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RETHINKING NEWS IN THE NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON JOURNALISM

Ali Sayed Mohamed[1]*, Haitham Gouda Moayad[1], Ahmed kamal Ali[1]

[1]Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Saudi Arabia

Corresponding Author: Ali Sayed Mohamed
(amohamed@imamu.edu.sa)

ABSTRACT

The study of news is fundamental to media research because of its role in shaping public discussion on political, economic, and social issues. News is constantly changing and both reflects and influences social reality. As Hartley (1982) explains, news organizations are shaped by their relationships with social, economic, political, and technological institutions. In recent years, digital and online media have increased the challenges facing traditional journalism, requiring news organizations and journalists to adapt while maintaining professional standards. This paper examines the relationship between the new media news environment and the challenges facing traditional journalism, particularly regarding professional roles, news quality standards, content construction, and evolving practices. It also explores the implications of new communication technologies for gatekeeping and news discourse. Finally, it highlights how new forms of multimedia and interactivity have reshaped news production and communication. In Part I, this paper examines how news media shapes political reality and sets the public agenda through strategies used by newsmakers to construct meaning. It applies the linear model of communication to analyze news as a tool of political hegemony and explores Carey's ritual view of communication to highlight the cultural and narrative dimensions of news beyond the traditional hard–soft news dichotomy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Part II analyzes key transformations in the contemporary media environment and their impact on news content and journalistic practices, particularly the changing role of gatekeeping. It also discusses reform initiatives, especially public journalism, as responses to these changes.

Part III focuses on online news and emerging forms of political communication in relation to the *public sphere.*

Part I: How the News Media Shape Political Reality

News and Hegemony

Hegemony or the "mass manipulative" approach is a theoretical approach which predicts that media content is influenced by the ideology of the powerful. It is one category among others that has been created by Gans (1979) and Gitlin (1980) to study the influences on news content. In this light, news content is a function of ideological positions and a tool of the status quo (Shoemaker, 1987, p. 2). This approach—based on the linear model of communication and the hypothesis that the mass media is all powerful—assumes that the audience is passive and powerless. The essential model of this approach is the "hypodermic-needle theory," which assumes that messages are injected into a mass audience that responds directly and passively. This approach, or what James Carey has called the "transmission view of communication," argues that the ultimate goal of mass communication is control. In this linear model of communication, the emphasis is on the transmission of information to the audience; and the focus, on one hand, is on a set of strategic mythologies, rituals, and conventionalized rules surrounding the practice of journalism, and, on the other hand, on news sources and owners—or on what has been called the "news promoters." This model ignores the cultural context in which meanings are interpreted, negotiated, circulated, and consumed by an active public within a shared history.

Researchers from early on examined the role of journalists and the impact of their news accounts in shaping political reality and the perception of the "world out there." Theories about agenda setting, priming, cultivation theory, gatekeeping theory, and media framing theory are essential to understanding how news discourse frames and constructs political and social issues within a society, so to influence how the public perceives these issues and events. In other words, the ways by which the news media sets the political and social agendas are tools of political hegemony (Johnson-Cartee, 2005).

To understand how the news media can exercise this kind of political hegemony to make a public accept their reflections of reality—which they claim to be truthful statements about the distribution of power and influence in society—and to make a public accept them as cultural authorities for the world, it is crucial to examine a set of myths and strategic rituals. These myths include those of professional objectivity and news judgment that professional journalists follow in their practice to give them the authority and legitimacy to construct and shape knowledge, and to make truth-claims about society. These myths and strategic rituals are enforced as authoritative and legitimized, and, in this way, become the potential foundation for hegemony (Johnson-Cartee, 2005; Allan, 2004).

Drawing on Gramsci's (1971) writings on hegemony, Allan (2004) argues that hegemony occurs when a mass audience gives its consent to a dominant group or ruling class. The dominant group commonly exercises power over subordinate groups by means of persuasion, not by coercion. It follows that a ruling group is hegemonic only to the degree that it requires the consent of other groups within its preferred definitions of reality. The masses can negotiate reality within the limits of what is called "common sense." This common sense is consistent with dominant norms, values, and beliefs. As Tuchman (1972) argues, common sense plays a central role in the assessment of news content, and determines whether a piece of information is accepted as a fact or taken for granted. Therefore, hegemony can be conceptualized as a site of ideological struggle over common sense. Allan (2004) argues that journalists' visualization of events in a news discourse does not constitute a natural reflection of "the world out there." Rather, it works to reaffirm a hegemonic network of conventionalized rules by which social life is to be interpreted by the public (Allan, 2004, pp. 79-80; Tuchman, 1972, p. 674).

Journalists rely on strategic mythologies, rituals, and conventionalized rules: to make news discourse predictable and recognizable as a distinct genre of factual narrative; to claim that they reflect and represent reality in a neutral, objective, and impartial way; and to defend their news judgment. The salient myth in professional journalism is the myth of objectivity, which surfaced when the penny press emerged in the 1830s, a period also decisive in the history of journalism (Schiller, 1981; Schudson, 1978). Tuchman (1972) shows how journalists use objectivity as a strategic ritual to protect themselves

from potential criticism. She also points to the role of news judgment and common sense as strategic rituals surrounding the practice of journalism.

"News values" is another strategy used to construct news as a truthful representation of reality, when, in fact, it imposes a kind of order or coherence on the social world. The news values which news reporters use in their news accounts lead to a broad similarity in news coverage across news organizations. By using news values, journalists justify the selection of certain types of events to be newsworthy at the expense of others. By selecting and emphasizing specific events and people, and ignoring others, journalists direct the public to interpret the social world according to their news frames. Influenced by a dependence on the mass media, the public perceives social reality as that which is created and constructed through media representations. Learning and images— the "pictures in our heads"—about what happens in the world and society comes from a contact with the media rather than from immediate or direct experience (Johnson-Cartee, 2005, pp, 1-15).

Schudson (1982) argues that news values and conventions reinforce certain assumptions about the political world. They incorporate into the structure of the news story vital assumptions about the nature of politics and the role of the press. Schudson (1982) argues that these conventions incorporate assumptions about the role and intentions of news media: "These conventions institutionalize the Journalists' view that meaning is to be found, not in the character of established political institutions, but in the political aims of actors within them" (p. 99). Reinforced by these conventions, journalists no longer abide by objective reporting; instead, they view their role as translators and interpreters of the significance of events for a public which cannot decide for itself (Schudson, 1982). As a result, the news media impose political hegemony by orienting the public toward specific issues to think about, and by framing news accounts in a certain way. Frames facilitate the ordering of the world according to the hierarchal rules of inclusion and exclusion (Johnson-Cartee, 2005, p. 126; Allan, 2004, p. 58).

Molotch and Lester (1997) identify three major news agencies that affect the social construction of news through a distinctive set of organizational routines. They are news promoters, news assemblers, and news consumers. News promoters identify an occurrence as special for the public and provide it to news assemblers who transform the promoted occurrences into "public events" through publication or broadcast, and so introduce such socially

constructed events to their audience as news stories. This dependent relationship between news promoters and news assemblers is characterized by a series of maneuvers and negotiations from both sides to gain the control of the news. The frames, values, and purposes of each may coincide or conflict with each other. According to the extent of their power and to the communication policy of their society (authoritarian regimes or otherwise), the nature of their relationship can be identified. For example, powerful promoters may pressure the media to alter their work routine to get their event needs published or broadcast. Molotch and Lester conclude that the media reflect not a "world out there," but the practices of those with the power to determine the experience of others (Molotch and Lester, 1997, pp. 196-199).

Reese (1997) shows how the news media plays an essential role in maintaining the authority of the political system through the incorporation of news promoters in the news paradigm. He argues that:

Media reproduce a consistent ideology without being instructed directly by the state…they accept the frames imposed on events by officials and marginalize and delegitimate voices that fall outside the dominant elite circles. By perpetuating as commonsensical notions of who ought to be treated as authoritative, these routines help the system maintain control without sacrificing legitimacy (p. 425).

Reese also points out that journalists may frequently conflict with the news promoters who are representatives of government and business, but this is a reformist antagonism that does not threaten underlying hegemonic principles. As Shoemaker (1987) assures: "Although the media will criticize the status quo to a certain extent, thus establishing their own legitimacy as news organizations, the media will never criticize the status quo enough to seriously threaten or change it" (p. 20).Reese (1997) also argues that:

by relying heavily on official statements made through routine channels, journalists give these sources the power, by default, to frame much of their reality. This helps solve the key problem of defining news: News is what authorities and other institutional elites say it is (p. 425).

Another factor that shows that news accounts do not reflect reality as much as they reflect the work of news promoters and journalists—those who have the power to construct reality for a public—is the beat system or what Tuchman (1978) terms "news net." News organizations disperse a "news net" through their arrangement of time and space, which is organized according to a system of beats and bureaus that locate reporters in legitimated institutions of

society that are objectified as the appropriate sites from which information should be gathered. Journalists together with the beat agency officials determine what becomes a newsworthy public event and what becomes a nonevent. In turn, the existing political order is imposed and legitimated through the dissemination of bureaucratic idealizations (Fishman, 1997; Allan, 2004).

In short, political scientists consider the news organization to be a political institution with a blind adherence to objectivity and hierarchical news-gathering routines. News mirrors hierarchal social relations, and the news net reflects reality as defined by the power of social actors. As Shoemaker (1987) says: "The media do not mirror reality; they reflect the practices of those having the power to determine the experience of others" (p.20). In this way, the mainstream media act as the main gatekeeper, and powerful institutional sources vie with each other to shape and frame the political agenda and the public sphere. The news is shaped by values, judgments, newswork routines, the gatekeeping of news organizations, and the power of owners and news promoters. Therefore, I argue that this linear model of communication does not provide a place for the public to participate or deliberate, and hence no place for the public sphere.

2. NEWS AS A CULTURAL PRACTICE

In contrast to the linear model of communication which focuses on the control of space and people (Carey, 1989, p. 15), a broad perspective of news as ritual and cultural practice goes beyond the conditions of production, notions of professionalism, and objectivity. For this latter perspective, "hard" news accounts are the primary focus of inquiry, a focus which may result in ignoring other forms of news content that might be more relevant to public debate and the public sphere (Allan, 2004, p. 86). James Carey's cultural approach to the study of communication—the ritual view model of communication—is the prominent explanation for how news functions in public life. In his most famous quote, Carey (1989) argues that: "A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the fact of imparting information but the presentation of shared beliefs" (p. 18).

Schudson (2001) calls for a "cultural approach" to the sociology of news production that transcends structures of ownership and the organizational routines of newswork. Schudson argues that the cultural perspective is means towards understanding specific dimensions in the production of news and

that news judgment goes beyond the limits of the perspectives of political economy and socially organized newswork. For example, the cultural context is used to explain generalized images and stereotypes in the news media and in other media. He argues that journalistic work is tied to "cultural air," the most important filter through which news is constructed, and according to Richard Hoggart, "which tells us that some things can be said and that others had best not be said" (Schudson, 2000, p. 192). Zelizer's (1997b) study "Journalists as interpretive communities" takes a culturological approach, arguing that examining journalism as a "profession" only neglects other dimensions of journalistic practice that are important to understanding the real nature of journalistic work. She approaches journalists as an "interpretive community," where informal activities and practices among journalists unite and consolidate them more than formal activities do. They gather in informal networking "interpretive communities" that share a common discourse and interpretations of occurrences (Zelizer, 1997b).

Jacobs (1996) proposed a multi-dimensional approach to study news production, which considers "production, reception and content as interdependent and overlapping 'moments' of the communication process" (p. 376). He focuses on the importance of narrative to the process of news production, arguing that newsworkers depend on "literary archetypes" to "perform" the news. They receive the world in a "storied" way and "narrativity allows newsworkers to do much of the work of producing the news in the very act of discovering it" (p. 381). He argues that "the narrativization of the event not only constructed it as newsworthy, but also influenced its formal composition into a news text" (p. 383).

The common denominator among these views, which grow out of a cultural approach to communication, is a revitalization of the collective values of communities, and the creation of a collective consciousness through narratives and human storytelling. In this cultural studies approach, news is a resource that people use to create and develop meanings that allow them to speak and talk about their lives and their reality. Zelizer (1997a) argues that "narrative helps us construct our view of the world, by allowing us to share stories within culturally and socially explicit codes of meaning" (p.26). She also argues that narrative affects the power of journalists and makes them reconsider their authority to interpret events (Zelizer, 1997a, p. 26). In Carey's ritual view of communication, news is:

a historic reality. It is a form of culture… [It is] not information but drama. It does not describe the world but portrays an arena of dramatic forces and action; it exists solely in historical time; and it invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social roles within it (Carey, 1989, p. 21).

These forms of cultural histories, values, and norms are produced and passed on through narratives or short stories. Accordingly, narration and human storytelling are a large part of everyday life. News is not *what* happened, but stories *about what* happened. News is social knowledge; it is a kind of narrative (Johnson-Cartee, 2005; Schudson, 1982).

From this perspective, it can be concluded that news can be circulated and communicated by different modes and different forms, including gossip, songs, rumors, and poetry. It also is not a matter of imparting and transmitting information to a passive audience; rather, it is sharing meanings among groups. Story-telling patterns in news provide journalists with more flexibility to always be active, to be constantly "repairing the paradigm." According to Bird & Dardenne (1997): "It is a process that is more complex than either a consensual model or a manipulative model, which assigns all the control to the media and sees media as somehow outside of, yet affecting, culture" (p. 346).

Bird and Dardenne (1997) also argue that the study of news as narrative and story becomes increasingly important as the emphasis focuses on texts as cultural constructions (p. 334). They add that news is part of an age-old cultural practice, narrative, and storytelling that seems to be universal (p. 335). They also argue that news should be considered as a myth: news is a myth in that it is "a way in which people create order out of disorder, transforming knowing into telling. News offers more than fact—it offers reassurance and familiarity in shared community experience" (p.336). In this way, Bird and Dardenne (1997) argue that people do not only consume news as a reflection of reality but also as a symbolic text—not "tell it like it is" but rather "tell it like it means" (p. 337). They also point out that:

Considering news as narrative does not negate the value of considering news as corresponding with outside reality, as affecting or being affected by society, as being a product of journalists or of bureaucratic organization, but it does introduce another dimension to news, one in which the stories of news transcend their traditional functions of informing and explaining (Bird & Dardenne, 1997, p. 335).

Bird and Dardenne argue that the distinction between hard and soft news or "news" versus "human interest" holds back a productive discussion of the narrative qualities of news in two ways. First, it hinders the development of a perspective of seeing news as a unified body that exhibits clear themes and patterns that have little to do with important/interesting distinctions. The distinction between hard and soft news or "news" versus "human interest" is a view of news from the perspective of a traditional "transmission model," essentially from the point of view of the news professionals who created this dichotomy. Second, this distinction blinds us to the structural qualities of individual stories (Bird & Dardenne, 1997, p. 335).

This approach to news corresponds with innovative programs in the new media environment that emphasize entertainment elements such as dramatization and sensationalism. These programs, including talk shows, phone-in programs, talk radio, and other audience-participation formats, blur the boundaries between quality journalism and tabloid news. Although often viewed as mere entertainment, they have gained wide popularity and play an important role in democracy, the public sphere, and political culture.

Their role necessitates, according to Curran (1998, cited in Tumber, 2001, p.28), "public recognition and legitimacy." They provide a space for public participation regarding social issues (Tumber, 2001; Curran, 1991; Carpini & Williams, 2001; Bennett, 2004). Allan (2004) argues that studies of human interest and soft news highlight how the apparent neutrality of this news format reinforces the "dominant political consensus" by encouraging and constraining the public to see events in a particular way. Programs about noncurrent affairs, including sport, royalty, celebrities, gossip, and competitions have, as Curran et al. in 1980 pointed out, "ideological significance [that] is most successfully concealed and therefore demands most analysis" (Allan, 2004, p. 86).

This view has been adopted by the radical democratic approach (an approach that often takes a broader and more inclusive definition of what is political) to conceive entertainment as a source of discussion in the space of the public sphere (Curran, 1991, p. 33). Carpini's and Williams's (2001) model of the flow of information across the news/entertainment dichotomy assures the collapse of this distinction by providing a set of technological, cultural, and economic factors that characterize the new media environment. They point to scandal and infotainment, and to the shift from political content to entertainment. In turn, they suggest that the study of political communication should exceed the clear-cut distinction between news and entertainment so to

understand the political significance of popular culture in the social construction and interpretation of the news (Carpini and Williams, 2001).

The approach to studying news in the new media environment that does not rely on a binary conception of news as serious-and-sophisticated/popular-and-light has its proponents and a certain credence. Meijer (2003) adopts this approach and develops a third dimension, that is, public quality. He points to five ways that media scholars have discussed the dichotomy of quality news versus popular news. First, a growing number of media scholars are convinced that news should be seen as a cultural artifact, and accordingly, the role of journalism should be understood in broad cultural terms. Second, critics have challenged the narrow concept of citizenship that frequently is linked with the notion of "Quality" or real news. Third, in line with this cultural role of news, it is argued that the political *content* of news should not count as the only quality standard of news: its cultural *impact* is as important as its quality. Fourth, critics argue that citizenship is not constituted only by reading or watching news. By watching soaps, detective series, and video clips, viewers may discover many new and valuable insights on how to be a citizen. Fifth, a final challenge to the opposition between popular news and quality news is directly associated with American culture. In contrast to the situation in Europe, most news in the United States is already a commercial product. This does not mean, however, that news on American television or in American newspapers is trivial or sensational by definition (Meijer, 2003, pp. 19-20, emphasis in original).

The other distinctive form of news is the new forms provided by the Internet. These new modes of telling and delivering news that have emerged on the Internet enable a fresh configuration of news production, distribution, and reception, new modes of authorship, and new kinds of producers and consumers. The most prominent form is social media, which is regarded as the new revolution in journalism. The social media phenomenon echoes the storytelling mode of ancient human history and oral culture, and its unique mode of narrative and storytelling enables users to participate more in constructing knowledge about world events and to be more involved in these events. Therefore, the characteristics of social media may be best examined through the theories of news as cultural practice.

Part II: How the Economy and Technology Change the News

Over the past thirty years, researchers have assessed the degree of transformation in the news media as a revolutionary (Klinenberg, 2005, p. 49). Research in communication and new media has examined the wide array of prominent technological, economic, and cultural transformations in the news media environment that have led to the changing nature of news and its content.

The most salient transformations are: the introduction of advanced communication technologies, such as satellites, the Internet, and computer mediated communication in general; the advent of cable television and the beginning of a twenty-four-hour news cycle; the rapid emergence of instant Internet news sites: and the emergence of a variety of forms for producing news on the Internet. The other important transformations in the new media environment are: the deregulatory environment of media markets, which has resulted in an increasing trend towards the concentration of media ownership within the media industry, leading to intense competition; the emergence of chain papers and multimedia production companies; and the rise of conglomerate media giants that use synergistic production and distribution strategies, which have grown out of the conventional wisdom among businessmen that "bigger is better," that is, the profit whole is greater than the sum of the profit parts. By way of conglomerates and synergy, the largest media companies constitute media empires. Other developments are the growth of the entertainment economy and the growth of monopoly in ownership within the communication industries (Klinenberg, 2005, pp. 49-53; Bennett, 2005, p. 75; McChesney, 2004, pp. 183-185; Tumber, 2001, p. 17-18; Gordon, 2003, pp. 57-72).

These transformations have had consequences on newsmakers, professional news standards, news audiences, and the social construction of news in general. The changes in the field of journalism—particularly the rise of new technologies, the convergence of news companies, the growth in monopolies, and the transformations in media news ownership—have imposed challenges on newsworkers who, on one hand, suddenly found their daily work interrupted and rearranged by additional responsibilities and new pressures of time and space. On the other hand, these newsworkers were obliged to comply with the corporate interests of the news companies that employed them. These challenges have undermined and disempowered their abilities, legitimacy, and autonomy. In the new media newsroom, journalists must be multi-skilled, flexible, and fast to meet the new demands and requirements of the new environment. Generally,

professional journalists face a new media environment characterized by intensified competition, rising economic pressures, audience shrinkage, conglomeration, and increased production stress (Gans, 2003, pp. 22-25; Klinenberg, 2005, pp. 49-53; Plasser, 2005; Tumber, 2001, pp. 17-18).

The ultimate goal of these new configurations of news company ownership is to maximize profit and reduce costs. This commercial pattern has a direct effect on news content. According to Altschull's (1997) economic model, news content has been correlated with the interests of those who finance it—the advertisers and their commercial partners, who usually are found among the owners and publishers. The impact of budget cuts (fewer staff and the closing of many international news bureaus) also extends to professional news standards, meaning that the news media must increase its dependence on international news agencies for reporting events, instead of using its own correspondents. The result is both a homogenization of news as the reliance on press releases increases, and also a declining commitment to investigative journalism. It also means an increase in soft news that is cheap to produce and a decrease in hard news. This pattern has led to rebranding news in a way that news companies no longer gain prestige from news as a public service institution, but instead gain prestige from news as a product, which generates profits for their investors and serves the market (Bennett, 2005, p. 77; Gans, 2003, p. 23; McChesney, 2004, pp. 80-83).

These transformations threaten traditional gatekeeping based on reporter judgment and the professional editorial standards that define the quality of news organizations. Klinenberg's (2005) fieldwork on reporters and editors working for a major news organization shows how they manage constraints of time, space, and market pressure under the regime of convergence news making. Reporters and editors complain that corporate management has classified their product as "content," a category that suits any story, image, or other form of intellectual property. They contend that the distinctions between different genres of newswork are beginning to blur. Journalists also are worried about the new responsibilities that reduce the editorial staff's time to research, report, and even to think about their work (Klinenberg, 2005; Livingston & Bennett, 2003, p. 364).

In regards to news content, the penetration of market principles and marketing projects into the editorial divisions of news organizations is one of the most dramatic changes in the journalistic field. This kind of market-driven journalism blurs the boundaries between the editorial and advertising, making the corporate managers and advertisers active participants in editorial decision making. In turn, journalists' control over the news, and their professional autonomy in shaping it, is undermined, and also their professional status. The pressure to increase profit has changed journalistic production in traditional newsrooms and has resulted in new forms and formats in which news is packaged and disseminated. The strength of this market logic is expressed in newsrooms, such as the television news magazine, which includes a mix of hard and soft news, in the proliferation of cable television talk and panel shows, in dramatized news footage, and in product-driven news sections. The increasing emphasis in newspapers on color graphics, weather packages, business reporting, and cross-promotional packages is part of the same trend (Gans, 2003, p. 24, 29; Klinenberg, 2005, p. 61).

In the context of the growing transformations in the global media environment, such as hypercommercialization, channel fragmentation, and shrinking audiences for conventional news formats, the practices of journalism have undergone changes and challenges at all levels. Plasser's (2005) study investigates and evaluates the influences of the new media environment characteristics on the professional roles and quality standards of news as perceived from a comparative perspective by American journalists. These changes increase the pressure on journalism while seeking to fulfill its goals. Researchers have noticed some structural trends in the media coverage of politics and public affairs, for example, a shift from hard news to soft news, from public policy and public affairs to the personalization and privatization of politics; and a shift to infotainment-journalism or the "hyperdization of news" (Plasser, 2005, p. 48).

The news in the new media environment evolves under pressures of commercial profit and political spin, leading to a declining space for serious political news, and a reduction in the number of staff who cover it. The most notable example is the drive to produce news content that may not bear much of a connection to social reality or to public policy problems. News media concentrates on the coverage of the activities and personal life of celebrities, violent crime news, entertainment, disasters, and accidents. Generally, the content of news is increasingly directed toward soft news, sensationalism, and human interest stories more than hard news and the coverage of the environment, government activities, and international affairs. The nature and direction of

change in news construction suggests that the shrinking space for serious political news is just one of several conflicting transformations in the way that information is selected from a public sphere constructed by the press and political actors (Bennett, 2004; McChesney, 2004; Tumber, 2001; Underwood, 1993 and 2001).

In another vein, new media technology also affects the news process as a whole. Advanced technology facilitates the gathering of news and its transmission from remote locations, especially during crisis and breaking news, without the necessity for fixed or operational communications links. Whereas remote real-time transmission once required tons of satellite uplink equipment, generators, and a stable of technicians, approximately the same process can be accomplished today with a laptop computer, a handheld digital camera, a satellite phone, and a mobile phone. The clear impact of these technologies has influenced the coverage of wars and media events. Not only do these technologies increase the capacity of newsgathering from remote locations (what is called event-driven news) but also help the public to better understand the political implications of the event. Moreover, these technologies facilitate the communication between the audience and journalists, and give the public a new opportunity to contribute their own reports to the flow of news and information, and thus, help to expand news coverage (Livingston & Belle, 2005, p. 47; Pavlik, 2003, pp. 75-79). Livingston and Belle (2005) argue that remote broadcasting technology tends to "de-institutionalize" news content by shifting a greater proportion of coverage toward breaking and event-driven news and away from institutionalized processes. They argue that this trend empowers journalists and diminishes the political control of those who usually dominate news and set its agenda: "When journalists turn to alternative sources, when they rely on first-hand accounts of witnesses, or when they tell a story in their own voice, officials who usually cue issue priorities and frames are displaced, if only temporarily" (Livingston and Belle, 2005, p. 47). Moreover, they argue that breaking or event-driven news reorients political power, the power that governs the political and news agenda. According to Lawrence (2000): "In institutionally driven news, political institutions set the agendas of news organizations; in contrast, as event-driven news gathers momentum, officials and institutions often respond to the news agenda rather than set it" (cited in Livingston & Belle, 2005, p. 47).

Other studies have investigated the effect of new

technology on an increasing event-driven news, and to what extent journalists rely on officials for selecting and cueing their political content. Livingston and Bennett (2003) found that event-driven news stories have become more common but that officials seem to be as much a part of the news as ever. In other words, institution-based news stories have decreased and event–driven news has increased. However, event-driven news stories overwhelmingly contain official voices. They conclude that event-driven news has not changed the core of the organizational gatekeeping process and its reliance on official sources. At the same time, however, journalists have greater gatekeeping and framing freedoms (Livingston and Bennett, 2003).

With new technology and the development of visual communication, accompanied by an economically driven action news format, a growing trend of television news that covers dramatic events and promotes "eyewitness" or action news formats places too much emphasis on immediacy and drama in the hope of bolstering ratings in an increasingly competitive local news market. Adversely, traditional news values such as professionalism and the journalistic obligation to cover stories of weight and civic relevance has disappeared. Rather than report on government and political activities with the aim of informing citizens, local news merely entertains and scares its audience with stories of scandal, crime, and violence (Livingston and Bennett, 2003; Hume, 1996).

Generally, the new media news environment—characterized by the decline of the professional practice of journalists to define what is newsworthy—is moving towards becoming an environment by which commercial interests produce or penetrate the news, and the market decides what is newsworthy and how events are covered. This has inspired a debate about whether market forces will improve journalism or not. According to the media publishers and owners, "good journalism and good business go hand in hand" (McManus, 1992a, p.787). However, McManus (1992b) contends that advertisers seek public attention for their products, rather than public education about current events. He argues that:

Newscasts and newspapers that depend on advertiser funding do not compete in a news market but in a *market for public attention* that includes many persons with little interest in understanding significant issues and events of the day because advertisers pay for numbers and demographic characteristics of consumers (McManus, 1992b, p.197, emphasis in original)

In light of market theory, McManus (1992a) argues that the nature of news must be understood as a commodity; a good that is bought and sold. He suggests that news is "a double commodity" in that: "News consumers trade their attention...to news providers for information. The news providers then sell that attention to advertisers for rates based on the size and commercial value...of the audience whose attention is delivered" (McManus, 1992a, p. 788). According to market theory, which primarily is based on the premise of self-interest rather than community interest, the conflict between journalism, (which aims to increase public enlightenment) and business, which seeks profit maximization, is inevitable. McManus' model for corporate and public benefit shows that the goal of journalism for public understanding and the goal of business for profit maximization do not come together (McManus, 1992b, p. 201, 205).

In another context, the media environment—which has changed dramatically through the proliferation of computer communication technologies and the growth of the Internet and World Wide Web—has increased the amount and range of information that is readily available. The integration of the media through conglomerates and the convergence of different types of media, as well as economic changes, result in a media environment dominated by entertainment, and based on profit-driven news judgments. In this environment, the traditional boundaries that distinguish news media from entertainment media, fact from opinion, and public affairs from popular culture collapse. This transformation challenges traditional power relationships: the authority of journalists, public officials, and other traditional gatekeepers who operate the gates in the old system. As a result, these traditional gatekeepers no longer exercise as much control over the agenda-setting of the public (Carpini and Williams, 2001).

he tendency of the new media environment is clearly towards the dominance of entertainment both in and over the news. This would seem to imply a shift in emphasis within journalism as a whole. In this context, Sparks (1991) identifies three trends that characterize our world today to support his claim of the vanishing "serious press." The first is the internationalization of economic life and the concomitant internationalization of news production. The second important trend, which has been identified by theories of a "new media age," in particular by theories of the postmodern, is the development of self-reflexivity as a conscious strategy of media artifacts. Third is the fragmentation of the audience. He argues that the sharp division between self-reflexive entertainment and serious news cannot be sustained (Sparks, 1991, pp. 70-71).

Carpini and Williams (2001) focus on two concepts that characterize the new media environment and use them to make sense of the new world of mediated politics and to better understand the changing nature of mediated political discourse. These two concepts are "hyperreality" and "multiaxiality." A key characteristic of postmodernity is what Baudrillard calls "hyperreality," which is associated with media events and their representation. Fisk (1996) defines the "hyperreality" as:

a postmodern sense of the real that accounts for our loss of certainty in being able to distinguish clearly and hierarchically between reality and its representation, and being able to distinguish clearly and hierarchically between the modes of its representation (cited in Carpini and Williams, 2001, p. 170).

The new media environment also has been characterized by what Fisk calls "multiaxiality." The single axis which dominated the old media environment represented by political elites and prestigious news outlets has been transformed to a multiaxiality media environment exemplified by multiple points of access, a more continuous news cycle, and an expansion of politically relevant media. Multiple axes of power within media have increased the opportunities for alternative media figures and alternative voices and ordinary citizens to influence public discourse. In this new environment, the public is free to construct its own interpretation of political reality and create its own narrative of news (Carpini and Williams, 2001, p. 172-177).

Also, with an increase of corporate news in the media landscape and the diminished role of public service in media systems, a lot of research laments the loss of the traditional role and importance of news in culture. Bird's (1997) "The End of News" argues that news is intended to occupy a smaller part of our cultural map than it has in the past. He argues that information is becoming more important than news to those who have money and power, and because of technological and social changes, news is becoming not only less reliable, but less relevant. Bird points to three forces that undermine the role and importance of news. First, powerful groups in modern society—including governments that manage and manipulate the news according to their own interests and public relations consultants in governments and corporations—play an important role in the management of news and how it is fed to the news

media. For more detail about these groups, see Bennett (2005), Schudson (1978), and Schiller (1981). One of the principal features of recent change is the prevalence of what is called "promotional culture" in political life (Tumber, 2001, p.20). Second, new computer-based methods of communication have superseded at least some of the functions previously carried out by news organizations. Third, news is embedded in the atmosphere of entertainment values that pervade the whole culture (Bird, 1997, pp. 4-5).

Information communication technology, especially new computer technologies, enables newsworkers to transcend the structural limits of the newsroom. Now, newsworkers are able to generate images from any photograph to provide visual footage for any event, without the restrictions of the video library or dependence on other news agencies (Jacobs, 1996). However, on the other hand, now images and sounds easily can be manipulated, and, as a result, news is perceived as unreliable and incredible. Technology also has increased the amount of available information and accelerated its circulation, at the expense of producing relevant and enlightened news for the public. Bird argues that news today is undermined by two different commodities: information and entertainment. Moreover, he argues that the recent communication revolution has weakened the bonds that connect the public to news (Bird, 1997).

3. CHANGES IN THE GATEKEEPING FUNCTION

With the transformation of the new media environment driven by commercial pressure and new media technologies, which helped to produce new forms and new configurations of news production and distribution, the term "gatekeeping" (traditionally a reference to what news stories get in and which are left out) has changed. To consider the implications of the new media environment on the traditional concept of gatekeeping and on news construction, the paper examines the classical studies of gatekeeping to begin to understand how this concept has transformed into the more recent models of gatekeeping.

According to White original article published in 1950, the term "gate keeper" dates back to social scientist Kurt Lewin who pointed out that "the traveling of a news item through certain communication channels was dependent on the fact that certain areas within the channels functioned as 'gates'" (White, 1997, p. 63). These gates are governed by a person or a group with some power that decides what passes through the "gate" (White,

1997, p. 63). "Gatekeeping" is "the process of reconstructing the essential framework of an event and turning it into news" as "one day's news represents the effects of many gatekeepers at many gates" (Shoemaker, 1997, p. 57). White's 1950 early study of the gatekeeper role of a news wire editor of a newspaper shows just how subjective the selection of news content can be (White, 1997).

Considering the complexity of the gatekeeping process, gatekeeping studies have progressed from an individual level of analysis toward a more socially based approach. For example, Shoemaker's 1991 "A New Gatekeeping Model" enlarges the model of the gatekeeper to put the individual level of analysis within the framework of the communication organization, which, in turn, is embedded in an ideology of a social system and culture. That is, the gatekeeper operates within the constraints of the communication routines and organizational characteristics that influence his/her decisions (Shoemaker, 1997). Bleske's 1991 study "Ms. Gates Takes Over" examines several comparative dimensions, such as gender, the journalism experience, organizational size, and the socialization process and values of the gatekeeper. Bleske concludes that the selection of news usually is conducted in predictable ways, that is, the journalist's behavior and news selection is governed by journalistic professionalism and constraints on the news organization, such as time and space (Bleske, 1997). Berkowitz's 1991 study "Refining the Gatekeeping Metaphor for Local Television News" concludes that other elements beyond the individual level and personal subjectivity govern news selection and decision making (Berkowitz, 1997). He argues that the decision making involved in news selection is subject to news routines and organizational constraints (Berkowitz, 1997). Another study by Donohue et al. published in 1989 shows that other factors affect the gatekeeping process, such as community pluralism, type of newspaper, form of ownership, and other constraints such as news routines, professional values, organizational structure, and management (Donohue et al., 1997).

The initial gatekeeping studies were conducted when news professionals were the only ones who decided what news got to the public, and what was left out. However, with the advent of the Internet and new media, news and information surround us from everywhere, and so the use of the old archetype of gatekeeping is irrelevant and underestimates the complexity of contemporary news construction. Schudson (2000) argues: "It tries to fix news-making at one point along a circuit of interactions and does

not examine the circuit as a whole" (p. 177). Other researchers and critics such as Kovach and Rosenstiel (1999) predict the collapse of the traditional journalistic gatekeeping role, and attribute this collapse to the characteristics of the new media environment mentioned previously. In addition, new media pioneer Bob Wyman adopts an even more extreme view about the end of the gatekeeper stating that:

The image of a 'gatekeeper' implies that there is a gate. That may have been true in the old days of journalism when there were very few ways for folks to get news of their community or world. Today that just isn't the case. Information is raining on us rather than being funneled along any particular path. Simply put: The gate is gone, thus the gatekeepers need new jobs (cited in Bennett, 2004, p. 290).

No doubt, the traditional gatekeeper role is becoming extinct. In 1998, after the Starr investigation of President Clinton became available on the Internet, Mike McCurry, Clinton's former White House press secretary, said:

All the filters that are present in the world of journalism evaporated. Raw information was available in [the] mainstream. The US public had to serve the role of editor, deciding what to show. It was instantaneous information without any of the editorial standards and filters that define what we think of the modern business of journalism (cited in Tumber, 2001, p. 25).

However, if gatekeeping is examined in its broader social context, no one can claim that gates do not exist. Bennett (2004) argues that gatekeeping still exists but can not be reduced to the individual gatekeeper of the classic gatekeeping theory. Instead of assuming that gatekeeping is at an end, Bennett endorses the view that the news making process is a complex interaction of organizational, personal, and economic factors. He proposes a model of news gatekeeping that identifies four main news gates or factors that, in their interaction, shape news content. These four factors serve as a systematic analytical framework to explain the construction of news content under different news situations across different historic periods. The four main news gates are: (1) the reporter's personal and professional news judgment, (2) bureaucratic or organizational news gathering routines (3) economic constraints on news production, such as considerations of cost, efficiency, advertiser potential, and audience demographics, and (4) information and communication technologies that define the limits of time and space and enable the design of news formats that appeal to audiences. Each gate is actually a set of journalistic norms and practices that affect news content (Bennett, 2004, p. 294). In a similar response, Schudson (2000) develops three research traditions to studying the social manufacture of news: the political economy of news, the social organization of newswork, and the cultural approaches.

Any contemporary study of the gatekeeper should go beyond what is offered by the previous literature, so to better understand the future of news gatekeeping, and also to predict the potential for new citizen engagement and new flows of information to the public. Bennett (2004) calls for a consideration of the rich interactions among the newly dominant technological and economic changes, and the still-important organizational and individual news practices. It might be said that the new media news environment opens news gates to more event-driven news, to public-introducing news, and closes the gates to institutional news (Bennett, 2004: Livingston and Bennett, 2003).

4. PUBLIC JOURNALISM

As mentioned above, technological change and economic rationale results in a media news environment: that is riddled with tabloid news formats and blurred lines between news, entertainment, and propaganda; that is characterized by light features "news you can use," instead of sophisticated and serious hard news; and that is limited by business values that favor profit over civic responsibility. As a result, the public's confidence in the news has decreased, and the distance between people and the news has increased. Carey (1999) argues that the commitment of journalism to business values and the "market model" in which news values are based on profit and "shareholder value" has made journalism abandon its watchdog mission "to provide a check on the state and, more frequently, to constitute the conditions of democratic debate and discussion" (p. 50). From this perspective, "the representative figure in journalism is no longer the citizen but the consumer, not the reporter or even the publisher but the shareholder" (Carey, 1999, p. 50).

In today's environment, it has become more complex, than it was in the past, for the news media to set and frame the public political agenda. Consequently, the public service mission of journalism to provide citizens with accurate, reliable information that can be used for self-governing, and a journalist's role as a representative of the people are now at risk (Bennett, 2005; Tumber, 2001; Carey, 1999; Underwood, 2001).

As a result, journalism has failed to sustain the public debate (and democracy), and as Carey (1999)

argues, the symbiotic relationship between politics and journalism breaks down. Some academics and journalists who have resisted market-thinking propose a new paradigm for news to restore the public service mission of journalism and to treat the audience as a group of citizens. One of the most prominent reform movements is called civic, public, or community journalism. This kind of journalism covers the news from the perspective of citizens to restore the role of journalism in democracy. It seeks to make the audience more active and conscious of their social problems, and to increase participation in the public dialogue. It renews the public sphere through bringing journalists into the "conversation of the culture" to address people as citizens, as potential participants in public affairs, rather than as victims or spectators (Carey, 1999; Rosen, 1999; Peters, 1999; Leonard, 1999; Glasser, 1999; Schudson, 1999; Hume, 1996). The public journalism movement has been criticized by journalists and critics who see it as a threat to the traditional role of journalists and news by its attacks on the traditional professional idea of objectivity and autonomy, and by its crossing the line that separates journalism from politics. This public journalism movement also challenges the profession by encouraging ordinary people to be involved in editorial policy (Gans, 2003; Curran, 1991).

The spirit of this movement has been raised in a similar ways under other names, such as the "radical democratic journalistic perspective" (Curran, 1991) or what Gans (2003) calls "journalism's theory of democracy." Another model for news proposed by Ellen Hume (2003), called "resource journalism," seeks to combine news about problems with news about a range of potential solutions to those problems, and utilizes not only traditional media but also the potential of the Internet. The common denominator of these movements is a desire to help citizens participate in politics by improving communication between citizens, between citizens and their representatives, and between citizens and journalists. Since traditional journalism in the new media environment has lost its relation to citizens, the hope is that the new emerging forms of political communication on the Internet will reconnect citizens to politics.

Part III: Online Journalism and New Forms of Communication

The Internet and its potential applications are a rich source of news. Although the debate has been widespread concerning its ownership, governance, model of communication, and relationship to democracy and the public sphere, a renewed discussion about the Internet has arisen around its potential to create new communications resources that can be used to challenge corporate control (Kidd, 2003; Strangelove, 2005). It can be said that one of the most socially significant aspects of the Internet is its potential to enable ordinary people to participate in the production and dissemination of news. Many researchers have investigated the potential of the Internet for news production, both by professional and nonprofessional journalists, and as a primary or secondary source of news for millions of people (Kawamato, 2003). Strangelove (2005) suggests that the number of people who participate in the production of online news, in one way or another, outside of the corporate sector exceeds the number of professional journalists. He shows that "non-corporate news" systems within the Internet have more freedom to produce their own news, without the constraints of the business relations with advertisers that circumscribe the production of news within the commercial news sector. Taking an optimistic view, he suggests that the Internet will be the panacea of all the current problems experienced within the commercial news sector. Not just this, but the Internet will erode the legitimacy and credibility of commercial news (Strangelove, 2005, pp. 166-174).

Many researchers and practitioners regard online journalism as the future of journalism. It is predicated that online journalism will bring the audience back to the news and political affairs, and they will be more involved than ever before. John Pavlik (2001) points to its potential to "reengage an increasingly distrusting and alienated audience" (p. xi). The transformation from the traditional journalism environment to the online environment is a transformation to a new culture that will reshape the conventional practices of journalism: "This new media system embraces all forms of human communication in a digital format where the rules and constraints of the analog world no longer apply" (Pavlik, 2001, p. xii).

The Internet provides news with advantages not available in traditional journalism. The flaws of traditional journalism, especially its lack of contextualization (McChesney, 2004), can be bypassed by engaging all the potential of the Internet. Pavlik (2001) argues that the best way to describe online news is as a "contextualized journalism." Online journalism opens up new ways of storytelling, primarily through a wider range of communication modalities such as text, audio, video, graphics, animation, and 360-degree video, all of which enable online journalists to tell a story in a way

that is more contextualized and navigable (almost impossible in any other medium), and that offers an audience news in a way that is much richer in regards to historical, political, and cultural context (Pavlik, 2001; Harper, 2003). But not all news sites exploit the potential of this new media. Many news sites are still in the phase of what is called "shovelware," that is, plain print content. They just recast or "repurpose" content from their traditional counterparts. Some are, in between; they recombine the print content and incorporate some interactive capabilities. A small number of sites offer original news content designed specifically for the Web and thus, exploit all of its unique potential. These online news sites contribute to the marketplace of ideas and have an independent editorial perspective, represented through a new medium of communication (Boczkowski, 2004; Pavlik, 2001; Salwen, 2005).

One of the most characteristic things about new media is interactivity. Interactivity is usually thought about in terms of empowering the audience. Salwen et al. (2005) argue that interactivity is evidence of the success of a site and has become an essential component in Website design. It motivates the audience to initiate two-way and group discussions, and to be active participants. Interactivity redefines the concept of news: from a hierarchical one-way communication usually top-down and assuming a relatively passive audience to a nonhierarchical two-way and many-to-many communication within a highly active community without mediation (Salwen et al., 2005, p. 133; Strangelove, 2005, p. 172; Boczkowski, 2004, p. 129).

With new interactive media, the news audience is no longer powerless, and professional journalists are no longer the only gatekeepers that can define what is news. Traditional gatekeeping shifts to an editorial function that centers on the facilitation and circulation of knowledge produced by a vast network of users-turned-producers. With hyperlinks and the nonlinear nature of online news, the editorial gatekeeping process of modern professional journalists has been challenged (Dibean & Garrison, 2005, p. 257; Boczkowski, 2004, p.143; Harper, 2003; Hume, 1996). Hypertext, by enabling readers to assume some of the roles of authors, challenges the traditional tasks of reporting and writing: "readers are viewed more as collaborators than as consumers" (Huesca & Dervin, 2003, p. 283).

Online news has the potential to change the way the audience learns about and processes the news. Users can customize or personalize news from original and alternative sources at their convenience, in ways not possible in other media. They can exercise more control over the news they read, and they can select from a virtually unlimited number of news sites. With new communication modalities and convergence, the personalized nature of online journalism potentially offers audiences a view of the world that is much more contextualized, textured, and multidimensional, especially when compared to the stories told about the world by traditional media (Pavlik, 2001, p. 22; Salwen, 2005, p. 74).

5. GRASSROOTS JOURNALISM

As the production and distribution of news in the new environment of communication is hindered less by structural constraints and becomes deinstitutionalized, new forms of deprofessionalized journalism emerge. Moreover, the environment in which the traditional news is produced is subject to more challenges concerning its claims to authority, credibility, and legitimacy. After grassroots citizens produce their own content in the new media environment, nothing is quite the same (Strangelove, 2005, pp. 187-188).

New media technology and the Internet have enabled a variety of new forms of political communication so that citizens of any political stripe can establish their own news and communicate directly to a public. The Web is particularly beneficial for nonprofit and grassroots media that do not have large financial reserves to fund a global media. Large commercial news media are no longer the only ones taking advantage of digital media technologies; the Internet facilitates political communication for citizens who cannot get their messages into traditional news channels (Bennett, 2005; Kawamato, 2003; Tumber, 2001).

The new media environments, namely the Internet, provide citizen activists and new social movements with opportunities to mobilize and organize their own activities, and to examine topics and issues in ways that would be impossible with the mainstream media. Many contemporary social movements owe their very existence to the Internet, to the extent that D'Annibale & Chehade (2004) call them "internet worked social movements." Atton's (2002) study of news culture and new social movements emphasizes that the radical media of new social movements is a set of deprofessionalized practices that privilege grassroots "native reporting," which is a distinctive feature of "alternative journalism." The social construction of radical media news is based on alternative values and frameworks of news gathering and access different from the social construction of mainstream media news (Atton, 2002, p. 495). Thanks to the internet, activists can "be the

media" as they put it. Wall (2003) draws out a set of attributes to distinguish digital activist journalism from mainstream practices. She categorizes activist news outfits as three types: professional news services, sponsored news services, and grassroots news services (Wall, 2003, p. 116).

6. CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed in this study indicates that the contemporary transformation of the news media is shaped primarily by two interrelated forces: market-driven economic restructuring and the rapid development of digital communication technologies. These forces—alongside media concentration, corporate convergence, and audience fragmentation—have reconfigured the political economy of news and challenged the normative roles traditionally associated with journalism.

Heightened commercial competition has encouraged a shift toward soft news, infotainment, and service-oriented content, thereby blurring distinctions between information and entertainment and between journalistic genres. Such developments necessitate analytical frameworks that move beyond the conventional hard/soft news dichotomy and

instead examine how popular news forms participate in shaping political culture and the public sphere. Cultural approaches to news analysis, as well as reform-oriented initiatives such as public journalism, provide important insights into these evolving practices.

At the same time, structural transformations in ownership, commercialization, and technological convergence have constrained journalistic autonomy and contributed to declining public trust in news institutions. The emergence of the Internet as a central news platform—characterized by interactivity, hypertextuality, and participatory production—has further redefined the boundaries between journalists and audiences, raising new questions regarding authority, professionalism, and media ethics.

These developments underscore the need for renewed theoretical models capable of accounting for the hybrid, socio-technical nature of contemporary news production. In this context, approaches such as Turner's (2005) adaptation of actor-network theory offer a productive lens through which to analyze journalism as a networked practice constituted by human actors, technological infrastructures, and institutional dynamics.

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