

Digital Media and New Forms of Journalism

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses the role and operation of digital media, the impact of digital technology on the media sector and new forms of journalism that have emerged in the digital era. With its origins in the 1990s, digital technology has been embedded in the media sector for over two decades. These crucial years saw the rapid development and evolution of *digital technology* to *smart technology* and then to the *interactive format* of Web 2.0, which decisively altered media operations, content and format. This chapter aims to define and describe *digital media* and other related terms, while also shedding light on *new forms of journalism* that arise from the widespread adoption of digital technology. These may include (but are not limited to) *Virtual Reality (VR) journalism*, *drone journalism*, *selfie journalism* and *robot journalism*. Finally, this chapter offers an academic overview and understanding of the issues surrounding the way in which technological disruption transforms old habits and practices in the newsrooms, leading to innovative storytelling that transcends time and space.

BACKGROUND

The term *digital media* is used to refer to digitalized (information or other) content that can be transmitted via the internet and/or a computer network. Initially, this content could (potentially) include text, audio, video and/or graphics, although since the early 2000s this variety of elements has been enriched by new forms of journalism emerging from a range of technological trends, particularly the rapid spread of *smart technology*.

In the early days of Web 2.0, users could locate media content through the internet; however, this content offered the same information, in terms both of quantity and quality, as the traditional media, whereas new content was available only via paid subscription platforms (van der Wurff, 2008). Since then, media have converged at spectacular speed: from smartphones to radios, television sets to tablets, newspapers to computers, the audience increasingly moves between an ever-extending menu of media platforms (Cushion & Sambrook, 2016). The notion of digitally converged media technologies has been the object of widespread attention since the 1990s, initially focused on the convergence of broadcast television and the networked computer, later evolving to include all media entities.

One of the most widely observed consequences of the growth in digital media is audience fragmentation. As more offerings are delivered on broadband networks and more choices are available on-demand,

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patterns of consumption become more widely distributed (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). Furthermore, media convergence in the digital age is frequently used both in the academic field and the media industry to denote the ongoing restructuring of media companies as well as to describe developments in media forms, distribution and consumption. The use of the concept has developed from being mainly connected with digitalization in media technology to also include elements of the ongoing process of integration, combination, competition and divergence (Appelgren, 2004).

Although the rapid evolution of digital media raised questions regarding the future survival of traditional media, the latter still constitute a significant part of the media system. The co-existence of traditional and digital media brought forward the notion of *hybridity*. Hybrid media, developed in the late 1990s, due to the elusive progress of digital technology, rely heavily on interaction and could be described as the result of the deep remixing of previously separate media techniques and languages (Manovich, 2007). Chadwick, Dennis & Smith (2016) describe the hybrid media system as a system built on interactions among older and newer media logics, where logics are defined as bundles of technologies, genres, norms, behaviors and organizational forms. Actors in this system are articulated by complex and ever-evolving relationships based on adaptation, interdependence, concentrations and diffusions of power. Actors create, tap or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals and in ways that modify, enable or disable others' agency, across and between a range of older and newer media settings (Chadwick, 2013, p.4).

FOCUS OF THE ARTICLE

Until recently, most digital media were focused on converting analog data/footage into digital. However, in recent years they have developed distinctive capabilities of content management and became more accessible to a growing global audience that seeks information online. According to the Digital Future Project annual study (2018), 49% percent of users go online to look for news at least daily, and 70% of users go online for news at least weekly. Moreover, the emergence of social media as consumers' primary news source, the extensive use of mobile platforms and the advent of complex technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are paving the way for new forms of journalism that are shaping the future of the industry. Apart from VR and AI, drones and bots are also expected to play an important role in the nearby future by exploring new reporting frontiers. Drones are offering unique visual perspectives and assist journalists in filtering and authenticating their news stories whereas bots are changing the way news are delivered by providing voice messages, news bulletin or even breaking news to consumers (Veglis & Maniou, 2019). To this end, digital media are evolving in a dynamic way, entering a new era, where new technological trends such as drones, bots and smart glasses bring new opportunities for experiencing and exploring new kinds of journalism with distinctive features, traits and values.

VR (Virtual Reality) Journalism

A relatively recent development in the realm of digital journalism is *VR(virtual reality) journalism*, immersive journalism or 360 journalism, referring to the production of news in a way that replicates either a real or imagined environment and allows users to gain first-person experiences of the events or situation described in news stories while at the same time interacting with the environment. The fundamental idea of this new form of journalism is to allow the participant, typically represented as a digital avatar, to enter a virtually recreated scenario representing the news story. Today, 360° videos can be produced

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