

Investigative reporting and the Internet: threat or opportunity?

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2007/11/02/dont-blame-the-net-for-job-cuts/

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The Guardian's [David Leigh](#) is possibly Britain's leading investigative reporter, as his success over stories such as the [BAE/Saudi](#) arms sales/bribery scandal shows. But I disagree when he blamed the Internet for the loss of time to do 'good' journalism in a [speech](#) to City University. He warned that the digital newsroom can devalue the reporter because:

“the idea of discrimination, that some voices are more credible than others, that a named source is better than an anonymous pamphleteer (that’s what they used to call bloggers in the 18th century, when they published, for example, the politically dangerous Letters of Junius.) The notion of authoritativeness is derided as a sort of ‘top-down’ fascism. I fear that these developments will endanger the role of the reporter.”

No-one would disagree with a word of that clarion call for journalism's core values. But I think that those values were as often under threat under old models of ownership and production. The real threat is economic and that is about more than the way the internet works, as David himself warns:

“It is ...clear that media outlets will never generate the kind of income enjoyed by printed newspapers: circulation revenue will vanish and advertising revenue will be much smaller than today. There just won't be the money to afford a large staff.”

I have no simple solution, but I hope that the Internet and associated technologies will help fill that gap by including the public in the journalism process, as I suggested in an article for [Press Gazette](#). We must not lose people like Leigh or their values. Instead we must make them part of a new kind of journalism. And funnily enough, that is just what [The Guardian](#) is trying to do with Leigh's BAE investigation by putting much of the data they used on a special website which people can use to further the investigation themselves. The [BAE Files](#) are an example of online networked journalism that suggests investigative work like Leigh's can even benefit from new technologies. That is as long as the news media continues to invest in that kind of work.

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