

Investing in the investigative in an age of alternative media (guest blog)

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What happens to investigative journalism when traditional trade craft is disrupted by a diverse range of new platforms with different principles and practices? Polis Summer School student Rahul Radhakrishnan reports.



This is what investigative journalism looks like now

The gritty charisma portrayed by Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman in [All The President's Men](#), or Kate Beckinsale in [Nothing But The Truth](#), or more recently, Jeff Daniels in Aaron Sorkin's new HBO series, [The Newsroom](#) has revived the long-lost appeal and celebrity profile of the professional journalist.

At least, one can hope...

Nonetheless, within its matrix, the objectivity and transparency of journalism in the digital age has sparked numerous debates worldwide. Here at the LSE, [Richard Sambrook](#) of Cardiff University, and formerly director of BBC Global News, discussed the need for "different codes or journalistic norms" in the digital age. His paper on impartiality and objectivity in the digital age published through the [Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism](#) outlines this ongoing debate in detail.

Sambrook proposes three principles in his paper, which "help rescue the core of what impartiality and objectivity delivered in the past without tethering modern journalism to an anachronistic approach." He suggests that evidence is the heart of objectivity where the audiences are exposed to ample proof of the story-at-hand; diversity of opinion is the heart of impartiality; and lastly, transparency.

Recently, there has been a surge of successful, 'I-wouldn't-label-them-as-alternative-media' journalism that engages audiences with non-objective (subjective) investigations into issues and displays honest reactions to the uncensored dirty detail of conflict reporting. Suroosh Alvi, co-founder of Vice Media [calls this](#) 'subjectivity with substantiation' – which is also Vice's ethos. Vice's online video network, VBS.tv hosts news briefs on underreported stories from the gun markets in Pakistan, and cannibalism in Liberia to Grand Theft Auto in West Bank – most of them hosted by the other co-founder Shane Smith.

Those who aren't familiar with Vice might be familiar with the scene from [Page One: Inside the New York Times](#) when NYT's superstar journo, David Carr [set the record straight with the guys who dared to question NYT's reporting](#). (video)

And there's the veteran war correspondent, Kevin Sites, author of [In The Hot Zone](#). Some would say, he is as bold as Liam Neeson on the silver screen, but regardless, Sites' widely acclaimed book and documentary which covers twenty wars in one year, provided a comprehensive lesson in digital storytelling, and war reporting – not to mention the conduct of the wars itself.

These new ways of telling news stories provide an important insight into the grueling realities of our world, and comes to play where conventional journalism fails. These reports often displays detachment from the surreal which allows further interrogation with a subject and looks into issues with a differing perspective from the mainstream

(see [The Vice Guide to Liberia](#)).

Of course, it ignores some of the fundamentals of traditional journalism but perhaps Mr. Sambrook would agree with me that this 'gonzo' approach is still relevant in determining an informed audience today, being the digital age and all. The brave immersive nature of these reports suggest (justify?) the need to transcend objectivity in reporting dire issues that highlight the residue of conflict on society.

However, classical investigative journalism is as intrepid as Liam Neeson in [Taken](#). Be it the solid reporting that exposed [the ulterior motifs of a former US president](#), or the recent revelation about the [the poisoning of a world leader](#), or even the [politics behind snowplowing](#).

Investigative reports continue to unravel the jarring truth, and puts the accountability of office-bearers in the chokehold of journalism. That said, the aforementioned successful, 'I-wouldn't-label-them-as-alternative' journalism with the subjective provides a supplementary form of investigative journalism for a public entrusted with a new, enhanced level of democratic participation in media, and thus politics.

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