

Looking to the audience to prepare for the future of news journalism

A bouquet is a bunch of flowers. No need to call it a bouquet of flowers then. The flowers are already there. What's that got to do with the future of news? It's about attributes and whether they are needed. It's also about understanding what and where we are as well as what myself and colleagues in higher education can contribute.

Why call a journalist a digital journalist when, following the BBC's James Harding's argument cited at the Future of News event that every journalist has to be a digital journalist at this point? If all journalists are digital journalists—journalists comfortable with all sorts of digital developments, not virtual journalists consisting of 1s and 0s—the attribute digital becomes redundant. And it goes further than journalism. Why call the 2015 General Election a social media election? Jim Waterson of BuzzFeed UK asked at Future of News, when “It's just how people live their lives now. Why are we still pretending it's a different thing?”

Journalism and how people live their lives are of course related. Journalism plays a central role in how people as a people, as different kinds of communities from the global and national to the local and even shared-interest level live their lives. That's why the future of news is also “the future of democracy”, as Lord Black of Brentwood suggested in his opening remarks.

The issue with calling a journalist digital or an election a social media one, is that we may miss out on some other, more important aspects. Attributes do matter. They signal nuance, important differences and similarities. For instance, local news in the UK has more in common with local news abroad than with national news in the UK, Google's Madhva Chinnappa suggested. Just an aside in his talk, it underlined the importance of nuance. The digital needs of a local journalist are specific to the local context. The same context specificity applies to journalists working for a national publication or even a national one with global ambitions like the Guardian. Dropping the digital from journalist gives us space to acknowledge and then address these needs.

The starting point to unravel these nuances is a shared key purpose of all journalism: to reach an audience. “Follow the reader!” Tony Danker of Guardian News and Media proposed as one of the key strategies to handle the challenges of the future. Some newsrooms but not all have been giving journalists access to reader data, mostly quantitative metrics for some time. In any case, getting that data is one thing; understanding the data another. That's why it's important that journalists become comfortable not just in with all sorts of digital developments in the *production* but also in the *consumption* of news. Too often most emphasis is placed on the former.

To get the balance right is not just a challenge for industry but also for higher education. Francois Nel of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and UCLAN challenged journalism in higher education in his talk by suggesting that its industry focussed training in particular is entrenched in the 20th century. The wider field of academic enquiry into journalism and media with its long tradition of looking into the relationship between culture and media may have something to offer here. Helping future generations of journalists understand how people live their lives through digital technologies, the new normal, can prepare them for the challenges the future of news may bring. Incorporating insights coming out of the institutions such as the Digital Cultures Research Centre or

the Pervasive Media Studio here in Bristol even more closely into the curriculum is our opportunity and challenge.

Back the reader as the starting point to nuance and specificity– journalists need to follow and understand not just *the* but *their* reader. Otherwise all journalists may as well be chasing the proverbial cute kitten community in a race for clicks. To follow the reader, to understand a journalist's specific audience, its willingness to merely listen or desire to collaborate, defines a journalist much better than the catch all term digital.

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