Television & New Media

http://tvn.sagepub.com

A Contemporary History of Digital Journalism

Ben Scott

Television New Media 2005; 6; 89
DOI: 10.1177/1527476403255824

A Contemporary History of Digital Journalism

Ben Scott
University of Illinois

This article documents the history of online journalism, charting its rise with the internet boom of the mid-1990s and its subsequent decline and stabilization within the present news media market. This history is situated within the larger trajectories of contemporary journalism, paying particular attention to changes in the existing political economic structure of the industry as it assumes digital form, the resultant variations in content and presentation, and the implications for the health of the free press. In the final analysis, this article argues that the move to an online format has exacerbated negative trends that have dogged print journalism for decades. It also extends an existing critique of hyper-commercial journalism by developing the arguments to treat the new institutions and conventions of the digital marketplace.

Keywords: *history; journalism; internet; business*

This article addresses the impact of digital network technology on American journalism. It is both a short history of the past decade of the internet news business and an analysis of the current activities in the industry and the marketplace.[1] By moving through the boom and bust cycle recently traversed by the "new economy" from the point of view of online journalism, I will attempt to explain the current dispensation of the digital news and offer informed arguments on likely developments in the near future. In some ways, this analysis is a measured response to the optimistic proclamations about media and journalism that escorted the uneven but unquestionably monumental development of the internet. But raining on the utopian parade has become a tired sport now that a cursory glance at the new media environment produces laughably little evidence of revolutionary bliss in the public sphere or the culture at large. More pointedly, the task at hand is to extend the existing critical scholarship on journalism and information technology to seriously and thoroughly examine the influence of

TELEVISION & NEW MEDIA
Vol. 6 No. 1, February 2005 89–126
DOI: 10.1177/1527476403255824

the internet—particularly now that it has attained a more stable presence in society. The answer to the question of what network technology will bring to journalism cannot be answered adequately without a deep investigation of the real complexities hidden beneath the oft-spouted generalities of both critics and celebrants. Though there may be no sweeping conclusions to be found, there are certainly better arguments to be made.

To that end, this analysis sits on the shoulders of two separate but related lines of argumentation: (1) journalism is in crisis, as told by journalists, and (2) the political economic structure of the media system and its commercial architects are to blame, as told by journalists, critics, and scholars. These long-standing discussions have yet to be integrated and applied to a thorough treatment of journalism on the internet. It seems an indispensable move at a time when the crisis in journalism worsens and the pace of transformation in the structure of digital media delivery hastens and begins to redirect the primary trajectory of the news industry. The nature of this change of direction is the focus of this study.

To begin, it is essential to recall the depths to which journalism sunk in the 1990s, before and during the rise of the internet. For well over a decade, it has become increasingly clear that the public service mission of democratic journalism has been abandoned by the commercial press in favor of expanding profit margins already swollen to levels of 20 percent to 30 percent. In practice, this has meant shackling the quality of a news organization to the fortunes of the equity market, almost inevitably sacrificing long-term credibility for short-term returns. As a result, and despite a near constant outcry from disillusioned journalists, most editors have seen a striking decline in costly (though essential) journalistic practices such as investigative reporting, foreign correspondence, maintaining a large and diverse staff of reporters, and performing as the watchdog of the political and economic seats of power—which increasingly underwrite their erstwhile media adversaries. Less costly and more saleable trends have emerged such as sensationalism, confrontational mock debates, low-budget and single-coverage fare, disproportionate coverage of marketable business news, homogenized content spread across commonly owned media, blurred distinctions between editorial and advertising content, and an extensive reliance on press releases and publicity from government agencies and corporations to fill the news hole. In the clutter of advertiser-friendly infotainment, the complexities of serious political coverage are often subordinated to entertainment values and squeezed to the margins—where they are more easily shaped into predictably shallow and homogeneous forms privileging image over issue. Over time, patterns of selective coverage (notably guided by omission) have emerged that project and reinforce as normative imbalanced attitudes toward social institutions, cultural practices, and economic structures. James Carey (1997) eloquently summarized the status quo:

> It is a journalism of fact without regard to understanding through which the public is immobilized and demobilized and merely ratifies the judgments of experts delivered from on high. It is, above all, a journalism that justifies itself in the public's name but in which the public plays no role, except as an audience; it is a receptacle to be informed by experts and an excuse for the practice of publicity. (p. 247)

Journalism has much more in common today with the elites it supposedly regulates than with the public on whose behalf it supposedly speaks.

Powerful business offices driven by both political and economic agendas have presided over the process with a uniformly shameless lack of compunction for the disappearance of a democratic fourth estate. The public trust that fused journalism with the constitutional foundations of democracy has been severed to more perfectly attune the news to the commercial marketplace. Even the elite press—despite its vigorous objection to the accusation—has handed over the rudder, producing quality journalism only insofar as it fits a profitable set of consumers and stays within the limits of critique proscribed by the reigning political classes. Good journalists and good journalism still exist, of course. But they exist within a system of market calculus that tolerates and exploits them without a foundational commitment to the principles of social equality for which they ostensibly stand. The coherence of the common good entrusted to the press simply falls to pieces when it is parsed, priced, and sold on the commodity market—no matter how conscientiously it is done. Quite simply, it is the difference between serving the public full stop and serving the public as long as it is profitable and promises to become more profitable.[2]

By the mid-1990s, heavy resistance had developed within the ranks of journalists themselves, represented notably by the Committee of Concerned Journalists and the "public journalism" movement. But well-intentioned reform efforts have proven no match for the juggernaut of a news industry racing to the bottom line, even in the open-communication era of the internet, though technological developments have played a critical role in this clash. Both the critics and proponents of the status quo saw the internet as a great opportunity. The former hoped it would alleviate or redress the conditions of crisis and lift journalism back into its hallowed role as public servant. The latter saw it as a vast new market, a streamlined delivery system, and a rhetorically legitimate way to deflect the claims of public service journalism to an enclave in cyberspace. Ironically, at the very moment when the progressive vanguard has all but given up on the internet's revolutionary potential, the corporate publicists have set it in stone.[3] The web has become a convenient way to silence critics, to pretend to have resolved the crisis overnight, and to advance the newsroom policies that have done the most damage—but this time under the radar of public attention focused on techno-utopias.

Like most good public relations efforts, this one has some truth to it. In theory, the internet does hold the potential to change the way information is produced and consumed. With an instantaneous, unlimited supply of easily accessible information on every topic under the sun, each citizen may essentially become a self-employed gatekeeper. What's more, low production costs have inspired millions to self-publish and millions more to read alternative content outside the mainstream. The monopoly on public knowledge long held by elite media outlets could, over time, possibly destabilize and empower individuals and their communities. The public may finally be able to use journalism as it was intended, as a set of guidelines and talking points that convene a discussion among a democratic citizenry.

A serious analysis of the state of online journalism in 2002 and beyond belies this facade with painful clarity and highlights the dangers of delusion. It is my contention that not only has the internet failed to stem the crisis, it has aggravated it. The very trends that have served to batter the condition of journalism for years are aggressively exacerbated by the intentional actions of the major news providers coping with the conditions of the digital marketplace. Absent established public expectations in this medium—and using the existence of alternative citizen journalism as a convenient foil—the captains of the news industry have grown bolder. They have concentrated production, limited coverage, and laid in a course that promises to further restrict the number of voices in the mainstream of the political discourse. At a time when the dangers of path dependency for an infant technology are prevalent, these changes can only be looked on with grave concern (Garnham 2000, 75-78). Never before have the ugly contradictions between capitalism and democratic journalism been so apparent. The reality is that the empty promise of a revitalized public sphere has given way to an even more tightly integrated oligopoly of commercial news networks. Though the nature of the technology does refuse the total domination of marginal players by corporate oligarchs, it has been fashioned into a powerful tool for undemocratic media. With it, commerce may finally cut itself totally free from the burden of public interest.

Dot.Boom, Dot.Bust, and the Current State of Digital Journalism

In any discussion of online, or digital, journalism, it is important to begin with an understanding of the context in which it has developed and is developing. Too often, it is treated as if virtual content is somehow produced in a vacuum, disconnected from the old world of print and broadcast news. Even more common, the economic and professional conditions that prevail in the industry are not carried over into the discussion of the new digital forms. Though it may well be that in the future digital convergence may expand online content and usage to the point that print and broadcast will cease to exist separately, at present this is not a useful way to consider the emerging phenomena. Online journalism is currently a supplement and a complement to the dominant print and broadcast news media (Regan 2000). There is still considerable debate over whether the internet will prove to be a new medium at all or, rather, more simply serve as a better tool for distribution (Kramer 2002). The digital medium for news proves to be both representative of trends in conventional media but also a harbinger of future convergent forms.

Digitized news has defied all predictions. It has produced innovative new forms of information production and distribution. It has demanded new business models, threatened complacency, and responded to innovation. It is at the same time the last citadel of the technological revolutionaries and the driving force behind the most alarming antidemocratic developments in the commercial media system. The fate of digital journalism as a commodity during the dot-com boom and especially after the dot-com bust is a tale of anomaly in the "new economy," one with major implications for the concurrent crisis in journalism, the related crisis in the political culture, and the stagnating potential for a digital democracy.

Though there were failed efforts at digitizing text-based content in the 1980s, the real explosion of online journalism occurred with the introduction of the first commercial web browsers, Netscape in 1994 and Microsoft's Internet Explorer in 1995.[4] By 1996, most news outlets, print and broadcast, had a web presence. At that time, their content was generally limited to what the industry now calls "shovelware," text/video/audio that have been "repurposed" from the original form for web publication without changing substance. (Most online news still falls into this category.) However, the online form offered new ways of consuming the same journalism. Content was grouped topically, often presented as a list of headlines and leads with a hyperlink directed to the rest of the story. Toolbars allowed quick linking to different sections of stories from the main page as well as between pages deeper in the site. Users could "drill down" into the depths of a story by following intertextual links to find follow-up and related material from that day or from previous days. Most online sites archived the news, producing essentially a massive database of information easily accessible to users via direct hyperlinks or search engines. Linking between the reports on the same story over a period of time was just as easy as linking between headlines. Using the unlimited space available on the web, context, primary documentation, and original web-only commentary could be added to the standard news.

Editors also quickly actualized a twenty-four-hour news cycle, publishing breaking news instantly, scooping print and broadcast sources and their "slow" production process. Other unique digital features debuted, such as web boards, chat rooms, and opportunities for readers to interact directly with the journalists. Options to customize the main page of the news site to individual tastes were also quick to develop, as were features that e-mailed out headlines and breaking news to registered readers. Such a diversity of options appeared to be a user wonderland. Add multimedia to this mix of possibilities, and the digital news looked to be just the revolutionary force its champions had predicted. There were also the enticing little matters of lower production costs and a promising climate for advertising and commerce. Publishing the news on the web costs roughly half of delivering print copy (Harper 1998, 70).

However, despite these golden opportunities, actually making money proved troublesome. In their enthusiasm not to miss the boat, many news divisions invested in the technology full throttle without properly considering the fiscal risks. It was an understandable mistake at a time when technology stock valuations were soaring to preposterous heights. But unlike other commercial ventures in the online world, journalism had no sustainable product in and of itself. News on its own has never been profitable. Though revenue in the news business comes partly from subscription and sales, it comes predominantly from advertising dollars that are protected at all costs. Hence, news has traditionally functioned as a natural monopoly. High barriers to entry, operation in an economy of scale, centralized information production and distribution, and heavy reliance on the advertising revenues drawn to the biggest players have always served as the balancing forces in an otherwise unstable market. This potential instability in the business model coupled with the uncertainties of the new medium proved to be deep water for management. Suddenly, there were almost no barriers to entry into the online news market (anyone with web publishing software could post a site with news content), information production and distribution no longer had an obvious need for centralization (except for the inertia of the status quo), the normative climate of the internet rejected any mention of charging subscription fees for content, and the value of advertising online was hardly a confident truism.

If this was not enough trouble, the traditional news media were facing competition from new and unusual places. First and foremost were the portals, especially AOL and Yahoo. Even though these sites produced no actual journalism themselves, they functioned as "aggregators," collecting links and leads from other news sources, filtering them into topical categories (e.g., headlines, sports, entertainment, politics, etc.), and presenting them on the main pages of the most high-traffic sites on the web. In addition, traditionally distinct segments of the news industry itself, print (dailies, weeklies, and magazines) and broadcast (networks, cable, and radio), found themselves competing head to head for users and advertisers. Furthermore, the internet is a global medium. News readers could now read the *London Times* just as easily as the *New York Times* or catch the headlines from the BBC instead of CNN. With so many news vendors to choose from, many users opted out of grazing around, preferring the short, simple format of the aggregators that proffer something of everything but not too much of anything.

The news wires blossomed in this market. Very quickly, the Associated Press and Reuters became major players, supplying ideally suited digital content (i.e., short and sweet) to the portal aggregators, start-up news web sites, and traditional news vendors looking to strengthen their online presence. Through sophisticated content management systems (CMSs), which could be mapped onto their existing systems, a company like Reuters could take better advantage of their 2,300 reporters in 160 countries. In the past, only a fraction of the millions of words the wires produce each day could be passed along and used by client news providers. Now, this sea of data no longer need pass across an editor's desk but is entered by reporters into a commonly accessible, networked database. Intelligent bots in the system then automatically search, tag, and meta-tag each individual article, identifying its topic and content according to preset distinguishing characteristics. Clients no longer depend on the editors at the Associated Press or Reuters to gatekeep the news. The system simply pushes the pool of data gathered on a particular day through a set of filters matching the specifications of each buyer and out come those stories that fit the bill—and only those stories. These clients then receive the package of news topics they requested to plug into their own publications. The Associated Press has recently added an automated advertising service that increases with parallel efficiency the advertising placement across multiple new sites (McGill 2002). Naturally, all of this searching, tagging, and specialized delivery are instantaneous (Hall 2001, 2). Buying at bulk prices from a system that processes ten thousand orders at only marginally greater cost than one, most web-based clients chose to provide the cheap wire content for free. Small wonder that the vast majority of news available on the web comes from the news wires (see King 2000; Maynard 2000b, 49; http://www.reuters.com; http://www.apdigitalnews.com).

Of course, the most heralded source of competition for the traditional news providers (though in the end the least impressive challengers) came from the start-up, web-only news outlets. The headiest upstarts were Salon, APBNews, Cnet, and Slate, the latter bankrolled by Microsoft, followed by many others riding waves of venture capital and near miraculous initial public offerings. These operations attracted a great many talented journalists away from traditional media jobs, promising a bright future in the new industry of digital news. They also attracted substantial numbers of users and a full complement of willing advertisers. Success stories congregated in niche news markets, finance and sports in particular. These highly touted ventures in turn triggered a flood in the market as local and regionally pitched news sites hustled to get in on the action.

Alongside these came a huge volume of nonprofit, noncommercial enterprises. Sometimes based out of small preexisting publications, institutions, community organizations, or social groups, these forums vary in style and content, running the gamut of the political spectrum and providing every cultural niche with its own unique voice. Perhaps the most well-known group in this category is the now worldwide network of Independent Media Center sites that grew out of the 1999 anticorporate protests in Seattle. IndyMedia specializes in multimedia, citizen journalism, public news from public voices. It is a very interesting example wherein an aggregation model of news collection is paired with an atmosphere of online community. Though IndyMedia remains in a class of its own, there are many other hybrid nonprofit journalism sites that offer alternative perspectives. These range from web logs, also called "blogs"—run by amateur as well as professional journalists such as Eric Alterman, Chris Matthews, Michael Moran, and Andrew Sullivan[5]—to alternative content aggregators specializing in partisan news commentary that draw contributions from professional journalists, experts, and concerned citizens and provide links to information resources elsewhere on the web. There are many sites built around political issues, social institutions, religious groups, and cultural practices that mix specialized nonprofit content with news wire headlines, or links to other commercial news content available for free on the web. These sites need not be of universal interest (even if they are available globally), as some of the most successful news sites provide only local news and cater to residents of particular communities or regions.

In the dot-com boom between 1995 and 2000, almost everyone in the news business went online, and almost no one made any money. By early 2000, the start-up capital that had floated the independents was either gone or going fast. The online divisions of major news organizations were deeply in the red with no end in sight. A mad scramble ensued as everyone hustled to find profitable strategies before they went out of business. The dot-com bust dove into free fall by midsummer 2000. A great many start-ups folded, including the very highly regarded APBNews.

It turned out that it was almost as expensive to produce high quality journalism online as it was in the brick and mortar world—except no one was willing to pay for content on the web. Only the most exclusive content could be sold to subscribers, as headline news was all too available for free.

What could be saved in production and distribution expenses was lost in the total lack of sales and inadequate advertising revenue. In consequence, the market contracted. Stock prices among the major, web-only news sites lost an average of 77 percent. Almost all the major news outlets slashed their online budgets. CBS dropped a quarter of its staff; NBC cut 170 jobs; CNN sliced off 130. The *New York Times* dropped 17 percent of its new media staff, Knight Ridder shed 16 percent, and they were the lucky ones—many major firms were in the 25 percent to 30 percent range. The *Wall Street Journal* online was held up as the great success story, because it had achieved profitability in a single quarter (Kurtz 2001; Piller 2000).

By contrast, most of the nonprofit sites, institutional zines, and blogs not only survived but flourished. Maintained either by volunteer labor or user support, these sites did not have the burden of providing comprehensive coverage alone. Their existence was predicated on the uniqueness of their content or approach. This interesting dichotomy points to the economics that underpin the boom and bust cycle and foreshadows the tiered system that is developing today based on lessons learned at the bottom of the bust.

At the most basic level, the problem with the business model for online journalism is one of supply and demand. Supply has badly exceeded demand (Small 2000). The exact same content that news outlets sell in print publications has been disseminated so widely by so many producers and aggregators that its value has been driven to zero. The media oligopoly held in place by expensive production and geographic markets did not fly online. On the web, there are some thirty-two thousand news outlets—and that is not counting all the sites that primarily feature other content but also offer a portal to news from a news wire or links to brand-name news sites (Piller 2000). Furthermore, when there are two players in the news market offering the same content but drawing revenue from different sources, competition will be uneven and the threshold of scarcity necessary to produce value will be undermined. It stands to reason that when a portal site like AOL—which makes all of its money from entertainment content, user fees, and advertising—provides a customizable aggregated news service to its twenty million customers for free, this action will badly undercut the product salability of pure news outlets trying to charge for similar content.

To be fair, the news industry recognized this would happen before they entered the market. It was not necessarily worrying to lose subscription-based revenue altogether, considering that advertising already funded up to 100 percent of some news organizations, and the internet was thought to be an advertising gold mine. However, the value of advertising online also plummeted toward zero, particularly on any site not in the top twenty most visited. The value of an advertisement depends first on the scarcity of the space in which the ad appears, second on the length of time attention can be expected to fall on it, and third on the size of the audience whose attention is up for auction. For most web sites, there is simply too much space, too few people, and too little evidence that they are spending any time looking at ads. Even though a third to a half of American adults read news online, the average time spent doing so is only thirty seconds per day (Piller 2000). Like the value of news as a commodity, the value of advertising on a news web site has dropped toward zero (Small 2000, 42). Even heavy traffic on the most popular news sites like MSNBC, CNN, and the *New York Times* (all netting better than three million visitors a month) cannot break even on advertising revenues alone—and this despite the fact that subscription services have proven even less profitable than higher ad rates on free content sites. Ad holes in a boundless virtual space are endless, giving advertisers tremendous leverage on pricing. Moreover, ratings and page-view counters have become notoriously unreliable, making advertising expenses online an even less attractive risk. Most seriously, however, the golden promise of internet advertising, the banner ad, has foundered. Recent estimates of the number of users who click on these ads at all (much less buy a product), the "click-through" rates, have fallen well below 1 percent (Farhi 2000, 39; Finberg and Stone 2001, 43).

What has effectively occurred is an interesting turn of events for the news industry. Left without sufficient funds from their primary market—selling audiences to advertisers—they are forced to think of ways to make the news itself a commodity worth buying. Given the state of journalism described in the first section of this article, it is a daunting task. Essentially, online news needs some value-added element that it can use to market itself in distinction to the gazillion other news purveyors plugged into the news wires—anything to make a site "stickier" to surf-numbed eyes. The drive to solve this dilemma is the common denominator of all commercial information services on the web and the difference between success and failure. It is the business premise behind the very profitable *Playboy* site. It is why the Consumers Union is the largest subscription-based news service on the web, with eight hundred thousand paying customers (Mayer 2002). It is also why the *Wall Street Journal* has managed to hang on in the subscription market while all the other major newspapers have free access—it has exclusive financial news, or at least its readers believe that it does. The content that is valuable enough to sell profitably is "disaggregated" from the bulk of coverage that appears in similar forms across countless web sites. It is walled off in content niches such as porn, financial advice, or consumer reports. Perhaps the best examples of this at a categorical level are local news, both dailies and weeklies, and its profitable value added for local consumers. Local dailies such as the *Tulsa World* and the *Albuquerque Journal* have broken the prevailing wisdom and retained readers and profitability after switching to a subscription model for their online content (Charging for access doesn't slow growth 2002). Local weeklies such as the *Chicago*

Reader, the *Washington City Paper*, the *Detroit Metro Times*, and the *Village Voice* have been especially able to market their unique ability to cover local issues and needs online—and consequently to charge fees without scaring away readers. The fees come from classified ads and entertainment listings, hugely popular services uniquely suited to local organizations (Richardson 2001).

In the second tier of news providers, those nonprofit or noncommercial outlets based around issues, communities, social groups, institutions, and individuals have always grasped this premise of value-added content. In large part, it is the reason for their existence—to provide a service that was not already there. They do not carry the burden of redefining the value of their content to justify their existence in the marketplace, say nothing of their purpose in regard to public service. They did not go online in search of a business venture but in pursuit of a democratic opportunity or personal gratification. For example, the highly touted Kuro5hin web log features articles written by people who have expertise in particular fields though they are not professional journalists. These articles then serve as springboards for discussion, "ensuring that the original article is only the beginning of the discussion, not the end"; it is a very popular combination, recently dubbed "collaborative journalism" (Lasica 2002b).

Considering the forces that have driven them to the brink, it is a great irony that the monopoly news providers—media giants of enormous political and economic power—have been forced to redefine the condition of their hold over news production. On one hand are other media properties, particularly the entertainment-based web portals (sometimes owned by the same parent as news outlets), which have undercut the value of mainstream news by highlighting its uniform banality, reducing it to a set of ubiquitous headlines. Even the much ballyhooed reputations of the bastions of elite journalism are insufficiently valued by the public to warrant actually paying for what they can add to the news wire coverage. On the other hand are the legions of small- to medium-sized web-based news sites, providing commentary from professionals and citizens alike on a whole range of specific topics. They draw popularity by explicitly foregrounding the value of particular insights, political opinions, or entertainment appeal that they uniquely provide.

Looking at this state of affairs—particularly in light of the crisis in journalism hovering over the move to the digital arena—it might be reasonable to expect a move toward diversity, a shift in thinking that might for once conflate fiscal and democratic values. What better way to make news worth reading than to invest it in the people it is meant to serve? What better way to add value to the headlines than to experiment with hard-hitting, investigative reporting into important but ill-covered issues? What better model could be followed than that which has led to the proliferation of self-published, decentralized, citizen news sites with accelerating civic popularity (particularly in the wake of 9/11)? However, quite to the contrary, the movement afoot in mainstream online journalism is toward further consolidation, convergence, and innovative ways to cordon off portions of the news world to sell products and services that attract audiences and then in turn to rent those audiences more lucratively to advertisers.

Essentially, what is happening in the world of online journalism today is a shakeout. The mauling of the market in mid-2000 is over, and those who remain in the ring are bloodied but still standing (Lasica 2002a). The search for a profitable business model that will ensure long-term security is no longer a mad scramble; it is a grinding resolve. There is an urgency, but it is not desperate, as the death of some competitors in the lean days of the bust has freed up more advertising dollars to feed fewer mouths. Though ad revenues dropped 15 percent in 2001, they are expected to rise again by 9 percent in 2002 (Pryor 2002). The first step out of the blocks was to realize that the portal sights, the aggregators that have saturated the market with free content, are here to stay—AOL has 70 percent more traffic on its news portal page than the biggest conventional news site, MSNBC (Barringer and Kuczynski 2000). The integration of mainstream content from multiple vendors into a single platform customizable to suit the interests of nearly every demographic is now clearly recognized as an unprecedented development in the news business (Hall 2001, 37). Furthermore, because aggregation is not a sensible business model for organizations selling content under a brand name, portal sites are no longer seen as competitors but rather as potential partners (e.g., AOL's partnerships with CBS, National Public Radio, *New York Times*, Salon) (Shepard 2000, 28).

However, the purveyors of free news still pose a problem for those firms that want to sell similar content. Consequently, step 2 is a firm rejection of the long-standing notion that consumers will not pay for news content on the web. Regardless of the fact that polls consistently return majorities denying they will pay up, news providers have decided the future will be otherwise, like it or not.[6] They may well be right. *Financial Times* online editor Chrystia Freeland (2002) explained that "the conventional wisdom has come around to the view that it is a matter of when, not if, most sites will begin charging for at least part of their content." The best way to counter the portal market may well be to get in on the game of free-news-as-bait while simultaneously developing a parallel market for commodity content.

In the past two or three quarters, the big online news operations have turned the corner into (or at least toward) black ink. Perennial web debtors such as the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* have posted earnings. Tribune Interactive and Knight Ridder Digital expect to be profitable across their online operations by the end of 2002 (Lasica 2002a). A recent survey of newspaper executives indicates that 42 percent of online news operations are now profitable (White 2002). The new media business model that has turned the trick relies on two central elements: (1) restructuring the production of news to use technology to cut costs and (2) the development of multiple micro-revenue streams that are insignificant on their own but sustaining when taken together.[7] Tellingly, neither of these changes has anything to do with improving quality. The consensus in the business office seems to be that the editors have failed to produce content that people will buy, so marketers will have to be sent into the breach to dress the line and move it forward by any means necessary.

The first of these strategies, systemic restructuring, operates through a pattern of changes loosely known as "convergence." Convergence in journalism does not refer primarily to the technological reduction of all communication to a digital form. It refers to a new strategy in the economic management of information production and distribution. The direction of the changes is administrative, and its raison d'être is profit. Positive or negative results in the quality of journalism are largely externalities. This is a key point, because proponents of convergence often argue its virtues in terms of improved content, obscuring or even denying the financial purpose behind its implementation. The impact on content must thus be seen strictly as a function of economic logic, both short term and long term. Similarly, the economics of convergence require that these changes be understood systemically, rather than taken up as isolated policies. The three major convergence strategies—newsroom convergence, cross-media partnerships, and digital news networks—are driven by the same thinking at different levels of administration. The larger the news corporation, the more likely it is to have implemented restructuring at multiple levels.

The most obvious of these structural changes for journalists is the convergence of newsrooms. This idea has been pioneered by Media General's news outfits in Tampa Bay, housing the *Tampa Tribune*, WFLA-TV, and Tampa Bay Online (TBO.com) in one building, known as the News Center. Commonly owned, they are now commonly operated. Though each property retains practical editorial independence, they are managed from a centralized multimedia assignment desk in the middle of the building. Editors passing information across media channels are able to minimize the number of reporters sent to the scene of an event. Features written on one medium can be repurposed to appear on another. *Tribune* reporters routinely appear on camera for WFLA newscasts. Digital images shot by a TV crew are passed along to the paper. And everything can be ported to the TBO web site. Most important for the business office, coordination of a converged newsroom can result in synergistic cross-promotion. Consumers of the television news can be directed to the newspaper or the web site, and vice versa. Scoops are handed across media depending on the timing and type of the story to maximize market value. Many journalists and editors on staff maintain that more good journalism is reaching more people because of convergence (Carr 2002a, 2002b).

Though in-house newsroom convergence has its problems and its critics (to which I will turn later), it is spreading rapidly with the allure of single-platform distribution and a wider distribution of the same content to separately capitalized advertising markets (Anzur 2002). Newsroom convergence is now in practice in Orlando, Chicago, Fort Lauderdale, Oklahoma City, and San Diego, with many others in the works (Lasica 2002a). The Federal Communications Commission repeal of cross-media ownership in major markets in 2003 will only serve to speed up the trend (Maynard 2000a; Gates 2002). Corporations such as Tribune Publishing are poised to fully converge the entirety of their expansive news operations at the first opportunity, mirroring Tampa's News Center on a grand scale. The central tenets of this wave of convergence are a greater degree of cooperation between the editorial board and the marketing department in the promotion of stories across media and the streamlining of distribution and presentation in multiple media from centralized production facilities (Breckenridge 2000).

Convergence is not limited to those companies owning multiple news media. Nor is it limited to the holdings within a single corporation. Since competition seems only to have brought financial misery to everyone in the dot-com bust, "news outlets are forming content-sharing partnerships at a dizzying clip, each trading on its own strengths" (Shepard 2000, 24). These trends in mainstream online news mirror the economic logic of in-house newsroom convergence and stretch it beyond intrafirm cooperation to interfirm combination. The central ideas are the same: established media companies blend and cross-promote content and brands, mutually reduce production and labor costs by reducing duplicate reporting, and achieve greater leverage at the bargaining table with advertisers. Some of the first partnerships linked the *New York Times* with ABC and the British Broadcasting Corporation, the *Dallas Morning News* with the *Fort Worth Start-Telegram*, and CNN with the *Houston Chronicle*, *Boston Herald*, and thirty other local newspapers (Farhi 2000a, 27; Shepard 2000, 23; Simmons 2002). The *Washington Post* has perhaps the most extensive convergence project in the business, joining forces with *Newsweek*, NBC, and MSNBC. At the local and regional level, many newspapers, television stations, and radio stations have formed similar partnerships, for example, the South Florida *Sun Sentinel* with Miami's WFOR-TV, Newsradio 610, and WXEL, or New England Cable News partnerships with the *Boston Globe*, *Hartford Courant*, *Union Leader*, and Boston.com (Tompkins 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). The details of these arrangements all vary, but essentially they all operate on the premise that convergence improves the audience reach of commercial journalism and increases revenue. The former is the pillar of the public relations surrounding these mergers, and the latter is the real operating logic regardless of the former. This severe economic drive reflects very real concern at the highest levels of media management that convergence is the only path to survival in the digital marketplace. *Seattle Times* publisher Frank Blethen predicts that two newspaper towns outside the top six markets are living "on borrowed time" (Gates 2002).

A related form of convergence in the news industry more closely resembles the technological definition of the term. This is the development of digital news networks within media firms with multiple news holdings. Companies such as Tribune Publishing, Knight Ridder, CanWest, and Belo "have all adopted a unified theory of online publishing, moving to single publishing platforms to share news and publish ads across nationwide networks" (Lasica 2002a). A company like Knight Ridder can tie all of its newspapers' web sites across the country into a single, content-sharing production platform and thereby lower costs and negotiate better advertising deals in a bloc. It is a process known as "chain convergence" (Lasica 2002d). Practically, it is a cross between newsroom convergence and cross-media partnerships—bringing together streamlined production with the reach and integration of content sharing. Internally, a company plugs all of its holdings into a common CMS, software that swiftly aggregates, collates, and distributes digitized text, audio, and video between the nodes on the corporate network. The virtues of this common production platform allow for cross-media content sharing, the elimination of duplicate reporting, and cross-promotional opportunities. For example, in the case of Belo, it allows a television station in Virginia to report content originally written by the *Dallas Morning News*, which in turn shares content with several other newspapers, web sites, and television news stations in Texas, Rhode Island, and Louisiana. The production strengths of every news outlet and medium in the corporate portfolio may now appear on the web sites of all the news channels (and feed back into the main medium)—eliminating the costs of duplicate production. Belo, along with CanWest and Knight Ridder, has also standardized the look of all the web sites under its umbrella operation to facilitate user navigation and the new plug-and-play mode of production (Lasica 2002d). Some critics have charged that this visual conformity has squashed variety and style, reducing the news to interchangeable bits plugged into a preset format (Outing 2002).

CanWest Interactive offers perhaps the most tightly organized digital news network. In 2001, CanWest purchased 136 newspapers from Conrad Black, bringing their corporate tally to 14 big-city dailies, 126 local dailies and weeklies, a television network, and several radio stations. Their strategy from the beginning was to integrate all of these properties into a single news web site, Canada.com, which would exist in multiple permutations to serve every constituency in the country. To this end, they have created a central portal site that features the major headlines of national and international news as well as nationally syndicated op-ed pieces. The central site then links out to the web sites of affiliated local papers, which add their own news to this common content. Everything is served up on a cookie-cutter graphic user interface that looks basically the same for each paper in the system and offers precisely the same information in different, locally tailored configurations. Via an elaborate CMS, each city's CanWest news site shuffles the relative positions of headlines and features to reflect the perceived interests of the readerships. All of this can be automated. Labor and production costs are reduced in direct proportion to their consolidation. Moreover, ad revenues are rising because nationally networked advertising packages can demand higher rates. Though there have been major criticisms of this system, which I will take up a bit later, it has settled in as Canada's number one news provider (Lasica 2002d).

All of these manifestations of convergence represent the recentralization of content production—swimming upstream against the natural facilities of a decentralized network technology that has weakened monopoly control over the news. Convergence strategies are also attractive because they reintroduce an element of scarcity to types of news coverage that were formerly commonplace. Shared content means fewer voices covering important events stretched across the network of coordinated news providers. These providers, no longer in direct competition with one another, might then choose to bond together into a coalition of news providers whose content might be worth paying for because of its removal from public access. Jack Fuller, president of the Tribune Publishing Company, foresaw these developments in a speech given to fellow editors and publishers in August 2000: "As media fragment," he noted, "all forms of journalism will be squeezed." The answer is not to cultivate profitability in each of the fragmented markets but to redouble efforts to consolidate by sharing content between corporate partners and across multimedia networks. In so doing, not only would the market reform around reputable brands, but the process would allow for further reductions in editorial expenses and the maximization of value for every piece of content produced (Fuller 2000). In principle, this would turn every major news network into another wire service—churning out standardized content void of comprehensive investigative reporting, cash-heavy process stories, or controversial challenges to political and economic power.

Newsroom convergence, cross-media content sharing, and digital news networks are thus mutually supportive developments as they broaden the reach of media properties while decreasing expenses. Merrill Brown, former editor in chief at MSNBC.com, predicts this trend will continue: "At the largest company levels, more and more of them will align with one another as a way to deliver stories on multiple platforms" (Where is the news industry headed 2002). Bob Ingle, an executive at Knight Ridder, explained the urgency of the mergers:

> The worst possible thing that can happen to you, in whatever you are trying to do on the Internet, is to not be in the top three. The top three guys will literally take three-quarters of the revenues. That leaves all the other players scrambling and subject to acquisition. (Shepard 2000, 26)

Another potential strategy of structural change in pursuit of long-term profitability would be partnerships with content carriers. Anticipating a future of monopoly or oligopoly ownership of the wires that carry digital signals to televisions, radios, computers, and telephones alike, the news industry has a stake in securing preferential treatment. In such a scenario, there is no guarantee that the owners of the wires would uphold "common carrier" principles but rather grant and restrict access to sites or the amount and speed of data that can be served up onto proprietary wires. Just as downloading now often comes with a price tag, uploading may one day carry a much greater cost. If every news site was required to pay a fee to the owners of the physical network to serve content, it would very likely mean that all news sites would pass that expense on to the consumer. Securing a partnership in advance with these wired landlords might ensure that upload costs were discounted or waived, providing an essential advantage in the news market by permitting lower prices without lower profits.[8] In such a system in which regulation of the network itself served as a gatekeeper of online content, it stands to reason that the number of providers would dramatically drop—much like in a comparable scenario playing out in the realm of digital television.

The second and simultaneous path to profitability involves the cultivation of multiple streams of micro-revenue. As Michael Zimbalist, president of the Online Publishers Association, put it: "The key to building a sustainable [online news] business is the diversity of revenue" (Khan 2002). In a strategy known as "modulated experimentation," companies are walling off content piece by piece and offering up creative new services, testing with calculated trial runs to see which veins might be profitably tapped (Lasica 2002a). The idea is to draw visitors with free content under a well-known brand and then "tempt them with paid material" (Mangalindan 2002). This premium content is offered up for a relatively small fee (micro-payment) and charged by credit card over the internet. All of these tiny streams of income are either forms of micro-payment (subscription or pay-per-view), paid services, or creative advertising. The first involves shelling out cash for access to particular pieces of content or particular services on a pay-per-use basis. The second involves registering with a flat fee for general access to an entire site or selected portions of a site. The third involves a growing number of new ways marketers have dreamed up to sell audience attention.

Trends in the industry make it clear that the days of totally free web content are rapidly coming to a close. Some content will remain open access on news sites, such as headlines, breaking news, and general interest—nonexclusives. Everything else will be classified as premium content and sold on a per-item or subscription basis. Revenue from micro-payment operates on the assumption that what the editors want readers to read will be free, but anything the reader wants to read will cost money.[9] Often, this pay-per-view content is financial information, sports analysis, or feature journalism. But it can also be "historical feature packages" constructed from subscription-only archives, "op-ed collections," or simply access to the full text of all the articles on a site (Dizikes 2002). Consumers who can be persuaded to buy access once are then hit with promotional e-mails to become a subscriber. The system has been modeled after the cable TV industry, offering multiple tiers of content provision on a sliding price scale (Mangalindan 2002). Salon, Cnet, *Financial Times*, and Ireland.com are some of the most recent news sites to turn to paid access. It is a delicate balance between the possible reduction in readers (and the consequent decline in ad rates) and the income generated from paid access. If micro-payments plus the reduced ad revenue in a subscription zone are greater than the ad money alone coming from a free access area, that content will be permanently commodified.

A second form of micro-payment involves exclusive services. For example, some news providers offer subscriptions to a service that will transmit content onto a mobile, handheld device. This content will, of course, include advertising, which in the context of a well-defined (because of registration information), affluent user group (i.e., those who own mobile platforms) will draw a premium rate. Similarly, broadband technology opens up new avenues of revenue generation in the form of unique content provision. Sophisticated graphics, audio, and video files can now be sold to consumers on a per-download basis—alluring to multimedia-savvy consumers using technology heavily tilted in its user base toward affluent demographics willing to spend on gadgetry. CNN, ABC, and Fox Sports web sites have begun to charge for some of their video clips (Dizikes 2002; Mangalindan 2002). Other services such as downloadable PDF versions of newspapers, e-mail updates, breaking-news alerts via instant messaging, links with personalized web logs, forums, games, and local news are also potentially profit builders. Searchable databases of classified ads have also proven very lucrative, even if they do draw funds away from traditional print sources. *USA Today* has rolled out a new "Newstracker" product that brings news content through to a screen saver for four dollars a month

(Khan 2002). Finally, micro-payment services can also be offered to other retailers rather than the customers themselves. Ideas such as the "send flowers" button on the obituary page and a link to a bookseller on the book review page allow media companies to make arrangements with retailers to earn a percentage of all sales directed from the news site.[10]

The final stream of revenue is not new, though it is the largest and the most difficult to stabilize: advertising. Moreover, instead of coming in large-scale deals, ad dollars are trickling in on a case-by-case basis. Given the steep decline in "click-through" rates, the proliferation of "ad-killing" plug-ins on web browsers, and the falling prices in ad rates across the boards, marketers for the news sites are developing new ways to attract advertising clients back into the fold. Partly, this involves hoping that the economy improves. Partly, this involves more creative ad types. Sites now feature more than just banner ads; they have animated banner ads (called "beyond the banner" ads) that move and dance, sometimes together with the logo of the news site. In addition, there have been experiments with pop-up window ads that fill the top of the screen with an ad window whenever a particular link is activated. As users have become inured to these, the pop-under window has made its debut, filling the bottom of the screen—sometimes directly after the pop-up window has been closed. Though many users consider these tactics invasive, these types of ads dramatically increase the click-through rates.

Other attempts at advertising integration include using commercial images and messages as wallpaper for news content pages, bringing commercial sponsors into the headline space of feature sections, saturating toolbars with links to e-commerce outlets, and placing an advertising screen between the links that connect a headline and the body of a story (Finberg and Stone 2001, 45-57). The *New York Times* online has begun to sell "rich media" ads, such as online trailers from film studios as well as sponsored packages of "news" stories about the film's topic (Khan 2002; Palser 2002). Such advertising deals are more easily and lucratively arranged in combination with other partner news providers that provide cross-promotional opportunities for the advertisers across a news network and even between cooperating competitors (Farhi 2000b, 37). However, there are also efforts to explore advertising opportunities aimed at the registered users of particular news sites. Despite privacy concerns, sites such as the *New York Times* online have begun to sell "surround sessions," a situation in which a registered customer with known demographic information is "owned" for an entire user session by an advertiser that supplies dynamically tailored messages. This service is vastly improved by new publishing tools that allow advertisers to write and edit the content of their ads and upload them directly onto the news site in real time (Pryor 2002). A related concept recently debuted is known as "site sessions," which feature a single advertiser across all the major ad positions for a specific period of time during the day—such as 9 A.M. to 10 A.M., the hour when most office workers read the news. These time-based ad sales introduce frequency and reach into ad buying, as the marketing team can offer advertisers distinct packages of user profiles and time-bound numbers of page exposures (Saunders 2002).

A number of new sites have begun to package many of the latest features of the new micro-revenue streams into very lucrative online news enterprises. Jonathan Klein (2000), a longtime CBS executive, has left the network and started Feedroom.com. Designed for broadband users and paying subscribers, Feedroom channels video news content from major news providers into an aggregating portal. With corporate partnerships and financial backers such as NBC and the Tribune Company, Feedroom has no problem gathering the video content from more than thirty television partners. Content is fed into a CMS, which automatically digitizes, encodes, and tags each clip with seventy-five distinct identifying pieces of information before it logs them into the database. Its service allows a user to search video feeds for topical news items from any broadcast carried by the site. Everything is archived and ready for instant playback. Consumers typically spend three times as long on the video site than on a conventional news site. Furthermore, extended use puts into play Feedroom's version of "collaborative filtering," suggesting which stories might be of interest based on past usage habits and the usage patterns of other customers with overlapping tastes or demographics. It is also a cash cow, as affluent consumers have responded to this personalized broadband news service (to the tune of half a million users a month), and advertisers have followed closely behind them (Lasica 2002e).

More accurately, however, these personalization services are customization services. They are designed to sell, not to serve. It is a lesson played out across the digital news industry. It is critical to remember that the *Daily Me*, Nicholas Negroponte's vision of a personalized digital newspaper, has evolved into Feedroom, a hustling, customized interface that does little more than shuffle around the bits of mainstream news in anticipation of consumption patterns and advertiser preferences, never straying from a carefully limited set of stories. And as digital news networks and newsroom convergence begin to take hold, the degree of variance of the cards in this news deck will decrease dramatically. Though certainly the technology exists to develop intelligent agents that scan the web and collect stories regardless of the source that matches content criteria, they are nowhere to be found on mainstream news sites (Lasica 2002c).

It is this fact, coupled with the trends in multistream profit seeking, that points to the most probable future of personalization. Like Feedroom, the best in personalization options will rapidly become customization services, which is to say they will eventually cost money. The economic logic of providing consumers with more and more precise, comprehensive, sorted, and searchable information using sophisticated web crawlers leads to a price tag. The better it works, the more it will cost. The current standard of deck-shuffling *Daily Me*s will likely remain free, partly as bait to draw page views and encourage registration and subscription to upgraded service. This situation of customized services makes far more sense to the news industry than the opposite path toward more sophisticated personalization options. This would involve allowing users to access every web site with news content that permits search and retrieval—porting content that potentially competes with, contradicts, or undermines the news provided by the portal itself or its primary partners. Naturally, this option would be good for citizen consumers of public journalism, but it would be very bad business. The citizen-consumer and profit motive–public service dichotomies are hard not to notice. Powerful economic forces at work in the news industry are set to make sure that at critical points like this, the technology and the normative uses that follow from it follow the corporate strategy. There seems to be little chance that such a lucrative business opportunity as personalization services would not be put to work for the bottom line, regardless of the potential value to the citizenry squandered in the process.

Exacerbating the Crisis

The patterns of development in online journalism follow very closely in the well-grooved paths that have produced and are producing the crisis in journalism more generally. They can be charted in a number of areas across the spectrum of online news. The current state of affairs that I have outlined bears out this argument ominously, as the evidence is considerable and its implications extremely negative for the health of the press, the public, and any effort to rebuild a democratic political culture. It brings to mind Edward Herman's (1998) prediction concerning these developments that excoriated any utopian thinking about democratic media and digital technology:

> There is no evidence to support this view as regards journalism and mass communication. In fact, one could argue that the new technologies are exacerbating the problem. They permit firms to shrink staff while achieving greater outputs and they make possible global distribution systems, thus reducing the number of media entities. Although the new technologies have great potential for democratic communication, left to the market there is little reason to expect the Internet to serve democratic ends. (p. 201; see also McChesney 2000, 176)

What follows are some of the specific causes for concern implicit in Herman's general prognosis. Though most of them overlap and reinforce one another, I have attempted to tease them apart for the purpose of more careful analysis.

The first place to start looking for the positive or negative impact of the internet on journalism is in its content—what are editors putting on their web pages? Recalling that current trends are toward infotainment, news for the affluent, corporate and government publicity, and inexpensive, image-over-substance features, the online environment appears to worsen rather than redress the problems. For starters, the vast majority of online content is merely "shovelware," reproductions of content that appeared in a news organization's primary distribution channels. Though it is true that the bottomless news hole can support all manner of primary documentation and related content to enrich each and every story, it typically does not. Most commercial providers are hamstrung in their abilities to offer comprehensive coverage because they do not do that as a rule, and it would mean pointing readers toward other media outlets, the last thing a capitalist news organization wants to do.

Second, the economic and political forces that push journalism toward impoverished content in conventional media are just as prevalent, if not more so, in the digital mode. What content does appear in web-only exclusives is subject to even more of a production budget squeeze than usual given the slim profit margins suffered by online news. Web-only independents feel the burn even more than outfits whose web shows are merely supplemental and bankrolled by a parent company with other, more lucrative assets. Everyone is looking for that value-added content to differentiate their sites from the tens of thousands of other news providers. Everyone is looking to siphon off a bigger piece of the advertisers' budget by attracting more eyeballs and providing more favorable conditions for commercial messages. The pressure from the bottom line is so fierce that original content decisions are fundamentally business decisions, not editorial ones. The situation is not aided by the fact that many online news executives have salaries tied to the stock valuations of their companies (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001, 50).

If the stark push of this financial logic were not bad enough, the technology itself makes it worse. Page-view counters allow editors, managers, and advertisers alike to see exactly how many readers visit each story and how long they stay there. Registration information further describes which demographics congregate on which topical sections of the site. Consequently, each topic, each story, and each journalist are subjected to a ruthless market calculus. Salon famously closed several portions of its site for this very reason, jacking up its sensational content to hold readers and ad revenue. Editor in chief David Talbot was even forced to lay off his wife in a content-based downsize, moving the news site away from intelligent political and cultural commentary and toward what he calls a "smart tabloid" (Gross and Talbot 2000; see also Rowse 2000b, 19-21). At Knight Ridder, features that do not cut the mustard in terms of traffic and advertiser appeal are routinely dropped or altered every one to three months (Farhi 2000a, 25). Excising topics, approaches, and voices is a routine occurrence in a market that tolerates nothing less than content of exceptional allure. To that end, the default position learned from decades of commercial news experience is toward sensational fare that brings the titillated and their audience-hungry advertisers or toward pay-per-view premium content that draws affluent subscribers and their target marketers. What is left out is what has always been left out, news and public information affecting the lower half of the socioeconomic spectrum. Online news content is very often market-based journalism of the rankest order. Not only does it rebroadcast the existing (very poor) journalism, it often resorts to featuring and expanding on the most outrageous, eye-catching headlines. Thus, the promise of volume and diversity offered by the internet has turned out to be largely a false prophecy. More is not better when it is more of the same:

> Therefore, for the time being, rather than strengthening democracy by fostering the knowledge and participation of the citizens, use of the Internet tends to deepen the crisis of political legitimacy by providing a broader launching platform for the politics of scandal. (Castells 2001, 158)

A third major factor that influences the production of online news (and that has played a grave role in the crisis of journalism) is commercial ownership and the business strategy of a management staff responsible not to citizens but to shareholders. In the online context, the most important issues in this domain are content sharing via corporate partnerships, intrafirm digital news networks, and multimedia newsroom convergence—practices most common to a handful of impressively large companies with cross-media holdings. It is a true testament to the power of the big commercial media firms that they are able to reverse the course of network technology—a medium that favors decentralized production and consumption points—and build business models based on recentralizing information production. This reactionary move is the true subtext of the reorganization of news production in the digital age. To put the genie back in the bottle and regain monopoly power over profits in the news industry, they have taken actions of unprecedented consolidation, concentration, and integration to severely narrow the scope of the press. Even though these moves are presented under the guise of a rich expansion of journalistic content, the reality of the situation is quite the opposite. The logic of the operation is guided by the intent to make the news something worth buying on the web, not to make the web a tool for the betterment of the democratic press.

However technologically illogical it may seem to use a global network to homogenize rather than diversify news production, it is economics 101. The value of a commodity is directly proportional to its scarcity. To be scarce, a commodity must have characteristics that distinguish it from others like it in the marketplace—or it must have marketing that persuades consumers to imagine such characteristics. Furthermore, the characteristics that define the scarcity must be proprietary to one firm to ensure profits are monopolized. If this is not possible, it must be proprietary to a group of firms willing to forgo competition and agree to set prices—that is, the prices that produce the most favorable equilibrium of customers and profits. In online news, the big players are looking to use the marketing strategy to produce the monopoly scenario. That is, they hope to attach the value of their content to a brand name to forgo the burden of quality products in the pursuit of high prices. The dream endgame would be to engineer a cartel of every major branded news provider. This cartel would then coproduce similar or identical content and sell by subscription to consumers persuaded by marketing to believe that this common product was unquestionably superior in quality and value to that of the multitudes of independent online publishers. These mass audiences would then be used as leverage to corner the market on advertising and ensure that no competitor could glean sufficient advertising revenue to break the monopoly. Essentially, the idea is to produce the same situation online that exists in conventional media. Diversity and uncontrolled abundance, the hallmarks of network technology, have therefore become totally anathema.

Seen as a response to the woes of the dot-com bust in 2000, these strategies make sound economic sense. The internet momentarily threatened to destabilize the media monopoly by undercutting scarcity. AOL and Yahoo solidified the price of headlines at zero, even as tens of thousands of alternative, independent publishers jumped into the market, taking advantage of low production costs and instant global distribution to provide free content. Every partisan stripe, every issue of public interest, every social group, and every cultural niche had its own journalism—unorthodox though it may be. Lowballed by the commerce kings of the internet and outflanked by legions of citizen publishers, the giants of the news industry were left holding the bag—down but not out. All they had to go on in the online market were brand names with near-universal recognition; huge numbers of habituated readers and viewers who now expected free access to content; networks of conventional media channels, none of which were yet profitable online; and the economic clout that comes with being a massive corporation. These tools would prove more than sufficient to launch a counterattack and suggest the ways in which it could best be carried out: convergence, micro-revenues, and the reconstruction of the media monopoly.

The tale of how this resurgence came about has already been told, but now it remains to assess the consequences. As I have noted, the sweeping wave of corporate partnerships, the rise of digital news networks, and the convergence of multimedia newsrooms within the largest news organization have together resulted in an increasingly profitable online news industry. On the surface, the companies present these changes as if they were a great thing for journalism. What a great thing it will be, they say, when television, radio, newspapers, and digital journalism owned by a single company are all plugged into a common CMS, passing news, features, and opinions back and forth across a global network. What a great thing it will be, they say, when the nation's best newspapers and broadcast news programs can share content, doubling and tripling the amount of outstanding coverage they can provide in the bottomless digital news hole. What a great thing it will be, they say, when the newsrooms within these proprietary networks and corporate partnerships are condensed into only a handful of multimedia super–news production centers—allowing journalists from every media to learn one another's trade, share content, and enrich the lives of the public. These wonderful results might occur if every last one of the biggest media companies were totally committed to public service and willing to forgo profits in pursuit of democratic ends. But to make economic sense (which is the only kind of sense that commercial journalism seriously attends), these changes are not likely to produce positive results for the public, unless it is by accident. Ben Bagdikian (2000) saw clearly the public's precarious position, and he was writing before digital convergence:

> Today the integrity of news and other public ideas depends on corporate self-control, on the hope that the large corporations that now control most of the media will never use that power as an instrument to shape society to their liking. (p. 223)

Let's start with newsroom convergence. What is the logic behind bringing print, television, radio, and online journalists into the same production quarters? It is certainly not to very expensively increase the diversity of coverage and perspective by integrating and copresenting four different takes on public affairs. The real goal is to reduce production costs by eliminating overlapping coverage—to generate one set of news reports made by a single set of cross-media-trained journalists that can then be repackaged into multiple media channels and sent out to the public. The obvious criticism is that convergence will reduce the number of journalists covering any particular story—stretching a less diverse news media over more homogeneous channels. If one story fits four media, why have four journalists and the costs of four separate voices? That is clearly the intent; however, the reality so far is that convergence has not run so smoothly. Journalists have been resistant, and coordination has proven labor intensive. Jobs have not necessarily been cut, even in an economic downturn. But an employment freeze is hardly a counterargument against the economic logic of convergence and its penchant for cutting costs. In the short term, the transition to multimedia newsrooms has meant more work but not more journalists. Even as the quality of the journalism begins to suffer—as reporters saddled with multimedia duties have less time to investigate, check facts, and write good stories—no further staff should be expected. Indeed, this has been the case in Tampa, where journalists have seen weekly hours jump from forty to sixty, but compensation and hiring remain the same (Stevens 2002). Over time, as production of this nature becomes more streamlined and homogeneous, jobs should be expected to fall away. At the very least, job descriptions will change. Fewer staffers will be journalists; more will be repackagers. This will mean heavy hits for online staffers whose ranks were already thin. A 2001 survey by the "Digital Journalism Credibility Study" of seventy-two online news organizations found that 75 percent had a staff of fewer than ten, 56 percent had fewer than five , and 25 percent had a single employee in charge of web content (Finberg and Stone 2001, 9).

It is at this point that economic directives and the commitment to content diverge. Coordination is only costly when it is difficult and unnatural. Consequently, the sensible business move in this context would be to gradually cover fewer and fewer stories that do not lend themselves to convergent distribution. Stretching content across multiple media lends itself easily only to particular types of stories. Journalists focusing more time and energy on cross-media production rather than good reporting can be expected to follow this path of least resistance. Consequently, production values may descend to the lowest common denominator of television news, encouraging more of the same profit-driven content decisions that are exacerbating the crisis in journalism. There will be more crime, sex, scandal, disaster, and regurgitated press releases from official sources in the news. There will be less process stories, investigative reporting, international news, and in-depth coverage on any topic that requires time, effort, and money to produce or that does not play well on all media channels. Interviews with in-house journalists will replace more costly contact with outside sources or independent investigation. Web sites will likely be discouraged from producing any extra content that is not of purely sensational or advertiser-friendly value. Moreover, with the focus on immediacy in the digital age, fewer journalists concentrating on speedy delivery in a twenty-four-hour news cycle will tend to produce less accurate, more speculative news. All of the media would of course be expected to maximize the amount of cross-promotional time and space devoted to selling the image of partner organizations—a practice that would reduce the time and space for actual journalism. Yet despite the lower production costs and the higher advertising rates leveraged out of an integrated media market—that is, ad space will be sold in more pricey packages across the media platforms that together offer better ratings—higher profits will likely not translate into a reinvestment in content. That was never the purpose of the exercise. Robert J. Haiman (2001), president emeritus of the Poynter Institute, has come out as a strong critic of convergence for this reason. Its goal is not better journalism but better marketing; its purpose is not public service but financial gain.

The trends toward speed, content repackaging, and superficial topics facilitated by the web make a mockery of the "contextualized journalism" promised by prominent new media analysts. Multimedia, hyperlinks, dynamic updates, and interconnection with archives of related contextual content have great potential in the abstract but amount to very little if the logic behind business operations runs against the grain of such innovations.[11] The best possibilities for diversity and enrichment of the public sphere through digital news production involve more resources not less. That is why, at base, newsroom convergence is a phenomenon that leads to homogenization. It means less news covered by fewer journalists reaching over more media channels.

Intrafirm digital news networks operating on sophisticated CMSs can be thought of as devices of newsroom convergence without regard to geography. They do essentially the same thing but on a much grander scale. Instead of cutting/repurposing staff, lowering production costs, and repackaging multimedia content out of a single pool of cross-media-friendly journalism in just one market, it can be done on a nationwide network. Owners of newspapers, television networks, radio stations, and news web sites can play to the strengths of each individual organization in their portfolios. The best stuff from each outlet can be plugged into the network and served up on all the other sites in the system, not to mention feeding back into conventional media production. Now, once again, on the surface, this could mean collating a huge amount of content and presenting a richer offering from each and every node on the network—and in some cases, it might do this on occasion. However, that would defeat the economic purpose of building such a network. Why build a sophisticated content management network if it will not streamline production and reduce costs? Recall that most online news organizations are in a terrific financial crunch, and public service is not high on the list of strategies they think will get them back in the black to stay.

In the beginning, as the waters are tested, the strongest journalism (i.e., the most popular and profitable) will be syndicated and served up across the network alongside the existing content in that news sector produced by the local outfit. However, as we have seen with the CanWest network in Canada, the drive is to broaden out the centralized pillar of content that is commonly held by the entire national network or by large regional sectors. The drive is to minimize local production and confine it to those stories that cannot be adequately covered by journalists in the large-market supernewsrooms. Costs are lowered across the board by expending minimum labor and resources to cover all the stories once, rather than pay for diversity or, rather, overlap—as the industry terms it. The very real danger is that this will result in “a sterile, homogenized product lacking soul, personality or purpose” (Lasica 2002d). The networked sites carry basically the same content, operate on the same publishing platform, use the same cookie-cutter graphic interface, and take orders from the same centralized editorial home office. Though setting a common denominator for networked news properties may raise some abysmal outlets up to a common standard, that standard will inevitably be as low as the public will tolerate. This is because the standard of public service is set according to the demands of private financial interests, both economically and politically.

For example, in December 2001, CanWest issued a directive ordering no editorial be printed in its regional or local papers that contradicted the opinions published from headquarters. Dissenting journalists complaining about the censorship of free speech and diversity in the public sphere were reprimanded and offered their resignation papers. The company aggressively squashed resistance to the new policy across the board, including banning the withholding of bylines organized by concerned journalists. Editorial control across the news network has been stripped from local boards and exercised exclusively from the top. Concern that these corporate networks will service the public only by “diluting the diversity of views in their communities” is impossible to ignore (Lasica 2002d; see also Canadian Journalists for Free Expression 2002).

These political manifestations are part and parcel of the economic logic in the news industry that drives convergence and internet business models. Standard news content online is now near valueless on the market, and it must therefore be disaggregated from the specialized content for which users will pay. Therefore, production costs for basic coverage must be minimized. This free content must be heavily brand marketed to paper over its homogenization and supplemented by premium services or content with some element of value added that can then be commodified and sold to audiences and indirectly to advertisers. Once again, it means less news covered by fewer journalists stretched over more media channels. Diversity and abundance are costly, inefficient, and counterproductive to this strategy, though they are of course strongly favored by the public. Therefore, standardization and homogenization are smuggled in under the banner of democracy by focusing only on the expansion of the raw number of outlets, not on the quality of the content that each of them provides. Quantity does not add up to quality. This is not about enriching the public sphere; it is about reducing diversity to such an extent that it can be controlled by a limited number of market players and invested with price-valued scarcity.[12]

But if several digital news networks within the holdings of specific firms are competing with each other on this race-to-the-bottom business model, the competition will lower everyone's chance of profitability. If only these networks could be integrated or at least become economically aligned, the odds of walling off the digital news into a subscription-based market would increase. *Cartel* may be an ugly word, but it perfectly describes the logic behind the cross-media corporate partnerships that are springing up between the biggest players in the industry in hopes of capitalizing on synergy. Not only do partnerships reduce competition, they also open up further opportunities for increasing profits by slashing production costs, content sharing, cobranding, and joint negotiation with major advertisers. The same consequences once again result for content. If one corporate partner is pulling in content from a major league branded partner, they are less likely to duplicate production of that content using their own staff. In fact, they may well be prohibited from doing so by the terms of the content-sharing agreement. The more content is shared, traded, and merged, the less original content is in the mainstream market. John Pavlik (2001) noted, in a moment of critical clarity, that he posed as a potential problem of convergence, that "diversity may be decreased, as fewer reporters for any one media company may cover individual stories" (p. 104).

Furthermore, this degree of corporate concentration—involving the intermingling of digital news networks and converging newsrooms—allows for unprecedented scope and power in the media industry. The contraction of an oligopolistic market into a smaller oligopoly, a duopoly, or a monopoly will naturally result in more powerful players. It will bring to the surface the worst of the economic forces that have been ravaging the state of journalism for decades. At the macro-level, it will box out smaller competitors in the mainstream by cornering the advertising market. Rarely can for-profit news organizations survive without at least half of their revenue coming from consistent advertising clients. Negotiating with major advertisers as a bloc of behemoth players with large audiences carries tremendous clout—bringing very high ad rates and a symbiotic relationship with major retailers that is unwise for either party to rattle. It is useful in this context to recall that online ad revenue in 2001 was $2.5 billion, a year that has been described as the worst advertising year since the Great Depression. It is expected to rise to $11.4 billion by 2004 (Pryor 2002; Gates 2002). The importance of cordial relations with advertisers cannot be underestimated for commercial news providers.

Further cementing this relationship will be elements of e-commerce that become integrated into news sites. As the wall between business and editorial decisions morphs into a bear hug, selling the news will become a tool in the digital world for selling other things—from books under review to flowers on the obituary page to myriad other possibilities such as movie tickets, music, stocks, and techno-gadgets. Sponsorship of news content will likely become more invasive. Special commercial sections that look like news but aim to sell will become more common. Indeed, as early as 1998, 37 percent of online ad revenues came from these type of sponsorships, not from banner ads (Finberg and Stone 2001, 45-46). All of these trends support the political economic interests to which the news conglomerates are tied, either through their parent companies or through partners and allies in other manufacturing or service industries. It raises major questions about conflicts of interest as more and more news organizations are tied to the fortunes of the corporations they are meant to critically cover. As James Carey (1999) has noted, "Under this dispensation, the representative figure in journalism is no longer the citizen but the consumer, not the reporter or even the publisher but the shareholder" (p. 50). It is no wonder that a recent survey discovered that two-thirds of Americans think advertisers and the business community exert undue influence over how the news is reported (Finberg and Stone 2001, 9).

At the micro-level, the power of commercial logic will shape much of the value-added content into carefully target marketed fare. That which does not sell will not be produced. "Facts are replaced instead by whatever sells—or can be sold. Spin replaces verification. Right becomes a matter of who has the greatest might—wattage, audience, rhetorical skill" (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001, 137). The much heralded customization services are already turning into premium packages of content appealing mainly to affluent consumers or meaningless tripe that attracts sensation hounds. It is hard to imagine a mainstream news vendor offering a *Daily Me* service featuring news about poor people, social justice, government corruption, corporate fraud, economic inequality, and the organization of popular resistance. That would be a double whammy—violating the political economic principles of the ownership as well as the dictum that only content that will draw substantial revenue (tabloid or business news) shall be produced. As Nancy Maynard (2000b) insightfully inquired, "In the new Internet world, where is the incentive to create important public-service stories—not stock prices or sports scores but enterprise reporting of oft-delayed value" (p. 128)?

This reveals the great problem with the system of micro-payment—it lays a frame of market calculus over each citizen's political interests in the public democracy. In the shoe market or the hamburger market, that is all well and good, as the aggregate of individual decisions does not typically affect the general quality of public life. However, journalism exists to serve the public and not an aggregate of the individuals within the public. Its effect is socially nonsummative, and its production value cannot be broken down into the composite of each person's cost-benefit decisions in the content market. What may be right for me in the market may not be right for us in the democracy, and any system of journalism that privileges the market decisions of the wealthiest "me" without any regard to the collective democratic needs of the "us" has totally skipped out on its public mission. Though it may be that trends in the political culture have reduced the political desires of citizens to an economic model, fundamental rights of common identity and freedom are still civically rooted (see Carey 1999, 62). What sells is not always what informs, and what is appealing is not always what is important.

It is critical that political news remain a public good, not a commodity in the entertainment/information market. The economics of protecting market-unfriendly hard news from the tyranny of retail offer up the positive externality of a common information pool on which to base public deliberation. The market is not a democracy, and no where is that more clear than in the news industry. Carving up value-added news into pay-per-view online experiences reduces the political needs of the public to a cash nexus in which what a consumer is willing to pay for becomes coterminus with what a citizen knows about public affairs and, consequently, what a journalist will bother to report. It factionalizes and compartmentalizes information into socioeconomic fiefdoms whose barriers to entry are guarded by market principles. By any democratic measure, this is a self-defeating system of sustained ignorance, information inequality, and rationalized depoliticization. "The notion of public service—that there should be some motive for media other than profit—is in rapid retreat if not total collapse. The public is regarded not as a democratic polity but simply as a mass of consumers" (McChesney 2000, 77).

The economic realities of digital journalism also create a number of paradoxes in relation to the technology itself. Already mentioned is the major contrast at the structural level: centralizing content on a medium that radically facilitates decentralization. As Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) eloquently put it, "The paradox is that news organizations use expanding technology to chase not more stories but fewer" (p. 141). But there are other glaring deficiencies in the current state of mainstream online journalism vis-à-vis the celebrated predictions of what the technology would allow it to become. First, there was a great deal of talk about nonlinear story telling. This technique would allow journalists to link their stories with contextual content, related stories, multimedia additions, customized features, and dynamically updated corrections and updates (Pavlik 2001, xiv). This set of new opportunities—though they have been incorporated in the second tier of journalism sites and to a small extent in the best of the mainstream sites—has simply not panned out, and for obvious reasons. For starters, more content takes more labor and resources to produce. This runs flat up against the trends in the industry toward cutting staff, costs, and extraneous content. Layered, contextualized journalism with a depth and breadth possible only in the limitless expanse of cyberspace has only made an appearance in the mainstream as a specialty feature that is offered for micro-payments, or when additional content is provided already produced and free of charge by corporate or government publicity agencies.

This commodification process limits the audience for the best in online news and shapes the type and substance of the content issued in these packages. What few extra features are still in the market for free will be removed as soon as a way to squeeze money out of them is discovered. In addition, users have become accustomed to sampling online news in only the most cursory fashion. This is a direct result of the homogenization of basic news and the disappearance of value-added features into subscription-only enclaves. It is a self-perpetuating circumstance whereby people do not spend enough time reading news to prompt news providers to enhance the experience, and so long as they fail to enhance the experience, users will not spend much time with it. The reduction of news headlines to an item worthy of nothing better than window-shopping fits well with the portal sites where news is most often viewed. These sites are little more than digital shopping malls, and the news is just window dressing for the real retail goods on offer. The paradox of the devaluation of journalism in the midst of the information society on the technology of the information economy is simply stunning.

Instead of actual rich content and thick layers of multimedia data backing up and surrounding every story—features that would actually improve the quality of journalism but cost money to sustain—users are offered gimmicks, stand-ins for actual enrichment pumped up through marketing to seem better than they really are. Chief among these is the ubiquitous, self-congratulatory service of "interactivity." Chat rooms, discussion forums, and the e-mail addresses of journalists are offered up as the transformative element in digital news. The argument can easily be made that these forms of interactivity are weak (if not fake), symbolic forms of the true interactive potential of the technology. The phenomenon of real-time instant gratification in chat rooms, message boards, and web forums compromises the true purpose of journalism, which is to guide and facilitate a public deliberation of depth and duration through time and across social strata. The fascination with "real time" has come to elide the glaring lack of community "through-time." Instant messaging and knee-jerk feedback do not often produce a reasoned debate over important social issues but are far more likely to result in what one critic has called a "barroom brawl" (Sorid 2002). Several news sites have had to close down their chat rooms and message boards because of hostile remarks and low-quality discussion

(Finberg and Stone 2001, 63). Journalists rarely respond to reader e-mails at large organizations, even if they bother offering the option. The *New York Times* actively discourages its journalists from responding to reader e-mail (Finberg and Stone 2001, 10).

That chat rooms have in some cases managed to develop a true sense of community among users is a result of cultivating aspects of the interaction that go beyond the most simple (and most common) application of this techno-gimmick. Building associations with other citizens around values, concerns, or shared information occurs in cyberspace in the same way it does in the real world, by investing time, energy, and commitment. If online news organizations were serious about fostering community interaction, they would have to abandon the digital shopping mall mentality of how to organize a site and discover the virtues of the digital community.

The Pew Center for Civic Journalism sponsored one such effort at the *Record*, a local paper in northern New Jersey. The *Record* linked up with as many community organizations as were willing to come on board, offered citizens self-publishing opportunities and carefully maintained and monitored discussion forums, and produced high-quality, multimedia, contextualized journalism. It continues to be hugely popular among community residents (Pavlik 2001, 132-34). But such a move would be expensive, a risky business venture for a national conglomerate, contrary to the strategy of concentration and homogenization, and not high on the agenda of any smart business manager. Moreover, true interactivity makes the journalist's story the beginning of the public discussion, one that continues through time, challenging, altering, and adding to the original commentary. This sort of ideological give-and-take does not mesh well with corporate editorial prerogatives. Jim Hall (2001) concluded,

> It is the reason why many branded online providers offer news in multimedia formats which are as far from being interactive as their newspaper precursors. They neither provide links to their own sources and to other views of the story nor do they offer their readers effective ways of responding or intervening. (p. 38)

Conclusion

The picture presented in this article is a grim one. The state of journalism is bad and getting worse. The clash between profit seeking and public service has not been swept away by the internet but rather made more acute. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) concluded bitterly about the conflict between market values and public service, "We are facing the possibility that independent news will be replaced by self-interested commercialism posing as news" (p. 13). The technology once deemed to be a possible savior has emerged as a tool of the very interests at the root of the crisis. The boom and bust cycle of the new economy did not produce a democratized media with decentralized news production and a more informed polity. Rather, it resulted in a hard-nosed set of business strategies that is rapidly handing even greater control over public information to an ever-decreasing number of media corporations. Concentration of ownership, consolidation of production, and homogenization of cross-media content have become the orders of the day. Within the industry, the profession of journalism is constricting and altering in its modes of production—favoring a new breed of cross-media talent churning out a slate of prefabricated, repackaged, and multimedia-friendly content. Standards of quality and comprehensiveness are slipping even further, even as corporate directives unabashedly hold editors to account.

As a result, bold infringements on principles of diversity, comprehensive representation, and public responsibility are being passed off as financial necessities and covered over by branding campaigns and more entertaining production values in the newsroom. Meanwhile, the heady promise of free information has also been squashed. Systematically, America's most trusted news sources are walling off ever-increasing portions of news sites and pricing them in the marketplace. In the digital arena, advertisers have been given even more power to determine the direction of journalism in the future. Though good journalism still manages to appear thanks to conscientious reporters and editors, the economic logic that determines the nature of the system and the trajectory of its future in multimedia, online distribution works to reduce their opportunities and the resources at their disposal. There does remain a great deal of hope and promise in a second tier of independent and alternative information providers—from citizen journalism to web logs to online community organizations—but in the context of a reinstated, strengthened media monopoly, it must be a guarded hope, not a triumphant one.

Notes

1. Please note that research for this article was completed in mid-2002. However, the conditions remain applicable to the present date of publication.

2. For more on the crisis in journalism, see (only the most recent books are listed) Bagdikian (2000), Borjesson (2002), Downie and Kaiser (2002), Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001), McChesney (2000), Palast (2002), and Rowse (2000a).

3. See Katz (1995) for a notable declaration of liberation and Katz (2001) for the retraction.

4. This discussion of the history of online journalism benefits greatly from Larry Pryor (2002).

5. Many of these new professional blog sites are run out of MSNBC, a prime example of corporate capital emulating public sector developments (http://www.msnbc.com/news/OP_Front.asp).

6. Based on the latest Jupiter survey, 63 percent say they will not pay for web content, and 69 percent say they will not pay for web services (Mangalindan 2002; see also Yaukey 2002).

7. For an acute premonition of these developments, see Regan (2000, 6-9).

8. This ominous specter of an idea is mentioned by Hall (2001, 177). However, the specifics of the scenario and the stakes involved were brought to my attention by Michael Albert in a phone interview (16 April 2002). Arguments about the relationship between the physical and content layers of the internet are also very nicely written up in Lessig (2001).

9. This notion was expressed by Leah Gentry, then of the LATimes online, in comments to Christopher Harper (1998, 47-49). See also Dizikes (2002).

10. Much of this discussion of micro-payments is drawn from Pryor (2002). See also Pavlik (2001, 102).

11. See Pavlik (2001, 4). Pavlik painted a rosy picture of the virtues of online news without exploring how their development will come to pass.

12. For more on this point, see Bagdikian (2000, 222).

References

Anzur, Terry. 2002. If You Build It, Will They Care? *Online Journalism Review*, 2 April. Retrieved from http://www.ojr.org/ojr/business/p1017776844.php.

Bagdikian, Ben. 2000. *The Media Monopoly*. 6th ed. Boston: Beacon.

Barringer, Felicity, and Alex Kuczynski. 2000. Net Journalism Tries to Regroup after Layoffs and Setbacks. *New York Times*, 12 June, C1.

Borjesson, Kristina, ed. 2002. *Into the Buzzsaw*. New York: Prometheus.

Breckenridge, Patti. 2000. Wanted: A 21st Century Journalist. *Nieman Reports* 54 (4): 25-27.

Canadian Journalists for Free Expression. 2002. Not in the Newsroom. Retrieved from http://www.cjfe.org/specials/canwest/canwintro.html.

Carey, James. 1997. The Press, Public Opinion, and Public Discourse: On the Edge of the Postmodern. In *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, edited by Eve Stryker Munson and Catherine A. Warren, 228-57. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

———. 1999. In Defense of Public Journalism. In *The Idea of Public Journalism*, edited by T. Glasser, 49-66. New York: Guildford.

Carr, Forrest. 2002a. The Tampa Model of Convergence. *Poynter Convergence Studies*, 1 May.

———. 2002b. The Truth about Convergence. *Poynter Convergence Studies*, 1 May.

Castells, Manuel. 2001. *The Internet Galaxy*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Charging for Access Doesn't Slow Growth of Newspaper Websites. 2002. *Mediapost*, 9 April. Retrieved from http://www.mediapost.com/dtls_dsp_news. cfm?newsID=113288.

Dizikes, Peter. 2002. Is the Free Ride Over? ABCNEWS.com, 2 April. Retrieved from http://more.abcnews.go.com/sections/business/dailynews/freeinternet 020402.html.

Downie, Leonard, Jr., and Robert G. Kaiser. 2002. *The News about the News*. New York: Knopf.

Farhi, Paul. 2000a. Surviving in Cyberspace. *American Journalism Review* 22 (7): 23-27.

———. 2000b. A Tough Sell. *American Journalism Review* 22 (5): 35-39.

Finberg, Howard, and Martha L. Stone. 2001. Digital Journalism Credibility Study. *Online News Association*. Retrieved from http://www.journalists.org/Programs/ona_credibilitystudy2001report.pdf.

Freeland, Chrystia. 2002. Delivering the News You Need in New Ways. Retrieved 19 May 2002 from FT.com.

Fuller, Jack. 2000. Merging Media to Create an Interactive Market. *Nieman Reports* 54 (4): 33-35.

Garnham, Nicholas. 2000. *Emancipation, the Media, and Modernity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Gates, Dominic. 2002. Newspapers in the Digital Age. *Online Journalism Review*, 1 May. Retrieved from http://www.ojr.org/ojr/future/1020298748.php.

Gross, Terry, and David Talbot. 2000. Transcript of "Fresh Air" Interview, 14 June 2000, WHHY.

Haiman, Robert. 2001. Smart Conference. Retrieved 28 February 2001 from Poynter.org.

Hall, Jim. 2001. *Online Journalism: A Critical Primer*. London: Pluto.

Harper, Christopher. 1998. *And That's the Way It Will Be*. New York: New York University Press.

Herman, Edward. 1998. The Propaganda Model Revisited. In *Capitalism and the Information Age*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Katz, John. 1995. The Age of Paine. *Wired*, May. Retrieved from http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/3.05/paine.html.

———. 2001. The Age of Paine Revisited. *Slashdot*, December. Retrieved from http: //www.slashdot.org/article.pl?sid=01/12/04/1737234&mode=thread.

Khan, Mickey Alam. 2002. Online Publishers Search for New Revenue Streams. *DMNews*, 22 April. Retrieved from http://www.dmnews.com/cgi-bin/artprevbot.cgi?article_id=20136.

King, Katie. 2000. The Wired Revolution. *Nieman Reports* 54 (4): 50.

Klein, Jonathan. 2000. Broadband Technology Brings News Video to the Web. *Nieman Reports* 54 (4): 47-49.

Kovach, Bill, and Tom Rosenstiel. 2001. *The Elements of Journalism*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Kramer, Staci D. 2002. What's Changed? Everything and Nothing. *Online Journalism Review*, 28 March. Retrieved from http://www.ojr.org/ojr/kramer/p1017382373.php.

Kurtz, Howard. 2001. Is Online Journalism on Its Way Out? *Washington Post*, 21 February, C1.

Lasica, J. D. 2002a. After the Meltdown. *Online Journalism Review*, 25 March. Retrieved from http://www.ojr.org/ojr/future/p1017079354.php.
———. 2002b. Independents Day. *Online Journalism Review*, 4 April. Retrieved from http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/p1017771181.php.
———. 2002c. The Promise of the Daily Me. *Online Journalism Review*, 2 April. Retrieved from http://www.ojr.org/ojr/ethics/p1017779142.php.
———. 2002d. The Rise of Digital News Networks. *Online Journalism Review*, 11 April. Retrieved from http://www.ojr.org/ojr/lasica/p1018588363.php.
———. 2002e. The Second Coming of Personalized News. *Online Journalism Review*, 2 April. Retrieved from http://www.ojr.org/ojr/lasica/1017779244.php.
Lessig, Lawrence. 2001. *The Future of Ideas*. New York: Random House.
Mangalindan, Mylene. 2002. No More Free Lunch. *Wall Street Journal* Online, 15 April. Retrieved from http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB1018650941891114320.djm,00.html.
Mayer, Caroline E. 2002. Consumers Union Chief Emphasizes Web Site. Washtech.com, 3 April. Retrieved from http://www.washtech.com.
Maynard, Nancy. 2000a. Digitization and the News. *Nieman Reports* 54 (4): 11-13.
———. 2000b. *Mega Media: How Market Forces Are Transforming News*. Victoria, BC: Trafford.
McChesney, Robert W. 2000. *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*. New York: New Press.
McGill, Kevin. 2002. Newspaper Execs Mull Industry Future. Associated Press, 1 May. Retrieved from http://biz.yahoo.com/ap/020501/naa_future_2.html.
Outing, Steve. 2002. Content Publishing Systems Squash News Design. *Editor & Publisher*, 8 May.
Palast, Greg. 2002. *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*. London: Pluto.
Palser, Barb. 2002. Advertorial with a Twist. *American Journalism Review*, May. Retrieved from http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=2510.
Pavlik, John V. 2001. *Journalism and New Media*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Piller, Charles. 2000. Web News Sites Fail to Click. *Los Angeles Times*, 18 August, A1.
Pryor, Larry. 2002. The Third Wave of Online Journalism. *Online Journalism Review*, 18 April. Retrieved from http://www.ojr.org/ojr/future/p1019174689.php.
Regan, Tom. 2000. Technology Is Changing Journalism. *Nieman Reports* 54 (4): 6-9.
Richardson, Dan. 2001. News Weeklies: Finding the Numbers. *Online Journalism Review*, 26 September. Retrieved from http://www.ojr.org/ojr/trends/p1015016916.php.
Rowse, Arthur E. 2000a. *Drive-by Journalism: The Assault on Your Need to Know*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press.
———. 2000b. Taming Online News for Wall Street. *Nieman Reports* 54 (4): 19-21.
Saunders, Christopher. 2002. NYTimes.com Debuts Dayparts. Retrieved 3 June 2002 from NewYork.com.
Shepard, Alicia C. 2000. Get BIG or Get OUT. *American Journalism Review* 22 (2): 22-29.

Simmons, Lisa. 2002. BBC World Service Ties Up with New York Times Digital. *Revolution*, 3 April. Retrieved from http://www.revolutionmagazine.com/print.cfm?r=1&id=86874&dir=news.

Small, Jay. 2000. Economics 101 of Internet News. *Nieman Reports* 54 (4): 41-42.

Sorid, Daniel. 2002. Political Chat Becomes Barroom Brawl on the Web, 14 April. Retrieved from http://reuters.com/news_article.jhtml?type=internetnews&StoryID=812439#.

Stevens, Jane. 2002. TBO.com: The Folks with the Arrows in Their Backs. *Online Journalism Review*, 3 April. Retrieved from http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/1017858030.php.

Tompkins, Al. 2002a. Bridging TV and Cable in New England. *Poynter Convergence Studies*, 1 May.

———. 2002b. Sun-Sentinel Courts Radio. *Poynter Convergence Studies*, 30 April.

———. 2002c. Washington Post Extends Its Reach. *Poynter Convergence Studies*, 30 April.

Where Is the News Industry Headed? 2002. *Online Journalism Review*, 10 April. Retrieved from http://www.ojr.org/ojr/future/p1018469789.php.

White, Caroline. 2002. Online Revenues Rise Despite Slowdown. *Dot Journalism*, 31 May.

Yaukey, John. 2002. Kiss the Free Web Goodbye. *USA Today*, 26 April.

Ben Scott is a doctoral student at the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois. He is a student of media history, contemporary journalism, and the economic structures of the communications industry. He is the author of several recent articles on these topics, including an introduction, coauthored with Robert W. McChesney, to the reissue of Upton Sinclair's classic, The Brass Check *(University of Illinois Press, 2003).*