

Racing towards destruction? Robert Colvile on the Great Acceleration

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By LSE MsC student Jill Russo

Throughout his talk, Robert Colvile managed to maintain a note of measured optimism even as he discussed some of the ways in which news production and consumption are going off the rails. Is journalism headed for a trainwreck, for new, exciting territory or, somehow, both?

“There seems to be a feeling that the way we get information is...kind of broken,” Colvile said. He attributed this feeling to today’s “broader phenomenon of acceleration,” and applied it to print journalism through an outline of three specific areas of acceleration: news transmission, the journalist’s workload, and business models.



Robert Colvile and Charlie Beckett on 15 November 2016

Simply put, technology and the 24-hour cycle allow news to travel very quickly, failing revenue models online have led to reduced staff and resources, and journalists are struggling to pick up the slack in this fast-paced environment while maintaining quality, accuracy, and relevance.

Click-bait

Under unprecedented time and resource constraints, journalists may feel pressured to jump onto high-traffic story bandwagons before verifying key information, driving even more traffic to such stories and artificially inflating their importance. News, both real and fake, now ricochets across the world in a way that is decidedly more democratic but also very vulnerable to manipulation. The overwhelming abundance of material creates a market in which only the eyeball-grabbers (think dubiously-coifed demagogues; sparkly, controversial optical illusions; puppies wearing tuxedos; crisis language; click-bait) and very high-quality content are widely shared on social media, and nobody

wants to pay for any of it.

The roles of both journalist and consumer are evolving rapidly. With news being consumed story by story rather than in a more packaged publication format, Colvile recognizes that the traditional role of the editor may become obsolete. At the same time, however, the need to curate and filter all of this noise is an undeniable “growth market.” Despite the pitfalls of filter bubbles, there is opportunity for producers and consumers alike to create a meritocracy by making and choosing to support and promote very good content.

“We don’t have to race to destruction if we don’t want to,” Colvile concluded. The lingering question is: what if we want to?

By Jill Russo

Watch Robert Colville’s talk:

[Robert Colvile: The Great Acceleration](#) from [Polis Video](#) on [Vimeo](#).

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