The Never Ending Story - Making Sense of the 21st-Century News Cycle

TECHNICALLY TRUE: News and Research in the Digital Age

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12:15 pm - 1:15 pm
Q. How could the ways news is created, distributed and consumed affect our perception of its reliability today?

• In many polls, a great majority of Americans express distrust in media and journalists.

• In the 21st-century, news is not just created ‘professionals,’ but also citizen journalists, bloggers, YouTube contributors, etc. A new kind of journalism — social journalism — (CUNY Graduate School of Journalism!) asks communities what stories they NEED — journalist work with non-journalists to create stories.

• Twitter and social media have changed the way stories are shared. Did you know that Twitter has influenced the way stories are created?
Q. How could the ways news is created, distributed and consumed affect our perception of its reliability in the 21st century?

• New digital platforms especially mobile (smart phones) have changed the way ‘content’ is produced and consumed. Smaller screen real estate means that stories need to be shorter (and often visual). What does this mean for reliability?

• New business models have ‘disrupted’ most every news organization — so that journalists have to reach audiences (or they won’t work!) Metrics rule. The traditional ‘firewall’ between editorial and advertising has been breached.

• Entirely new kinds of journalism have been developed using technology (e.g., blogging, data journalism, data visualization, social journalism)
Issue #1: The Density of Information in Media Has Been Reduced

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- New York Times (Twitter @nytimes)
Issue #2: News Stories Are Packaged Differently Depending on the Device / The Way They Are Consumed

• Digital Journalists re-imagine how stories can be told using all of today's devices..., combining different elements (text, photos, videos, VR, data, etc.)

• How Stories Are Consumed:

• 'Lean Forward' (browser -- intensive focus / reading / viewing / clicking through content)

• 'Lean Back' (passive viewing, like a video)

• 'Walking Around' (mobile)
Issue #2: News Stories Are Packaged Differently Depending on the Device / The Way They Are Consumed

CONTINUOUS -- Telling a story from beginning to end (traditional, long-form journalism)

COMPREHENSIVE -- A simulation, or a tool to explore census, economic or other data

IMMERSIVE -- E.g., virtual reality / video

These types of digital journalism can be combined -- continuous / immersive (Fractured Lands @ NYT)

Journalists today can fit a story to different media to reach readers in different, more effective way, on different devices. Photos, video, VR are not add-ons, but an intrinsic part of the process of creating and publishing journalism.
Issue #3: Today, Journalists Need to Care about Metrics and Commerce

• In the past a strong 'firewall' existed between the editorial side of news / media organizations and the business side.

• Newspapers didn't really know if a story (or newspaper section or columnist) was being read or not. *Editors just 'knew' what their readers wanted to read.*
Issue #3: Today, Journalists Need to Care about Metrics and Commerce

- Today, most journalists follow their numbers (analytics rule). They cultivate audiences and followers on Twitter and social media. (That’s a job requirement!) *Managing digital audiences / social media is actually a promising career path in media.*

- AI can even automate headlines that will generate the most interest (used at major online newspapers).

- Advertorial / 'sponsored content' blurs the line between news and commerce.

- Many bloggers accept advertising (undisclosed sponsorship) for favorable stories / reviews.
Issue #4: Sharing Stories / Social Media Means Confirmation Bias

- In the past, newspapers may have helped communities form a sense of identity (even for modern nation-building by printing news in vernacular languages).

- Community newspapers still exist (even in Queens / NYC!)

Issue #4: Sharing Stories / Social Media Means Confirmation Biases

- Blue Feed / Red Feed (wsj.com)

See what each side is saying.... Do we see the biases of other side in our social media feeds?
Issue #5: Today's News Cycle Is Fast, Provisional & 'Never Ending'

• In the past, newspapers printed an 'official' version of events. Readers could comment on stories, but only selectively and much later. Yes, there was 'spot news' reporting (TV / live broadcasts), but print could claim more 'objectivity' and even 'truth.'
Issue #5: Today's News Cycle Is Fast, Provisional & 'Never Ending'

- Today live events can be 'live tweeted' / 'live blogged.'

- Online versions of stories are more 'official,' but can be easily updated as new information becomes available.

- Readers' comments are an important part of many media sites.

- Journalists today mine social media and readers' comments for new sources. **Twitter is valid source for journalists!**

*Twitter and Facebook were an important part of the 'Arab Spring' (A Twitter revolution?)*
Some Solutions / Advice for 21st-Century News Readers

• Add some *slow news* in your media diet (don't rely on Twitter / your Facebook feed or Yahoo! News for your understanding of the world -- that's *fast food*).

• **Responsible media still exists -- read a whole issue if you can.** (News apps let you browse a whole issue of *The New York Times, The Washington Post* and many magazines.) *The New York Times* is free for all CUNY students (Google 'NY Times Academic Pass'.)
Some Solutions / Advice for 21st-Century News Readers

• If you're a liberal / progressive, look at some of the 'responsible' media from the other side. *(The Wall Street Journal* leans right, but still has responsible content.) If you're a conservative, read a responsible source from the Left. *(The New York Times* has high editorial standards -- it's not 'fake news.') *Find out what the other side is saying.*

• **Always, always, always, consider the source** -- check who's behind that tweet or post or blog? Is it reliable? Is it sponsored by a corporation, a Think Tank, etc.?

• **Don't feed the trolls.** *Why waste time on stupidity and rants in comments sections that aren't curated? You have better things to do.*
Some Solutions / Advice for 21st-Century News Readers

- Consider taking a Journalism Course at LaGuardia!

- ENG 210, ENG 211, ENG 212 and ENG 274 are listed in the Pathways Common Core.

- The Journalism Option in the Liberal Arts offers a premiere Journalism Program in the CUNY community college space -- with articulation agreements with Brooklyn College and York College.
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Thank You!

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