

## MODERN MEDIA: INSTANT MEDIA

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### Abstract

We live in an age where mankind is experiencing abrupt technological changes affecting the entire social structure, from the political and economic decisions to the impact on education and culture and the metamorphosis of the self into a subconscious attempt to adapt itself to the new environment. What determines this almost chaotic process is, in fact, the speed with which these changes occur. The past tells us about peoples who, facing certain history “accidents” – like the countries that belonged to the communist system – have been afterwards forced to “burn the stages” in order to align themselves to the modern world. The evolution or, more likely, the revolution of technology seems to have made the whole world undergo this process. Journalists or more likely journalism as a whole are in a full process of “reinvention”. Access to recording devices (the mobile phone), rapid transmission (the Internet) and the broadcasting platforms (the interactive sites of the majority of all press institutions) is now available to anyone. Consequently, one must redefine the gist of the reporter notion. The press, in its ideal form, represents a *power* sustained by *ethics* and *responsibility*. Modern society is trying to find out today whether the new type of amateur journalist, flooding the electronic space of the publications with huge amounts of news can align to the mentioned norms.

**Keywords:** *instant media, reporter, journalism, technology*

The technological development in the recent years has brought surprising and complex changes in the journalistic field. Adaptation to the new channels of communication and to the speed with which information travels today triggered the creation of a new way of producing reportage that can be rightfully called “instant media”.

Recent discoveries in the field of electronics and in that of the microprocessors, the use of new materials that allow a decrease in the number of the hardware components, have generated as a first consequence a diminished size of computers and their screens. There followed the launching of lap-tops, notepads and iPads.

Simultaneously, the world has also undergone a revolution in the field of communication: the mobile phones. The first call from a mobile phone, using Bell System Mobile Telephone Service, was made on the 17-th of June 1946, in Missouri, USA. The device, placed in a car, weighed 36 kilos. Obviously, it is difficult to refer to it as being a “mobile” phone.

Within a very short period of time though, things changed both regarding the design and functionality. Just like computers, mobile phones became, firstly, ever smaller. In an early stage, they were attached photo cameras, then to video cameras. Today, a 4G generation mobile phone is, at the same time, a chronometer, GPS, radio, television, game console, videophone etc. What our study is interested in is the fact that the trivial mobile phone (trivial in the sense of its spreading all over the world, to all age and professional categories) can be transformed, if necessary, into video camera, report phone, writing pad and relay for transmitting audio and video data. Undoubtedly, this is the complete logistics that a reporter can wish for, regardless of the media field they work in.

One must also consider the fact that the price of such tools has decreased dramatically over time. In the early ‘90s, a digital photo camera with only 1.3 Mega pixels could reach the cost of a couple of hundred Euros and was considered highly efficient. Today, a much more sophisticated digital camera can be purchased for only a quarter of the above mentioned price. Similarly, two decades ago, the television stations used SVHS or Betacam cameras. Now, we can buy very good personal video cameras, whose quality is highly superior to the SVHS or Umatic cameras used by TV stations only two decades ago. Even the simple video camera of a mobile phone is, generally, superior to the professional cameras of the 90s.

In conclusion, the access to this kind of equipment may turn any mobile phone owner into an occasional/pseudo-reporter: a person who, having witnessed an exceptional event, seen in his/her journeys, extraordinary places and people, simply has got something to say neither more nor less than to ...the whole world.

Major media trusts, followed then by almost all publications, have guessed from the beginning the huge potential of new technologies and their challenge from the shadow.

The deadline for drafting a report is not determined anymore by the time the newspaper model has to get under the press, or by the time the Journal is published.

As a result, the adjustment to the new conditions was the establishment of the sites "online". These are permanently "fed" with information by the employees of the respective trust or by the "occasional reporters" we have mentioned earlier. Riots in the Arab world, for example, and many other exceptional events as well, have been "covered up", hidden from the public, especially in the beginning. But, by means of the mobile phone, people from the public captured varied "topics" on their phone cameras and sent the images to the You Tube site, wherefrom, TV stations or newspapers took them. Initially, many people expressed their skepticism on this new type of "journalism", but recent history has proven that it is the natural evolution of things.

Even events of less importance have made journals out of television news due to the fact that an amateur reporter sent images and data from the sight of the event. In schools of Journalism, students are taught that a two-seat plane, crashing into a barn is not news unless images of the event can be provided. It is clear that we are now provided with hundreds of films with "planes crashing into barns" and the editorial offices fully benefit from the amateur reporters and cameramen.

You Tube, whose motto is "*Broadcast yourself*", appeared in February, 2005. In December the same year it was accessed approximately 8 million times daily. In 2006 the numbers reached 100 million visits and 65.000 new films loaded every day. In July 2007, first contacts between

You Tube and the press are made, by launching the debates CNN/You Tube - a historical moment, as seen by the creators of the electronic space. There followed contracts that allowed the programs rebroadcasting, such as CBS, MGM or Disney. The first important TV station whose broadcast is fully imported is Channel 4. In 2009, channels of two public institutions are launched: US Congress Channel and President Channel. Pope Channel further on joins them. In the spring of 2010, on You Tube we have 24 video hours loaded every minute, and the number of daily views reaches 2 billion.

In these conditions, site creators felt the need to help journalists who take increasingly more information and images from the site, by creating specific pages dedicated to them, *You Tube for media* and *Citizentube*.

From the first page, *You Tube for media*, journalists learn to access, with greater ease and accuracy, information and images they need in their work. They also find out the site policy for copy right. At the same time they are introduced to methods to interest the public in providing them with information, films, or even reports to be broadcasted. ABC, CNN, CBS, Reuters, Fox News are just some examples of media trusts that profited from collaboration with You Tube.

The second address, *Citizentube*, defines itself as a channel where the site visitors are able to watch the latest news stories sent by private individuals and to learn the new trends in the use of the latest technology by editors, activists, politicians or governments. How this new media system work and what does is the boundary between professionals and amateurs? We will consequently stop, for exemplification, on a subject of public interest - the Royal Wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, as it was reflected in traditional media and You Tube web pages.

Reports with the largest audience (number of views) were, of course, the ones released by BBC, Associated Press, Telegraph, The Royal Channel (the You Tube channel dedicated exclusively to Britain's Royal House) etc., which had millions of visitors in the first month after the posting. In addition to these, there have been loaded on the site in question hundreds of other individual

films of a better or lesser quality. The visits number for the latter posts range from several hundreds to several thousands within the same period of time. Interesting is the fact that the ceremony as such and the two protagonists were not the only ones to have attracted the amateur journalists' attention. For example, during the celebration there was also scheduled a moment when both old and modern fighter airplanes flew above the crowd. An amateur movie, shot from Buckingham Palace Square, had 1183 views in the first day and 4168 after a month. Others chose to stand not in the front of the palace, but on the runway. The movie made by these people had 27 views in the first day and several hundred after a month's post. Other people thought they saw a UFO behind the airplanes and they documented the moment, their movie being found interesting by other hundreds of viewers.

From these figures one can see clearly that there is a major public interest for the professional reports. On the other hand, one can notice that the influence of amateur productions on the "media market" tends to increase. Unquestionably, these have their own public.

Changes in the processing of information, as well as the increase in its speed transmission have resulted in the emergence of what the specialty literature calls *the new media*. Given its complexity, the phrase is hard to fit into a pattern. One of the most commonly used definitions is that proposed by Lev Manovich, in *The Language of New Media*: "[...] new media are the cultural objects which use digital computer technology for distribution and exhibition". The author details in *New Media from Borges to HTML*: „Thus, Internet, Web sites, computer multimedia, computer games, CD-ROMs and DVD, Virtual Reality, and computer generated spatial effects all fall under new media". Manovich excludes from the mentioned category the productions that need computer work for editing and storage, but not also for distribution (broadcasted programs through the traditional TV stations, printed newspapers, books and any other kind of paper printings).

According to this definition, the newspaper sites, radio and TV channels dedicated to

Internet transmissions are in fact sides of the discussed "new media". The question is whether or not and how the editing of a report of any kind has been affected within the context of "new media". To the first question the answer is quite clear. The evolution of the writing technique has been constant throughout centuries. In a way was drafted William Howard Russell's report *Moscow Goes to Town*, published in *The Times* on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1856, in a different manner are conceived Geo Bogza's texts, written in the XX-ieth century, and again differently written is the report entitled *The Clock Said 7.55 – Precisely The Time The Missile Struck*, authored by Robert Fisk for *The Independent*, on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

It's only natural that the text drafting technique should evolve in time. „[...] The writing, only exists because it functions, circulates, shifts and has varying value and weight within complexly articulated social, cultural, political, educational, religious, economic, familial, ecological, artistic, affective and technological webs", Anne Frances Wysocki thinks. That's why writing must evolve together with society.

In terms of modern writers and journalists, we are basically presented with a branching of the evolutionary process. On one hand, the technique of the text production develops naturally in newspapers, books and the traditional audiovisual. On the other, there's also an entirely different kind of evolution, namely that generated by the new platform offered by "new media". It's probably a phenomenon that can only be compared to the changes that have been taken place in the text drafting process along with the emergence of radio and television.

That is why the communication sciences specialists are already configuring specific rules for the journalistic text exclusively destined for the "world wide web". As a matter of fact, the term "Internet Journalism" has already naturalized and become an object of study in most of the faculties of this field, since it is considered that writing for "new media" requires special training.

In conclusion, all these technical utilities, "pushing" people to write, have paid off. The

number of “amateur” articles posted on the electronic media editions has reached tens of thousands. The same is the case of the video reports. These statistics raise several questions, though. What is the quality of the texts? How many of them are authentic reports? To what extent are the ethical standards that the professional journalist doesn’t stray from respected? Is it morally correct for a respectable publication to host, even on the electronic edition, texts that are often biased and can harm innocent people or institutions? How reliable may be the information – whether processed or not – provided by a stranger on the Internet?

As far as journalistic ethics is concerned, the sites hosting amateur reporters, such as CNN, solve the problem by not taking the responsibility on the majority of the materials they post. On the front page iReport(CNN), readers are presented with the following message: „So you know: iReport is the way people like you report the news. The stories in this section are not edited, fact-checked or screened before they post. Only ones marked ‘CNN iReport’ have been vetted by CNN”. Therefore, reports that interest publishers, representing a much lower percentage than reports not receiving the CNN endorsement, are checked (often rewritten) and used for the making of professional productions of the press trust. The same system is used by most editorial offices that have an interactive electronic component.

Regarding the first question, concerned with quality, it is – I think – quite clear to everyone that the vast majority of the articles sent by non-professionals do not meet the standards of the reports written by specialists in the field. Can we consider them as reportages? Perhaps we could take some as reportages, but in a very small percentage. The one thing that’s sure is that we are witnessing an unprecedented social phenomenon which is transforming the way we write and read news. In this context, I assess that the definitions are also changing. Whether we talk about “occasional” reporters or professional journalists or writers, the novelty of cyberspace is that they all had to adapt to.

In conclusion, there are many factors that make new media platforms very attractive and also harmonized with modern life style:

- From a technical standpoint, there’s an easy and quick access to information.
- Dissemination speed of information is greatly increased than that in traditional media.
- The huge number of details which can be accessed starting just from a few words.
- Reports can be viewed/read anywhere, anytime, if there is an Internet connection. If someone missed a piece of news or even a larger documentary footage, they can find them at any time on the known sites.
- A topic of interest can be viewed whenever and as many times as it is desired.
- Access to different viewpoints is free.
- Differentiation between unimportant and important issues/topics etc. is no longer the privilege of the editor in chief, the power to discern remaining the reader’s only.

These are, in our opinion, the main arguments in relation to which the new type of media practically imposed itself “overnight”.

Is there still room for the “great story” report? What will happen with the traditional newspapers? Will traditional journalists disappear? Here are just a few of the questions that editors, journalists and sociologists are trying to answer. Of course, one cannot predict with certainty what will happen in the literary and media fields. Beyond the writers’ and journalists’ guilds or the readers’ will, we must admit that a major influence will be had by economic policies and technical developments.

As to the first question, we think that there will always be loyal readers of the traditional report. Even if the world is changing, new topics will keep on emerging. And we will be constantly interested in that “human side” which is ever so close to the report writer. This component – and history has demonstrated abundantly so far – remained almost unchanged for millennia. Therefore, the “raw material” will be permanently available for those who wish to “process” it, as Brunea Fox, Geo Bogza, Ernest



Hemingway and so many more or less famous authors did before.

In an article recently published in the Time edition on-line, *Why I Already Miss Physical Media*, Harry McCracken bemoaned the bankruptcy of the largest books distribution network in the world, Borders. „For years, I had a happy weekend ritual. I'd head to my local Tower Records and lose myself in the aisles of CDs and DVDs. After emerging from the store – usually with some purchases in hand – I'd move on to a nearby Borders, where I'd peruse new books and magazines, rarely resisting the temptation to buy even more items". Now, the place where the book store was is empty. He continues by saying that he still has books that he loves, books that even his grandparents read, but, on the other hand, he is also an avid buyer of electronic books.

Perhaps that future generations will slowly drop the "paper" books. A pupil whose habit from school is to find everything on an electronic tablet will continue to do the same at home. Yet, this is but one step in the evolution of technology and it doesn't mean that, with paper, the novel or the story report will disappear, too. Through a relative analogy, students continued to study Miron Costin or Cezar Petrescu despite the emergence of the telegraph, radio or television.

We believe that we will witness the creation of new forms of story report, just as it was the case of television, since, of course, we can include many video reports in the canons of traditional reportage (be it journalistic or literary), both because of the text skill, and that of the image and editing.

Perhaps more in danger of disappearing than the books are the printed newspapers. Statistics show that, even in the beginning of this century, there were more families with subscriptions to electronic newspapers than to the traditional ones.

Rupert Murdoch launched, in early 2011, the first "iPad Newspaper" – The Daily. This is the first daily electronic publication exclusively destined for tablets. The "newspaper" includes, among other things, movies with journalists reading their news, interactive graphics etc.

Moreover, the subscription is cheap. The same happens with other "veteran" electronic newspapers that we've been reading for some good years on the computer.

Hence, in order to answer the second question, regarding the traditional media, we consider that in a nearer or more distant future the paper support will disappear. However, this will not lead to the disappearance of the newspaper report which is actually the central subject of new media.

Developments in technology have rendered information much more accessible and, more importantly, changed or rather expanded the meaning of the term "reporter". Ion Heliade Radulescu's urge: "Write, boys, just write!" received nowadays a new meaning with the emergence of the "amateur reporter" (or even the "literary reportage amateur writer"), usually "frantic", assaulting the electronic media editions. However, it would be wrong to think that the media professionals are disappearing, as some skeptics might think. The journalistic field is and will always be in need of accuracy, intellectual discipline, correctness (resulting from compliance to technical and ethical rules), and, not least, talent. All these qualities – some native, but most of them gained through specialized education and daily practice – are essential for a professional reporter or writer. Such gifted amateurs in the field can be counted on fingers.

In our opinion, the data accumulated so far in the writing technique of literary or press reportage will not be thrown into the "dustbin of history". We think it's rather about the adaptation to a new environment by creating a set of rules that would differ from "traditional writing" only in detail.

Nobody can accurately predict what the years to come will have in store for journalists and journalism. For now, we are witnessing a peaceful coexistence between the two ways of report writing: the traditional and the modern.

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