

Why we should invest in trustworthy media #Almedalen

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This is the English version of a blog I wrote for Swedish Radio in advance on my talk at the annual Swedish political get-together called Almedalen.

Think of the big things that happen in the world and how you know about them. Stockholm riots, National Security Agency surveillance, the Syrian war. Then think about three small things you need to know: football club fixtures, kids exam results, a good restaurant to eat tonight. It's clear that there's huge demand for media that gives us useful, timely, reliable and important news, data and opinion. So why is there a crisis for those whose job it is to deliver it?



The difficulties being faced by news media organisations are familiar – even in rich, sensible Sweden. Newspaper readership declining, advertising revenues reduced, and digital competition increasing. Public service media too is being asked to justify its income in an age of austerity.

My research has been about finding new ways to use the new technologies to create media that people value. I think this could turn out to be a golden age for journalism – both popular and serious – though it's also going to be a very tough time for a lot of people who can't or won't adapt and invest in change.

My main work has been around networked journalism: how being more interactive, open and connected improves editorial content. By encouraging public participation and sharing the process with your customers you create better material and a real relationship with the people who pay for your work. Instead of an old fashioned linear manufacturing process you have a flexible, responsive service.

But before you can plan change you have to decide what kind of media you want. It might be the fantastically successful celeb news of Mail Online or the serious investigations of The Guardian. It might be the mix of debate, information and banter of a forum like *Mumsnet*. But you have to add value and provide a service people really want.

Public Service media can be provided by anyone in this networked era – including by Universities like mine which, for example, 'broadcasts' thousands of public lectures to millions of people every year via podcasts. I have also worked in the private sector and know that if they invest and innovate they will compete and prove quality as well as quantity, as Channel 4 and the FT have shown in the UK.

However, even in the digital age institutions still matter as places that protect and nurture the social value of media. In an age of complexity and uncertainty it is more vital than ever as a society that we chose to invest in trustworthy media that has a wider responsibility to the nation and to its diverse communities.

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