort found in video games could be added, or better still built in, to journalism. Potential solutions would need to be contextual – that is to say, no single answer will fit every situation; they must be thought through on their own merits and needs – and wide-ranging. It would be ridiculous for journalism to ape video games by adding virtual rewards to news stories, discovery and collection of which would take readers up to new levels – or would it? Readers of print newspapers have certainly responded to physical rewards in the past (discounts, reader offers, sets of encyclopedias) so there is no reason why the principle should not work if the right digital rewards are offered and applied in the right way.

**Ask yourself:** what information do readers want and how do they want it? Use as broad a definition of ‘reader’, ‘information’ and ‘want’ as you can.

### Profit vs public good

Or to put it another way, how can the apparently contradictory demands of capitalist commerce and fourth-estate journalism be reconciled? After all, newspapers and magazines need to make money if they are to be able to pay for the raw materials and industrial processes that go into them, not to mention the journalists they employ to create content. The question is whether they should be considered purely commercial entities or if there is some special quality that demands greater protection.

This is a far from simple question and there are no pat answers. Barrie Jones, quoted earlier in this chapter, made a very interesting point when he said: ‘To date, it suited that model of profitability to get the most credible and quality based journalism that we could.’ Read one way this statement can be seen as an admission that ‘credible and quality based journalism’ is no longer such an important consideration, that perhaps celebrity gossip has filled the gap, but read another way it can be seen as an acknowledgement that there is considerable doubt and confusion about what will now support a ‘model of profitability’.

This leads in turn to numerous other questions, among them:

- Why do people buy newspapers?
- Should newspapers be owned by the people who read them or by some kind of trust rather than by profit-seeking companies?
- Should the state provide subsidies to newspapers (for production) or to their readers (for consumption), the reverse of a tax on knowledge?
- To what extent do people want to contribute to their newspapers?
- How important are advertisements to readers?
- What should the relationship between profit and investment be?
Ask yourself: Would it be more dangerous to have state-subsidised newspapers than to allow the free market to determine content and which would promote greater trust in the product?

**Regulation vs trust**

The YouGov/Prospect survey of trust cited earlier in the chapter revealed a distinct difference between television and newspaper journalists; the broadcasters had a significantly higher level of public trust. One of the questions this raises must be: does television journalism have more trust because it is more heavily regulated? Does the fact that output is overseen by the Independent Television Commission, the Radio Authority, the Broadcasting Standards Commission, the BBC Trust, as well as Ofcom itself, give people more confidence in its reliability?

This may have been something print media should have considered more seriously before the Press Complaints Commission brought an end to its own existence in March 2012 during the Leveson Inquiry. The PCC had positioned itself as a mediator rather than a regulator, it only responded to complaints rather than initiating its own investigations, and it had no statutory powers of enforcement. Membership was not even compulsory, so when Richard Desmond’s company Northern & Shell refused to pay the levy in January 2011, the *Daily Express, Sunday Express, Daily Star, Daily Star Sunday* newspapers, along with *OK!, New! and Star* magazines were no longer subject to PCC rulings and the PCC dropped all outstanding complaints against them. There have been a number of proposals for a new regulatory body (the Royal Society of Arts recorded a debate on the topic that can be viewed or listened to here: [http://bit.ly/leGqZd](http://bit.ly/leGqZd)) but nothing will be decided until Lord Leveson has published the findings of his inquiry.

Of course, loss of trust in newspaper journalists may also have arisen from the fact that some of those working for publications that did subscribe to the PCC performed illegal acts such as phone tapping, some undertook morally dubious forms of entrapment by dressing up in exotic costumes and some just treated their sources in an extremely shabby way or simply fabricated quotes and events (for example Juliet Shaw’s experience at the hands of the *Daily Mail*). When things like this occur the new news media – blogs, Twitter, Facebook – allow victims to spread the word about what happened to them instantly and globally. As Jeff Jarvis notes of a politician embroiled in scandal, how can anyone ‘still be stupid enough to think that the coverup won’t be what kills them’. Given this dichotomy between media forms, how would the demands for cross-media ownership rules to be relaxed work in practice? If effected, relaxation would allow the same person or company to own local newspapers, television stations and radio channels so, hypothetically speaking, not only could all local media share a social or political viewpoint, a vindictive proprietor could conduct a campaign against an individual in regulated form on television and radio and in unregulated form in print.

**Ask yourself:** If cross-media ownership were allowed, would newspapers gain trust from their association with more regulated media, would television and radio lose trust because of their association with unregulated media – or would the majority of viewers/readers not notice or care?

**What makes a journalist a journalist?**

When George Brock, the Head of Journalism at City University (London), considered that question in his inaugural lecture he identified four essential characteristics that
could separate journalism from the mass of information that has become available to everyone all the time:

- verification – the elimination of doubt about what has happened;
- sense-making – provides context or values; may go under the labels of reporting, analysis, comment or opinion;
- witness – many situations are still best captured, with whatever technology is available, by an experienced eyewitness;
- investigation – hidden stories require skill, experience, patience and resources to tell.

(He also has an interesting take [pages 9–10] on what might be considered ‘complexity’ in Stephen Johnson’s sense, discussed above.)

These are not the only things that journalists need to be able to do, but they are the things Brock regards as the ‘pillars of trust’, things he considers to be most important in the attempt to distinguish journalists from those who simply provide information or raw data.

Notice what is missing from that list – there’s no mention of shorthand, for example, no mention of the need for a qualification in Public Administration; in fact there is practically nothing that could be found directly on a journalism course syllabus. But that doesn’t mean those skills or qualifications aren’t there – a moment’s analysis will show that shorthand fits very neatly into ‘witness’ (it’s a way of recording information quickly and accurately, not an end in itself) and knowledge of how civic affairs are conducted could fit into both ‘sense-making’ and ‘investigation’. Rather than clogging up his analysis with detail Brock focused on the larger building blocks, which allowed him to strip away the superstructure and leave only the essence.

Brock makes good and defensible points about all of these characteristics, but in the end none of them actually defines either what journalism is or what a journalist should be able to do:

- Verification only requires questions to be asked of the right sources – lawyers, accountants, doctors, shop assistants, garage mechanics do it all the time.
- Sense-making is something that anyone telling a story of any kind does; a good teacher can turn a jumble of facts into sense for her pupils.
- Witness – we are all witnesses and journalists increasingly rely on non-journalists for their first-hand accounts, as well as their photographs and videos.
- Investigation – it is possible to make a strong argument that many journalists are in the worst possible position to undertake a deep investigation. Many lack the forensic skills to interpret financial data, for example, while specialist reporters may be too compromised by their relationships with important sources to risk delving under the surface. Investigation might well be handled better by an accountant or a scientist.

We have already established that journalism is not a profession; there is no standard corpus of knowledge that all journalists must know, there is no single body to which journalists are answerable, there is no way of preventing anyone from calling themselves a journalist. Furthermore, there are ever-increasing numbers of people doing what journalists have traditionally done and there is no way of stopping them.

**Ask yourself**: the question – what makes a journalist a journalist?
NOTES

1 http://www.thewrap.com/media/column-post/daily-review-stunningly-beautiful-probably-addictive-and-just-little-fluffy-24403?page=0,0
2 http://mcheters.com/2011/02/02/the-daily-impressive-but-hardly-innovative
3 http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/technology/shanerichmond/100006286/the-daily-ipad-app-review-a-complete-failure-of-imagination
4 http://www.oecd.org/document/48/0,3343,en_2649_33703_45449136_1_1_1_1,00.html See also http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/jun/17/newspaper-circulation-oecd-report
5 Available at: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/id/200708/idselect/idcomuni/122/12202.htm; or at [pdf]: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/id/200708/idselect/idcomuni/122/12212i.pdf
6 http://www.stock-analysis-on.net/NYSE/Company/Sony-Corp/Ratios/Profitability
7 http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/jun/17/newspaper-circulation-oecd-report
8 http://www.stock-analysis-on.net/NYSE/Company/Sony-Corp/Ratios/Profitability
9 http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=6&storycode=41326
11 http://www.assemblywales.org/cr-ld7563-e.pdf
12 Ibid. p. 9.
13 Barrie Jones, Editor-in-Chief of NWN Media, publisher of newspapers in the north of Wales, ibid. p. 7.
14 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gresham’s_law
17 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/id/200708/idselect/idcomuni/122/12207.htm
18 http://www.assemblywales.org/cr-ld7563-e.pdf
20 http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/mcewen07.htm
21 http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-ownership/rules.pdf
22 http://www.assemblywales.org/cr-ld7563-e.pdf
23 Ibid.
24 http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2010
26 http://today.yougov.co.uk/sites/today.yougov.co.uk/files/YG-Archives-Pol-PublicTrust-190810.pdf
28 There is an interesting summary of the situation at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/seealso/2011/05/daily_view_2.html
29 See note 14.
30 http://nosleeptilbrooklands.blogspot.com/2011/01/true-story-of-daily-mail-lies-guest.html

WEBSITE LINKS

http://georgebrock.net/ George Brock is the Head of Journalism at City University, London. His blog frequently carries interesting think pieces about how journalism is evolving and how journalists can prepare themselves.
http://www.buzzmachine.com/  Jeff Jarvis, a former journalist, teaches journalism at the City University of New York, has devised some very innovative courses, is a vigorous commentator on the media scene and, among other things, wrote What Would Google Do?

http://tabloid-watch.blogspot.com/  As its sub-heading declares, this is a blog about bad journalism. Read it and begin to understand why trust has seeped away.


http://www.niemanlab.org/  The Nieman Journalism Lab, based at Harvard University, posts a wealth of news and analysis to its website. Worth looking at for the onward links alone.

http://www.poynter.org/  The Poynter Institute is a school dedicated to teaching and inspiring journalists and media leaders. Content on the site reflects its American location but there is a wealth of relevant material.

http://pressstink.org/  Jay Rosen is a journalism professor at New York University. You might not always agree with what he writes but you cannot ignore it.

http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/  Charlie Beckett is the director of POLIS, a journalism and society thinktank.


http://www.ppa.co.uk/training/  PTC website for magazine qualifications.

http://www.bjtc.info/  BJTC website for broadcast qualifications.

RECOMMENDED READING


A wide-ranging and comprehensive overview of the many factors that have shaped and changed journalism in the UK.


A key text for anyone interested in how print has affected the world.


Takes a scalpel to newspapers and examines the various component parts.


An extensive history of print journalism.


An essential introduction to all aspects of print magazines and magazine journalism.


Gives a thorough insight into the skills needed to work in print journalism, with chapters by selected experts.

REFERENCES


