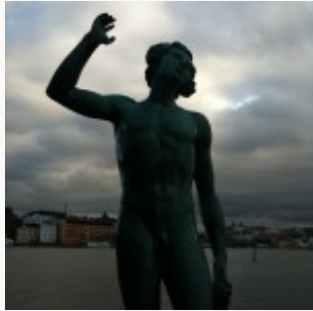


Future of journalism: some principles and predictions (Polis in Stockholm Pt 3)

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Old wave, new wave

I gave a talk to the Swedish Journalism Fund's 40th anniversary conference on the Next Five Years for journalism. They seemed to have a better idea than I did of what's coming next, but here are some extracts from my notes for the evening including a list of predictions for the next five years and suggestions for how journalism training or education should enable better journalism.

News media is now itself environmental – it is part of every aspect of our lives. But if journalism is to survive and thrive then it will do so by learning to love the public and work with them. My book *SuperMedia: Saving Journalism So It Can Save The World* (Blackwell) recognised three possibly contradictory facts.

1. Journalism has never been more plentiful and of such as high quality – there is more good quality information, analysis and debate than ever before. It's never been easier or cheaper to make good journalism – sales of quality like the Economist, Wall Street Journal are up – the BBC now has global reach for its public service international journalism online – even the liberal niche British broadsheet The Guardian has found 10 million online readers outside the UK. Across the world there are booming sales of newspapers and TV channels are being launched daily.
2. New technologies are delivering opportunities for journalism. I have more processing and broadcasting power in my iPhone than I had with a whole newsroom from 10 years ago. And the public want to help make news media even more plentiful and productive – and they will do it for free.
3. The same forces that offer these opportunities are also threatening the business model for mainstream media. More than that they are changing the very nature of news production and even news itself. So whatever news media survives will not be the same as before.

All this shows how we are witnessing a shift in journalism from:

1. Product to Process
2. Manufacturing to Service Industry
3. Fortress to Network

This means we will be doing a different kind of journalism – not just using different platforms

So here are some predictions:

1. MSM when networked will be more valued by the public but less valuable financially
2. Specialised media will be more valued – eg finance & sport
3. Public sector will sustain – and is actually growing in the US
4. Independent online media will grow – eg hyperocal appears to be taking off in the UK – but it will not replace MSM because MSM will become more networked – the two will become symbiotic
5. In a sense all organisations with a public role are becoming media organisations. Government, business, NGOs, unions and the rest can all now communicate directly with the citizen and act as a forum, watchdog

and reporter. They become networked journalists.

6. 50% of current jobs will go – there were far too many journalists considering the efficiency implications of new media technology – but possibly the equivalent of 50% more jobs will be created elsewhere as societies chose to invest in NJ. We should spend the money on the new jobs not on protecting the old ones – which is why I am opposed to subsidies and protection for Old Media.

Which brings us to how the journalist should be prepared for this brave but very difficult and complex new world.

Firstly I have to say that media literacy should be for everyone. One of the best things for journalism would be if the public is given the skills and understanding to participate in networked journalism – everything from learning how to set up a blog to thinking about ideas such as objectivity or transparency.

Then think about building journalism skills as career long – but also as conceptual – it's not enough to know how to do journalism – we all have to learn to think about what journalism IS and what it CAN BE – so critical creative thinking as well as skills

Of course we do have to be new media literate – do we have a variety of online skills? not all of them, but a range? and do we understand things like why it is a good idea to moderate comments but also to respond to people who do comment?

Here's a key thought. In a world where people have instant and easy access to your rival's work – what are you adding? are you just creating Churnalism – as Nick Davies call it – or journalism?

When you create your journalism – why is it of use to the consumer? are you providing it in a way that they can re-use and add to or link to or pass on?

And to that end, how connected are you to your audience? are you in the same social networks they use? are you listening to what interests them? what systems do you and your organisation have in place to gather this information? This is not just good marketing, it's newsgathering.

How relevant are you to the consumer? By that I don't just mean that you should only produce what they find useful in their lives. What I mean is how good are you at matching your output to their interests? Do you ask your public what interests them? Do you measure their response? Do you work hard enough to make your product of relevance?

And finally, how editorially diverse are you? Your public is very diverse in its ethnicity, identity, interests, emotions etc. Take the local paper – how can that represent a community which is so connected to different places, activities. I live in Camden where my children go to school and I eat and drink and play football. I work in central London but my football team is in East London, my wife is from West London I have relatives in Bolivia and Germany and I am interested in archeology and Scandanavian literature. What's my most relevant media and can you provide it?

It's only when we have started to answer some of those questions that we can start to talk about pay-walls or public subsidies. First we must show the public that we understand that our role as journalists has changed from gatekeepers to networkers and that we can provide the traditional functions of reporting, analysis, commentary and entertainment – then when we have saved journalism perhaps the world will save us.

When you look back five years you realise how much has changed and how much might change in the next five years. But that will not be the end of it. You must now prepare for permanent impermanence.

Just when you get used to Twitter, for example, you may find that it is replaced or supplemented by something new. Moore's Law shows no sign of slowing down. So by the end of the next five years you will face a new landscape – possibly more geologically different even than the new environment we face ourselves in now.

In some shape there will emerge a more semantic web that understands what you want from the Internet and seeks to provide it – so it threatens to disintermediate the editorial function entirely.

At the very least we can expect much more intelligent search so that the consumer can access information that they didn't even realise they wanted.

We will be able to tap into the power of connected online data and networks – but the Internet will be so vast that we will increasingly operate in separate clouds within that internet sphere – this has profound implications for the role of news media organisations as they shift from institutions to networks to clouds.

So my final prediction is quite simply this. We don't know what is going to happen next. All we can do is try much harder to understand and act upon change as it happens. I look forward to hearing from others about how you think we can save journalism so it can save the world.

Read what Swedish innovators are thinking [here](#)

Read my first report on Swedish media, Crisis? What Crisis? [here](#)

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