

BR(E)AKING the news

JOURNALISM, POLITICS
AND NEW MEDIA

Janey Gordon, Paul Rowinski and Gavin Stewart (eds)

Peter Lang

Introduction

What is happening in the world this very day?

Has an earthquake rocked part of the globe? Is a conflict causing thousands of people to flee for their lives? Is a more long term event looming, – is a famine developing? What will be the economic consequences for that area of the world? Who will suffer from this disaster? And, *who* will benefit? What are the most recent machinations of authorities and governments? What of other matters termed ‘news’, – personal triumph and loss? What is the most recent, juicy peccadillo of those whose names are known via the screen or sports field?

How did *you* discover this breaking news?

The radio or TV? A micro blog, an RSS feed or news website? A printed, paper copy of a newspaper?

How do you know it is true?

How did you pay for the information? Do you regard a robust news industry and incisive journalism as a fundamental benefit to democratic society? Without funding of some sort, the news services will break down.

Where did the material come from?

Was it acquired fairly and ethically? Should brakes be put on the news media in terms of how it functions?

These are the themes of this book of edited chapters. In the past few years the news industry and the journalists who supply it with content have been under pressure to supply news using the latest technologies and develop novel ways to do this, that appear cheap or free to the news consumer.

Journalists and news producers around the globe have found new methods of discovering information and disseminating it as these chapters will attest.

It is one of the more unfortunate side effects of the widespread adoption of digital media that it has tended to foster overly simplistic thinking about media change. It has encouraged an unhealthy separation between that which is swept up into the rhetoric of 'new' media and that which is seen as 'old'.

It is clear from the examples provided by the chapters in this book that something much more subtle is occurring across the globe. These examples suggest that we need to think both more holistically about media communication as a series of ever changing, culturally embedded systems and much more specifically about how these systems play out in reality, both in terms of time and place. In some areas, such as the tribal regions of Pakistan, radio is the 'new' medium, in the sense that it has provided a new voice to a significant anti-liberal force in the region. Likewise, in the Hausa speaking parts of West Africa we can see that radio and the mobile phone have interacted to produce an interesting shift in the mediation of the life of the region. In the developed world, it is clear from the case of phone hacking in the UK that a devilish brew of new technology adoption, myopic business practices and unethical or illegal behaviour have revealed that elements of the UK print media are quite capable of being 'new' when it suits their agenda.

The first section of the book concerns the crisis in the news industry in the UK during 2011–2012, where a series of unethical journalistic practices culminated in a major inquiry, the shaft of which is still quivering as we go to press. However the origins and intricacies of this crisis may be seen as starting much earlier. In chapter one Julian Petley details the case of Operation Motorman, a police investigation that unearthed a quite unprecedented series of data thefts of private records of individuals. The chapter questions the journalistic defense of 'public interest', – exposing wrong doing, corruption and criminality, – as opposed to the misuse of 'public interest', to justify intrusion. Chapter two continues with this theme, in a chapter written by an experienced journalist, Kate Ironside, who examines the UK phone hacking scandal over two decades and how it has become pivotal in possible future regulation of the UK press. That

regulation may (or may not?) be based on the recommendations of the inquiry led by Lord Justice Leveson, which was prompted by the events of the earlier chapters. It was to this inquiry that even a media magnate such as Rupert Murdoch had to give account of his actions and acquaintance with the practices taking place in his newsrooms. Ivor Gaber analyses Mr Murdoch's testimony to the inquiry. Is he the newspaperman with printers' ink running through his veins, or the corporate boss of a massive global media conglomerate? Paul Rowinski takes up this theme but includes another media mogul, Silvio Berlusconi, and demonstrates how both the Berlusconi and Murdoch media have used their front pages to deepen Euroscepticism and support nationalistic views. Jon Silverman continues the topic of Euroscepticism in chapter five and analyses the way in which the UK press has reported the Human Rights Act in terms that make it unpalatable to a British voter and present it as a threat to Britain's 'identity'.

The following two chapters look at the media in developing countries, Pakistan and Nigeria. Ali Usman Saleem and Sayeeda Syed, both Pakistani nationals describe the illegal radio stations run by the Taliban in the remote areas of the country, which are used for coercion of the local people. This is followed by Janey Gordon and Umar Lawal Maradun's work on users of mobile phones in northern Nigeria for both everyday activities but also for accessing radio and responding to the media. It is an example which may be replicated in many developing areas. Both chapters also point to the impact of illiteracy in these areas and the need for trustworthy news sources that are readily accessible to the audiences.

The next chapters focus on Twitter. Tim Markham argues that in Arab countries Twitter is a serious journalistic tool and, in countries where being a journalist may be a difficult or dangerous occupation, its use and content should not be taken lightly. Lee Hall, Neil Farrington and John Price support this view in their chapter which examines how Twitter is being used in sports reporting, – by clubs to bypass the news media and communicate directly with fans but also by sportsmen and women to bypass their own press office and give a personal view. Significantly, sports journalists can also use Twitter to access and communicate with their audience and bring expertise and veracity to the tweets.

Chapters ten and eleven are both research reports. Axel Bruns, Tim Highfield and Stephen Harrington point to the speed of take up of Twitter in Australia and have studied the way that 'links' to news stories are passed between Twitter users. They found that the trusted authoritative news sources are still the established Australian newspapers. In the second report, Sonya Yan Song, Fei Shen, Mike Z. Yao and Steven S. Wildman chart the results of software they have designed to capture the news stories censored and deleted from Chinese news sites.

The last three chapters of this book are of particular interest to those teaching journalism. David Brake suggests that User Generated Content (UGC) may be a mixed blessing to journalists and cautions wariness when making use of it as a news source. He reminds us that not all news consumers will have access to UGC or wish to contribute and this risks the most vocal users being the only views portrayed. Susan Jacobson then prompts us to recall the core values of journalism, namely good writing, solid story composition, fact checking and verification. She believes that these do not change despite the new technologies introduced into newsrooms. Finally, Gavin Stewart examines examples of Wikipedia pages dealing with war and conflict. He concludes by urging educators and journalists to not only read the pages but to make use of the ability to contribute and edit them and take part in the Wikipedia community.

Readers are also invited to read the Notes on Contributors, as there is surely not another such varied and informed mix of authors, journalists and academics, practitioners and commentators. They have all been a delight to work with and we would like to thank them and acknowledge their work and enthusiasm.

— JANEY GORDON, PAUL ROWINSKI, GAVIN STEWART:
Bedfordshire 2013