

# Journalism Education In A Networked World (Polis in Shanghai)

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This is the text of a speech to a gathering of global journalism education leaders at the 80th anniversary conference of Fudan University, Shanghai.

## JOURNALISM EDUCATION FOR A NETWORKED MEDIA

We are at a critical moment in the history of journalism. This is a phase of accelerated technological, economic and political change. This is a period when the consumption and production of journalism is undergoing significant alteration. It is vital that journalism studies reflects this and engages with it.

This media change is manifested differently in different media markets. In America and much of Europe it is a crisis of the conventional media business model. In other regions it is a period of rapid expansion and development. I will argue that while there is cultural and economic diversity, there are common if not universal factors: the growth in education, the role of new technologies and the spreading of economic liberalism. There are also comparable changes in the nature of news.

The fundamental fact is that journalism is being disintermediated.

*“The social media revolution is all about the separation of information from its means of distribution”*  
[Prof David Campbell Durham University]

There are two principle characteristics of the emerging new journalisms:

- **Public participation:** bloggers, online video, file-sharing, user-generated content, but also crowd-sourcing. The citizen is now involved in the production of news at every stage. They can work with professional journalists or they can do it by themselves.
- **Connectivity:** everything is hyperlinked, people can share, distribute, get information directly, business or government can communicate directly with citizens who can connect with each other. So instead of linear dissemination we have complex networks and interlinked data flows.

These two factors are changing the production, consumption and indeed the very nature of news itself in profound ways. Together they show we are moving towards what I call *Networked Journalism*.

Here are two quick examples – I could talk about Iran or Obama but I want to take two more routine but possibly more radical examples because they are rooted in everyday experience of news journalism:

**Pamoja FM:** My first example is not very high tech and is from Kibera slum in Nairobi, Kenya which I visited last year for research. This community radio station run by volunteers but trained by a former professional journalist enhances its work with mobile phones. The growth of mobile telephony in Africa is far faster than elsewhere and is

transforming news media. For Pamoja it allows them to news gather across their sprawling community. And it allows the listener to send in ideas, stories and to respond to what they hear. It becomes participatory. So when riots tore that community apart after the disputed elections, Pamoja was much better connected to the community and took a much more responsible attitude than some of its more commercial-minded stations that lacked the same connectivity with their listeners.

BBC Snow: My second example is from last April when there was a massive and unexpected snowfall in southern England that brought the country to a halt. The mainstream news said it was a disaster for the country and that we would lose £2 billion in lost production. Meanwhile, the BBC were being sent photos and video by ordinary people of their experience of the day. 60,000 people sent in material for free that told a different story. It told a story about a once in a lifetime day when families went and played together in the snow instead of going to work or school. So people made the news themselves but chose to tell the story through the mainstream broadcaster. It shows how citizens are shaping agendas in a networked way.

So we see this is not just about content or business models. It is also about the role of journalism in the public sphere.

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.

The previous institutional structure of news media is changing from a series of fortresses to networks. Media institutions have to become more interactive. Transparency is the new currency for building audience trust, replacing imposed editorial stances. Journalists are changing from gatekeepers to facilitators.

At the same time states and corporations are fighting to retain control – often very successfully – but the terms of contestation have changed:

- Abundance militates against control – as Castells argues, the Internet is simply too big and too complex to be controlled entirely
- Creativity conditions atomisation – while there are fears that the Internet fragments communities I would argue that it builds social capital in different ways, largely through putting the means of media production in the hands of the citizen
- Connectivity mediates solidarities – that we no longer will identify simply because of our institutional affiliations but more in terms of our chosen bonds and references – so the political party might die, but political networks are springing up all over the place, driven by deeper social forces but facilitated by digital communications.

So how might this change journalism education?

We operate at the level of strategic thought leadership rather than training. We insist that journalism is no longer about repeating formulae, so journalism education should not just be about training students to do what people used to do.

Journalism and therefore journalism education must be about challenging the role, value, nature of news media. I do not reject the traditional role or values of journalism: to report, analyse, comment, hold to account, to entertain and excite – but we recognise that as a practice it must be reformed to suit the new context of changing audiences and publics.

So at Polis we combine practitioners and academics in all our research and events through seminars, public events



Pamoja FM



and online conversations. Our teaching seeks to combine imaginative creativity, real-world cases, and interaction with practitioners. This is alongside rigorous critical analysis, historical contextualisation, and theoretical discipline. We believe that what journalism needs now is not just teaching *how* to be a journalist, but instead teaching an understanding of what journalism is and what it can be.

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