21st Century COMMUNICATION

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The Changing Nature of "News"

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What Are News Values?

"Man bites dog" is an old newsroom joke demonstrating what kind of event would be considered universally newsworthy to tell any audience, what would justifiably make it to the printed front page or the opening moments in a television newscast. It is a story that has time-honored news values, including timeliness, proximity, conflict, impact, and unusualness.

The story is timely as well as local, and the conflict arises from the notion that a dog is no longer man's best friend, which has broad implications and consequences. Of course, it is unusual, and if the man biting the canine turns out to be a celebrity, then the story has prominence as well. And if the dog is famous (appears in commercials, movies, or skateboards in a YouTube clip), well, then we have an undeniably newsworthy story with double the celebrity value.

But such simple definitions of news have become splintered and confused in an increasingly chaotic and crowded media landscape. How the local man-bites-dog story is told in the 21st century depends on the audience and the delivery mode—whether it is received as text, digital, or broadcast, or all these combined. The content of the story would not stop at the simplistic text answers to the most fundamental and traditional questions of who, what, where, when, why, and how in an inverted-pyramid-style story of 250 words.

It would be an elective experience for the audience on many platforms and in many shades of intensity driven by personal interests.

Today, a consumer would go to the newspaper's Web site, see the bulleted brief or a simple headline—perhaps 15 words underlined and in blue, click on it, and watch a video of the man being taken away by the police, perhaps following a car chase resulting in a reality-TV-ready arrest. The bitten dog's owners would be interviewed on a separate audio podcast, with links to information about the breed, how to report pet abuse, plus a Flash-enhanced timeline of man-bites-dog incidents in history, as well as a photo slideshow with audio of comments from neighbors and coworkers on the "canine-ivorous" man's recent behavior. A link would be available for a longer text profile of the man who bit the dog, accompanied by a visual graphic of a timeline, explicitly defining the chronology demonstrating how exactly the bite happened, and a separate graphic of the anatomy of a man's head and mouth compared with a dog's. A Man Bites Dog blog would be available for readers to post their comments as well as their own video and audio about related stories. Readers/viewers/users would then vote online their preferences for segments of the story they liked most, and pieces of the story would likely become viral through blogging and social network sites such as MySpace or Facebook, with related photos posted on Flickr. This is a case study demonstrating a model of information flow that is more about less.

The newsworthiness of the story would be closely connected to the voluntary behavior of the audience and would shift according to the needs of that audience. The story would then erupt into a user-driven multimedia package with nearly infinite incarnations involving perhaps one

mobile journalist, several staffers and freelancers, citizen journalists, bloggers, and consumers providing different informational pieces of the totally puzzling experience.

Timeliness, Proximity, Unusualness, Prominence, Impact, Conflict, and Human Interest

The definitions of news have altered because the playing field for news has been disrupted, redefined, and sculpted to court and suit a highly fickle audience. It is an audience no longer defined principally by geography but also by social demographics, age, education, ideology, affiliations, behaviors, and specific media use. They can create a self-motivated audience craving more information about fewer topics or less information about more topics. The 21st-century media landscape for news offers the possibility for consumers to delve into topics a mile wide and inch deep or an inch wide and 100 miles deep. They can be mobile and technologically savvy consumers who no longer sit patiently for the delivery of the newspaper on the front doorstep to read the news or who lounge passively in their living room at the appointed time of 5, 6, 10, or 11 p.m. to watch the newscast delivered by two well-paid anchor readers.

These are often consumers who intend to participate in the choice of news stories offered, the gathering of news, public commentary on the news, and the ongoing news choices made by editors and journalists. This is a different approach to the news than we have seen in the previous media age beginning in the mid-19th century of top-down, elitist, editor-driven journalism. So today's journalism requires a modernized toolbox of news judgment factors. Yes, there is still an audience who waits for the newspaper every morning to enjoy it with a cup of coffee and then unwinds at night with a favorite local newscast. But this is a shrinking audience. The feared extinction of this audience and the necessity for news producers to chase new audiences and capture their attention is why news has changed.

In generations past, "readers needed news and had limited ways to learn about current events," Michael Hirschorn wrote in the December 2007 edition of *The Atlantic*. "Editors would tell us what to read and we would read it. News didn't have to be interesting, because it was important, and any self-styled citizen of the world needed to know what was important" (p. 137).

In the 21st century, not only is the reader/user/participant pressed for time and bombarded by more options for information, but the walls between user and news provider have become porous. In many instances, the barricades have fallen completely away as citizen journalists contribute to mainstream media and to their own viable, vetted citizen journalism Web sites and popular blogs. Since the debut of South Korea's OhmyNews International in 2000 and, later on, domestic citizen journalist hyperlocal sites such as Backfence.com, Goskokie.com, NorthwestVoice.com, and hundreds more, the formerly passive consumers now want to be part of the journalistic process. They want to participate in stories important specifically to them, but they also require the option to consume stories offered by the mainstream press that they could not otherwise find on their own. The question of access in many instances is still insurmountable for citizen journalists. Though bloggers can get press credentials at a national political convention, citizen journalists are still not granted wide backstage access to the events, drawing rooms, and offices of major newsmakers.

A tolerance for top-down "news you should know" that fits rigidly into the old definitions of news as construed by a finite group of journalists in a closed-door editorial meeting has given way to a consumer push for a breadth of stories told in a variety of ways. These stories can forgo the traditional justifications of timeliness, proximity, unusualness, prominence, impact, and conflict, as long as they can be sheltered by the umbrella of human interest.

And it is that humanistic element, the connecting anecdotal link, the character portal leading the audience into the story, that drives the news consumer's desire and appetite for news. The overall dramatic shifts in types of stories from text, digital, audio, and video outlets toward a focusing on citizen sourcing and a casual writing style reflect this cultural reverence for the personal story and a revolutionized set of news definitions. No longer will a story be relevant solely because it delivers news such as "The mayor said Monday" edict. The story must be told in a compelling way across a variety of media, illuminating the stories of individuals while personally connecting to the lives of the audience. It is no longer one door the consumer enters that opens onto the news but a series of doors, windows, hallways, and obscured passages that the consumer can choose from.

Just as the audience has become accustomed to changing cable channels in a millisecond, they can instantly click away from the news site and go somewhere else. Logistically, a printed newspaper now is the last to cross the finish line on news. If something is breaking news and is hot, it has already been reported in a video online, recounted on TV and radio, and blogged about on countless sites. Digital media has stolen print's thunder. So printed news reinforces and reinterprets the news through a different lens, rather than breaking the news first. The consumer already knows that there was a fire in a department store from TV, radio, and Web sites. Now they want to read the longer story of the firefighter who saved the customer.

So many options compete for the news consumer's time that delivering a relevant story across any and every platform becomes a race to offer the most useful, engaging, and informative content. Never has accurate and keen reporting been as crucial or eloquent and insightful multimedia storytelling been as important to capturing the attention of the audience. As the traditional elements of newsworthiness continue to contribute to the decisions of what stories are

played in print, online, and digitally in broadcast and radio, additional forces factor into news judgment.

News does not have to portray a rigid sense of timeliness; the story can be current, ongoing, recent, upcoming, or merely hypothetical. It can also be any item, individual, phase, trend, or event that was previously unknown to the audience. While the news may be commonplace in one area of the community or the world, it is "new" to this target news consumer. Timeliness has become elastic. Just because an event happened yesterday no longer deems it automatically newsworthy. The notion of yesterday's news told today or today's news delivered tomorrow has evaporated as news can be communicated digitally in real time. Traditional timeliness is an antiquated notion left over from an era when citizens would not know of a news item unless it appeared in the newspaper or on radio or television. Because of text messaging, cell phone photography and videography, as well as audio recording on portable digital voice recorders, unfolding news events can often be broadcast live by amateurs on their Web sites. Consider the images and reactions from citizens following any number of recent tragedies; these were urgent, immediate, and raw visuals and commentary that were unfiltered by professional journalists. The lesson of immediacy that was learned in those unfortunate events is that no one has to wait for the reporter to arrive before the "news" is published, disseminated, and absorbed by a wide audience.

Because of the universal accessibility to publishing, a news story is no longer constrained by geographic proximity. A global economy mandates a global information network, so a story about a young girl in Kenya struggling to succeed in school is as engaging and newsworthy as a story about a young girl in Kenosha struggling in school would be to local Wisconsin readers. At a time when we are submerged in the infinite and boundless flow of information online, and Facebook and LinkedIn users swap personal stories across all physical boundaries, it becomes less important to define proximity limited by spatial closeness as a news parameter. Human interest serves as the overarching, inclusive bridge.

The irony here is that being unlimited by the shackles of location in mainstream media, hyperlocal news has built an enormous following in community journalism sites, weekly publications, zoned newspaper editions, newspaper Web sites, and blogs. Traditional media outlets such as newspapers, magazines, and the local television or radio station no longer have exclusive rights over local news. A single community blogger can succeed in informing a local audience of local city council votes or even the latest scores in middle school football. An audience can be built around a garden club, alumni group, or local transportation issue, offering news that would no doubt be ignored by the larger press.

"What does it mean to me?" is still a question the news consumer wants answered in his or her media. While the impact, importance, and consequence of a story for the consumer can be subjective, it remains influential as a factor in news judgment. But the interest quotient has shifted from the flat response "Now I know" to "What can I do about it now?" The news user in this current 21st-century iteration wants to take the information from a simple story told and apply it elsewhere, transforming facts into action, perhaps, and using this story as a springboard for deeper examination, reflection, active feedback, involvement, and possible advocacy.

For instance, at the end of the 20th century, a simple text story of 10 or more inches in the metro section of a newspaper reporting on a city council vote to increase property taxes in a suburb or city would quote only council members on their official comments during the meeting. Now, however, that simple story evolves into a multimedia package telling citizens what action they can take, how to contact council members, and how to have a home's value reassessed, providing profiles with photos and audio of each council member and the mayor, along with a podcast of the meeting, a video of citizen reaction to the vote, an avenue for bloggers to post suggestions, as well as photos of homeowners and their homes affected by the property tax hike. Still, the news of the tax increase may be the same, but the manner in which the news is delivered is a thousand times more complex, urgent, and democratic. The rationale for that delivery has morphed into a more layered and faceted portrayal of the news guided by the consumer's needs. News gathering has become much more complicated, enhanced, some say, by the technology of multimedia tools, while others claim that the multimedia options have only burdened the consumer with unnecessary bells and whistles that dilute the impact of the message, distracting the consumer from the core news itself.

While unusualness still holds true as one undeniable factor in defining the focus for news; the story must be more than just odd, such as the man-bites-dog story. As the media reaches far beyond the boundaries of town, city, county, state, country, and continent, what is unusual for one audience group is commonplace for another culture, and not even a distant culture. What is understood as an everyday occurrence in the far western suburbs of Chicago may be unheard of within the city limits. Is this a story that for the main audience would be unknown or inaccessible without the journalist's intervention? Is this a trend, event, or person so little understood or examined broadly that an illuminating and enterprising story informing the audience would be edifying and useful to the consumer? Or is the consideration of this as unusual merely a reflection of the journalist's myopic view of the community and the broader world? And would publishing this as news alienate part of the audience and only underscore the notion of the traditional ivory tower editors making decisions disconnected from the broader consumer's interests? The element of unusualness must be viewed through the lens of diversity and inclusiveness, as news gatherers must embrace a higher sensitivity to all groups whether they are defined by age, race, gender, religion, ideology, disability, geography, education, income, or behavior. Because a news item is personally unfamiliar to the journalist or editor, this does

not grant it unusual status. In the sweeping reach possible with 21st-century media, a narrow view of newsworthiness may render the news itself irrelevant.

An individual's celebrity or prominence can control decisions of newsworthiness, but who is labeled a celebrity in the transaction of news has changed. While webzines, blogs, television entertainment news shows, and gossip columns in the mainstream press have maintained an obsession with the comings, goings, arrests, births, deaths, and outrageous acts of a handful of Hollywood and MTV royalty, the culture's celebration of the amateur has invited a new brand of individual into the spotlight. A college student can become globally well-known for a clever YouTube clip, while a diligent inventor can be vaulted into googledom for an ingenious solution to a universal problem, such as a prescription bottle that easily opens or a coffee mug that does not spill. Just by inclusion in the story itself, the individual secures his or her own celebrity and prominence. Being listed as a source in a reaction story run on a popular Web site can turn the average Jane Doe into an oft-quoted and sought after expert on even the most obscure topic.

Conflict is a historically traditional sustained news value and is a fundamental component of human nature. A 2007 study in *Newspaper Research Journal* of Yahoo! News found that both producers and users of news ranked conflict as the news value occurring second most often in more than 1,000 news stories, ranked only behind impact. It appears that no matter how the news changes in content, style, or sourcing, the drive to understand conflict, whether it is political, social, professional, interpersonal, or more general, influences decisions to present news and information that contain these dramatic human elements.

Economic Factors Affecting the News

The first decade of the 21st century was tumultuous for the traditional media. Newspaper closings, layoffs, downsizing, revenue slides, breakups, and sell-offs of major chains such as Knight Ridder and Tribune Company seemed to further erode a wounded industry scrambling for identity, relevance, and profitability. Declining circulation among the majority of the country's newspapers had been in effect for more than 20 years, and circulation was only stabilizing or gaining in a few markets. The former editor of *The Wall Street Journal,* Paul Steiger, reminisced on his 40 years as a journalist in a *Journal* column in December 2007:

> The cornucopia of national, international and business news, sports and especially opinion available free on the Web is rich beyond historical parallel. Anyone with a fact, a comment, a snapshot or a videoclip can self-publish and instantly compete with the professionals. . . . What happens next? Change, rapid and largely unpredictable. Nearly every company in the industry needs major new revenue, big cost reductions or a healthy dollop of each. (para. 8, 47)

As readers fell away from traditional print news, and advertising revenues migrated online, with newspaper Web sites accounting for nearly 34% of local online advertising in 2007, news consumers also moved online, but not exclusively. Consumers did not report reading only the newspaper or only going online for news. According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism in the 2007 *The State of the News Media* report, about 92 million people around the country get their news online, compared with about 51 million Americans who buy a daily newspaper and 124 million who read the printed newspaper. This number accounts perhaps for all those copies left on tables in Starbucks and dental offices across the country as some single copies of newspapers have several readers. In 2007, 90 newspapers in this country had a reach of 64% of adults in their communities each week. In spite of closings of papers such as the *Cincinnati Post* and the threat of closing at the *Chicago Sun-Times,* as well as layoffs and firings at the *Los Angeles Times, Philadelphia Inquirer,* and others, there were more than 1,450 newspapers in the United States as of 2006, some with healthy and slightly increased circulations.

In a January 2008 opinion column in *The Washington Post,* the writer David Simon, executive producer of the HBO series *The Wire,* wrote,

> Isn't the news itself still valuable to anyone? In any format, through any medium—isn't an understanding of the events of the day still a salable commodity? Or were we kidding ourselves? Was a newspaper a viable entity only so long as it had classifieds, comics and the latest sports scores? (para. 6)

The answer is no, a newspaper is more than that, and news is more than ink on paper. But the notion of what is considered the news of the day has changed. And how the news is delivered previously molded the content, but now content must be adaptable across delivery modes. The reality is that news outlets can no longer be considered in separate silos, as entities of printed text, digital text on a laptop, video on a screen, or audio from a car radio. Newspaper companies have succeeded in presenting a multitude of online formats, as radio stations also present slideshows, photo galleries, video, and text on their Web sites. While the talk of convergence journalism has been prevalent since the start of the 1990s, what is necessary in the first part of this century is to view the news media industry as one in flux, at the cusp of emergence journalism.

Few consumers exclusively read the newspaper or check news online; there is crossover, there is a hybrid consumer who gathers information from a variety of sources—print newspaper, multiple online sources, news magazines, niche magazines, radio, television—as if he or she is building a dinner plate at a salad bar. One would think that the consumer is not just heaping vanilla pudding or green beans on his or her plate over and over but, instead, sampling from many different sources and delivery modes to build a well-rounded information flow. A 2006 Pew Internet and American Life study reported that

71% of broadband users in this country got their news online daily and 43% of Americans get their news from reading the physical newspaper. Additionally, the study showed that 32% of those surveyed reported that they get their news online from the Web site of their local paper.

The nearly limitless offerings of news and information and the many transformations of news outlets has succeeded in creating a monster of an audience—at once demanding, disloyal, fleeting, and capricious—who can easily be misunderstood. News companies and news purveyors may have initiated their brands as a print product but know that they must continue to offer an expanded online presence, no longer limited to stories "shoveled" onto the site after they have been printed. A print news company's Web site will also offer audio, video, photos, interaction, expanded graphics, as well as value-added text in an effort to differentiate the products and to make the experiences of reading a newspaper and the news company's Web site distinctive and separate.

For instance, a news Web site from a traditional newspaper company such as *The Washington Post* or the *Chicago Tribune* will daily offer photo slideshows related to stories or existing on their own without print support, as well as opportunities for the news consumer to add comments in a blog or contribute his or her own media. The *Tribune* newspaper refers to online-only offerings, and the Web site is not a reproduction of the paper. For instance, on January 25, 2008, the *Tribune* Web site listed no full stories but rather little text, more than 50 headlines, photos that clicked onto videos, photo galleries, and links to columnists, sections, and options to "share your thoughts" and "post your photos." Aside from the headlines, only the lead news story with the largest photo had text, and that was limited to about 20 words. What story could be read in toto was completely the choice of the user and required action by the user. Having a headlines-only home page also suggests that the reader was already familiar with the stories, needed no explanation, and was only clicking for further enlightenment on a story he or she already was aware existed. This is the practice of many newspaper Web sites, from boston.com to USAToday.com, which can offer sometimes more than 100 links to text and multimedia on the homepage.

Changes in Content, Style, and Sourcing

The end delivery mode or presentation of the news information changes how the news is gathered, who gathers it, and who is the intended consumer. Just as the definitions of news have been reshaped, so have the outlets for the news. No longer involved in a monogamous relationship with print readers or a reliable partnership with broadcast viewers, news companies have been forced to reinvent their presentation of news in content, style, and sourcing. The physical news hole or space available for news on paper has been literally shrinking on many major newspapers in an effort to cut costs without taking a more aggressive machete to the newsroom payrolls. Smaller paper dimensions mean fewer stories. Fewer stories may be the result of shrinking newsrooms and restricted budgets. But the online product is still limitless.

News providers then are struggling with brand identity through content. If the content now is received primarily as text on paper, how will the content change if it is received by phone or on a screen on the back of a train seat? Perhaps a recorded interview can be used as an audio podcast and also referred to as quotes in a text story, but repetition would make the story redundant, and new content must be delivered in each platform. If the journalist covering the story has been trained in producing text only, how will the job of that journalist change to accommodate the needs of the news consumer? How will journalists be trained for new roles, or will there be instant turnover to enlist a new staff with multimedia skills and no history as news gatherers? If news providers can make this transition to a cross-platform, multidimensional gaggle of content fluid and easy for consumers to understand and participate in, then the news industry will have succeeded in reinventing itself.

That reinvention will also have to include an adaptive, modernized media business model, one not limited by department store display ads and classified ads for used cars and garage sales. Revenue has been rapidly diminishing from traditional media online, and more inventive models need to be established for content to be available for the consumer. "When people think of the 'media business model,' they usually just think of advertising," wrote Chris Anderson in January 2008 on his blog, The Long Tail, named after his 2006 book, *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More.* He added, "That's a big part of it, to be sure, but as those of us in the media business know, it goes far beyond that." Anderson went on to describe the possibilities for media revenue in cost-per-click ads, banner ads, lead generation, subscriptions, subscriber list sales, brand licensing, syndication, and many more.

But just as the advent of television was falsely heralded as the death of radio and the airplane was feared to signal the death of train travel, the Internet is not the single cause predicting the extinction of print news. It is a complement and supplement to it and vice versa. What is changing is how consumers opt to receive their news and the kind of news they elect to experience, and it is these changes in information flow that are forcing revenue models to be adjusted and redirected. The market for online news offered by traditional print companies is robust: On December 2007, *The New York Times* reported more than 17 million unique visitors to nytimes.com in 1 month, with *USA TODAY* reporting close to 10 million unique visitors for the same period.

Cultural Factors Affecting Content

Everyone knows and understands that the days of waiting for the newspaper to arrive to see who won yesterday's football game are long gone. Consumers already know the

news before it appears in the newspaper the next day. Because of so many competing outlets of information, the newspaper is no longer a time capsule of the day before; it is a more general, personalized account of what is happening now, happened recently, or happened in the distant past, with a new twist. Unless it is an enterprise story—and that is usually a feature—or an investigative reporting exclusive, the odds of the news in the paper being first-time news to readers is slim. The audience already knows what happened because they got it online, from radio, or from TV. So people need a different approach to the same event. They need humanistic stories. They need to deliver to the audience a friendlier product that goes into more depth, answers why, and emphasizes who. The what, when, and where they likely already know. They want more information about the who.

Journalism is not just the rough draft of history; rather, it articulates how we expect and demand delivery of information and what kind of information we seek. Journalism has shifted to become an anecdotal companion to history in the 21st century. As a culture, recently, we have altered the priorities in news to revere personal story over official commentary, which can represent a democratization of news and an implied mistrust of official sources. This change from paradigmatic knowledge to a quest for narrative information controls the kind of story and content. The content is predominantly more narrative and emotional than factual and staccato regurgitations of events in a "he said, they said," format. The notion that consumers of information prefer news to be slower at times and more in-depth, personalized, and humanistic than news told in factoids and bullets tells a lot about how we allow ourselves to be informed as citizens.

More news today than ever before revolves around an individual's personal take on events. This is a reflection of how contemporary culture sanctifies the roles of non-celebrities in society. The flip side is also a cynicism with regard to information offered from official sources. We experience the signs of this reverence for the individual voice throughout the culture. Product Web sites selling everything from Botox injections to White Castle hamburgers, Hanes underwear, diamond rings, and Volvos solicit posts, video, photos, and text from users about their own stories of interaction with the brand. Citibank urges consumers in magazine ads to disclose their own personal anecdotes: "Whatever your story is, your Citi card can help you write it. What's your story?"

It is undeniable that real stories of real people saturate the media landscape both editorially and noneditorially. We're not seeing celebrity spokesmen so much anymore; we are seeing real people tell their stories of car insurance, home sales, makeup, and jeans. This is marketing by anecdote and personal testimony, a move parallel to telling news stories by anecdote and unofficial commentary. It can be a confluence of events that contribute to this sanctifying of personal stories—the paranoia that official sources spin or lie; the need to connect with individuals and feel empathy and compassion for their stories; the belief that reading about others' lives will bring a deeper humanistic understanding or some brand of redemption; and as a result of globalization, a realization that stories of real people offer connection and meaning to our own lives.

The plethora of reality TV shows accordingly reflects this worship of the amateur. Whether it is a show about wife swapping, nannies, or home makeovers, millions tune into the dramas of average citizens relishing their life details, anecdotes, and stories. The formerly voiceless are given voice in a variety of formats for a growing, responsive, and welcoming audience. The popularity of shows such as National Public Radio's *This American Life* or *The Story* demonstrates a cultural appetite for democratic narrative and information shared through the eyes of the individual. The rise in documentaries as film, shown on television, and through podcast or online on current.com also exemplifies a cultural need to understand events through the voices of individuals. News information has gone from a push-down to a pull-up model.

Whether information and news are offered in print, online, or through broadcast, you are more likely in the 21st century to experience news through the portal of a character or an unofficial observer or participant than you are to understand news information through the eyes and ears of an expert or administrator with a title. For example, a news story on a presidential campaign speech will likely begin with an unrehearsed, spontaneous reaction from someone in the audience. With citizen journalism and a higher degree of participation in mainstream journalism from a previously passive audience, the profession has evolved to tell in greater detail the stories of the common man and woman, the person on the street. When you read a story about changes in city services, it will likely begin with an anecdote of a resident who can't get his or her garbage picked up on time. Consider a story about a local parade. A journalist, blogger, or citizen journalist can report the news by talking to everyone standing on the curb waving flags, the spectators and the participants, getting their reaction and focusing on their anecdotes. The end result will be a decent reaction story. These kinds of sources are necessary in stories because they add color, humanity, and depth. So unofficial sources are a good thing, but that does not mean that official sources are bad or immaterial. To be accurately informed, the consumer needs to know with authority how much the parade cost, how many floats were in it, and how many people attended. Unofficial commentary is valuable, but accuracy and correct information still uphold solid journalism. This is not information you can get from the Cub Scout leader on the Snoopy float.

To qualify as fair journalism, the reporter needs to get the final, authoritative word from the head of the parade or a city official, so journalism needs both official and unofficial sources in stories. The shift toward greater prominence and use of unofficial sources should never be at the expense of all official sources. Reliable journalism needs a

balance of both sources in its content. Otherwise, journalism runs the risk of turning into Chicken Little Journalism, or the musings of individuals convinced that they know the truth (the sky did appear to be falling even if it just was an apple falling from the tree) but who are, in fact, spreading untruths and urban myths.

Just as youtube.com changed the face of video, this kind of "younews" is a concept that is changing the tone and content of print journalism. What I call such younews grants a higher significance to stories of ordinary people. Studies from Northwestern University's Readership Institute quantify the attitudes of consumers who decide that they want to read stories about people, not just concepts, facts, and interpretations but stories about real people offering reactions to information they want to know, which makes them smarter and keeps them informed. Perhaps it is the fragmentation of society and the breakdown of genuine in-person communication that creates a craving for storytelling about individuals and a need for community building through narrative. If we can't talk to real people, at least we can read the stories of real people.

Matters of Style

The inclusiveness of this kind of citizen-friendly content breeds a casual tone that has also influenced the style of news writing. The immediate and off-the-cuff approach of blogs has made journalistic style less stiff and formulaic because readers have become accustomed to a less formal top-down approach to their news. While some blogs are merely outlets for rants and personal attacks, or what can be called "blog-bys," the conversational approach embraced on thousands of viable, intelligent, and information-packed, insightful blogs has forced mainstream media to oblige by making the writing style in text, online, and through broadcast more casual and less like "the spokesman said Thursday" kind of news. Blogs are based on opinion and the individual stories of everyday citizens. Bloggers demand that their voices be heard, and newspapers want to be more inclusive of these unofficial voices. So news delivery outlets mimic this voice, the immediacy and accessibility conveyed through a more approachable and understandable style.

Recent history also has played a role in the change of news writing style. Much has been written about how the events of 9/11 have changed journalism. But when viewed with more distance and objectivity, it is easy to see that perhaps the entire industry did not change its practices, but instead a change in tone was manifested in the reporting of more humanistic and emotional stories. The terror that was born that day in New York and Pennsylvania, and echoed throughout the world, contributed to an alteration of the approach to daily journalism. The raw reporting of the day's events allowed a more intimate tone, resulting in writing that was more descriptive and infused with opinion and insight rather than being strictly a rehashing of events through exposition and colorless quotes. It was preferable to tell the stories from the street, using the voices of the people directly affected, speaking about emotion and heartfelt dismay, mainly because the official sources had little to no information. From that day continuing forward, media outlets concentrated more often than previously on description, observation, and direct reaction to the day's events, telling the story in a more personal, humanistic way.

The impact of *The New York Times*'s bold "Portraits of Grief," brief, anecdotal profiles of the fallen of 9/11, on how all news would be written in the future was enormous. News could be informative as well as evocative. No longer was a mainstream media provider expected to be unbiased and straightforward telling just the facts, but rather, a eulogistic tone and reverence for the individual was expected. And because consumers became accustomed to reading the kinds of personal and emotional stories from the weeks and months following 9/11, they did not want to go back to strict hard news. Rather, they began to show a preference for interpretive, descriptive, immediate, personal, and emotional narrative stories as a vehicle for news. It would be like expecting a theatrical audience once invited to view a performance from the main floor of the auditorium before the orchestra pit to go back to the third balcony and rely on opera glasses to absorb the action of the play. Once consumers became accustomed to such softer news deliveries of stories, it would be difficult for them to regain an appetite for news briefs.

The narrative movement in journalism was not born as a result of the events of 2001, but rather, the genre of narrative became more emphasized in more newsrooms in the 21st century than in previous generations. Narrative had been practiced by maverick writers, such as Joan Didion, Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson, and Gay Talese, in the 1960s and 1970s under the genre "new journalism." However, the cultural reverence for storytelling and what can be considered evangelism for bringing the narrative form to daily journalism was energized in the 21st century.

Narrative made the format of news more about craft and style than the objective delivery of news. That is not to say that the masters of the craft, from Tracy Kidder to Alex Kotlowitz, Katherine Boo, and Anne Hull, were not solid reporters making painstaking efforts to be accurate, fair, balanced, and ethical in their stories. But the methodology of narrative writers—applying the craft of fiction writers to the coverage of news events—was widespread and encouraged more often than other forms at the start of the 21st century. It is a form of news storytelling that is highly rewarded by editors and by prize committees, with 73% of the news stories receiving Pulitzer Prizes in 2005 told in the narrative form.

The most talented reporters and writers are granted time to write enterprise stories and given the space to translate assignments into narrative masterpieces, which can be the result of months of investigative reporting and meticulous

writing. The problem is that not everyone is good at writing narrative news and delivering simple information in the narrative form. Not every news story deserves a narrative approach, and not every story should be 50 inches long. As Ken Fuson of the *Des Moines Register* said, "Sometimes there is no universal truth. Sometimes it is just a parade."

What Is News Now and Going Forward?

Contemporary culture has succeeded in altering our perceptions of newsworthiness, forcing us to redefine what is news, away from the time-honored and perhaps outdated news values of unusualness, timeliness, proximity, impact, prominence, consequence, human interest, and conflict.

Many cultural and economic influences have helped us create a demand for information that is conveyed in a different way or in a multitude of platforms, meeting a different set of news value requirements. This is news with an emphasis on individual and unofficial voices, relayed in an intimate style of narrative that conveys information as story, turning newspapers into storypapers and stories into reinforcements of a media company's brand. The author Doris Lessing said in her Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 2007, "It is our stories that will re-create us, when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed." Storytelling is such a powerful tool in our culture and used in the mainstream of news in the 21st century that the recounting of individual stories may serve as a mechanism for readers' understanding of the immediate and larger world of our culture today and for generations to come.

Even with the changing definitions of news and news values, it may well hold true that the man-bites-dog story forever remains newsworthy, captivating us with the base unusualness. And then what could be truly worth waiting for is an exclusive interview with the dog.

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