Journalism 2.0: 
Exploring the Impact of Mobile and Social Media on Journalism Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the impact of social media upon journalism education from two perspectives: both from the pedagogical changes Web 2.0 and mobile devices enable, and within the context of the changes in journalism that social media use are driving. A participatory action research approach was adopted, beginning with the establishment of a lecturer community of practice focusing upon exploring pedagogical change enabled by mobile social media while allowing the project to develop within a series of reflective interventions within the course. These interventions included the use of Twitter, blogging, QR Codes, and Facebook as part of authentic scenarios throughout the course. Drawing on this experience, the paper presents an emergent framework for a response to social media within journalism education, illustrating the positive impact of integrating the use of mobile social media on student engagement, collaboration and contextualising theory within authentic learning environments.

Keywords: Journalism, Participatory Action, Pedagogy 2.0, Reflective Interventions, Social Media, Web 2.0

INTRODUCTION

Journalism is in crisis (Hall, 2005; Hirst, 2011; McChesney & Nichols, 2010); how does traditional journalism respond to a world where consumer preference is for music that is now distributed via the Internet rather than purchased on CDs, video that is streamed either live or on demand rather than DVD, and news that is distributed via a host of social media channels such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and viewed on mobile devices such as the iPad rather than traditional print media? Fairfax media recently announced 1900 job losses within the traditional

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print industry in Australia as a direct result of the impact of mobile social media uptake (http://tvnz.co.nz/business-news/fairfax-axe-1900-jobs-video-4935480). In February 2012 the Guardian (Rusbridger, 2012) presented their view of how journalism is changing in response to the impact of mobile and social media within a fictitious revamp of the classic three little pigs fairy tale shared on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDGrfhJH1P4). In this paper, we argue that not only is traditional journalism in crisis but journalism education also needs to respond to the implications of the impact of social media.

The Internet has transformed the news industry: its ability to make money, the means it uses to distribute its product and the way news workers practise their trade. The rise of social media sites has even affected the nature of journalistic identity, altering how journalists are viewed and how they view themselves. The editor in chief of The Guardian newspaper and executive editor of its sister Sunday paper, The Observer, writes that in the past journalists were considered figures of authority because they had the access to news sources. They were the gatekeepers and the public trusted them to set the news agenda and to tell the important stories of the day accurately, fairly and quickly. Now many readers want to make their own judgments, create their own content and learn from peers as much as from traditional media sources (Rusbridger, 2011, p. 87).

Consequently, there has been a decline in the number of people relying on conventional sources of news. According to the most recent study by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2011) in the United States more people in the 18 to 20 age bracket (65 percent) now say they get their news from the Internet and only 21 percent cite newspapers as their main source. Even among the over 50’s, 34 percent use the Internet to access the news while 38 percent read a newspaper. Further, more people are getting news via smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices. In fact nearly half of American adults claim to get some local news and information on their cellphone or tablet computer (Rosenstiel, Mitchell, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011).

It’s a situation that has been developing in the fifteen years since most newspapers went online and this period has seen a long-term decline in newspaper sales. Between 2005 and 2009 newspaper companies saw drops in circulation in North America (11 percent), Western Europe (8 percent) and Oceania (6 percent). The biggest declines in the UK (15.9 percent) and US (13.3 percent) coincided with two of the highest penetrations of social media. The third country with a high social media use, Australia, saw a smaller decline in newspaper circulation of 2.5 percent (The Economist, July 19, 2011, p4).

With increasing numbers of consumers getting their news for free online, it is clear that the traditional media business models are no longer working and new ways of thinking about news gathering, distribution and the news audience are required. Some news organisations are adjusting well, recognising the opportunities afforded to those willing to adapt.

Television news now includes significant amounts of amateur footage, often taken from video-sharing websites such as YouTube. During events such as the London riots and the Oslo bombing some of the most dramatic pictures came from amateurs. The unsteady shots, often including the voice-over reaction of the person holding the camera, add an honesty and authenticity to the footage that viewers respond to. During the Arab Spring, Al Jazeera aggregated social media content, including YouTube video, material from Facebook and Twitter messages and delivered it to its television viewers, many of whom did not have access to the Internet. Journalists at the BBC constantly monitor Twitter and use postings either to gauge opinion, get reaction to or eye witness accounts of events or to drive the public to their news site.

Rusbridger (2011), one of the pioneers of innovative web journalism, describes these new practices as offering a partnership with the audience, creating a mutualised news organisation where there is a democracy of ideas and information. He believes that collaboration
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