Chapter 66
Practicing Local Data Journalism:
Opportunities and Obstacles

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ABSTRACT

The use of local data journalism has the power to fundamentally change local news. Local journalists can find vital insights, spot trends, and shed light on significant issues that have an impact on their communities by utilizing the power of data analysis, visualization, and narrative. This article studies the many facets and difficulties of local data journalism. The discussion highlights the fundamental role of training and possession of abilities in order to gather, evaluate, and present data in a way that appeals to regional audiences. Other areas that relate to local data journalism are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of information and communication technologies in journalism at the end of the previous century, substantial changes occurred in the profession that have resulted in its significant transformation. This is mainly fueled by the digitalization of the journalistic workflow and the introduction of additional dissemination channels for the news (Siapera & Veglis, 2012). Journalism has traditionally been seen as closely related to technology. It is worth noting radio and television that their introduction created new opportunities for the media organization that were based solely on printed editions to distribute the news content. But of course, news gathering, creation, distribution, and consumption were completely transformed with the introduction of the internet and its services (Spyridou, et al., 2013). This also resulted in the emergence of many new journalistic specialties (multimedia journalism, drone journalism, algorithmic journalism, etc.) (Diakopoulos, 2019; Ntalakas, et al., 2017; Tu, 2015) among which data journalism (Bounegru, & Gray, 2021; Gray, et al., 2012; Veglis & Bratsas, 2017), which require journalists to possess specific skills and use specialized information processing tools. At the same time, citizen journalism has increased competition, and traditional journalism organizations are under constant pressure to deliver more news faster (Allan and Thorsen, 2009). This means that journalists have to be very competitive in a very demanding market.

Data journalism, which emerged and began to develop in the early 21st century, is now accepted as a recognized journalism specialty (Veglis & Bratsas, 2021). Many factors have contributed to the accession of data journalism, among which are the availability of data in digital format and also the abundance of data visualization and data management applications (Veglis & Bratsas, 2017). It has received a lot of attention recently in academic literature and the area of cutting-edge innovations in digital news production (Hermida & Young, 2017; Loosen et al., 2020; Weber et al., 2018). According to Gray et al. (2012) and Bounegru & Gray (2021), it is regarded as a journalistic discipline that illuminates the crucial role that numerical data plays in the creation and dissemination of news in the digital age.

Another type of journalism that is significantly related to data journalism is local journalism whose readership has declined in recent years (Wadbring & Bergström, 2017). Local journalism can be defined as news coverage in a local context (focusing on local issues and events) that interests people that live in a particular geographical region (Franklin, 2006). Local journalism topics typically include regional weather, politics, business, and human-interest stories (Meyer & Tang, 2015).

The connection between local journalism and data is not a recent phenomenon (Stalph, Hahn & Liewehr, 2022); during the previous 15 years, data journalism practices have been adopted by local media (Ali, 2014) supported by the advancement of a vigorous ecosystem of hyper-local data journalism (Stalph & Borges-Rey, 2018). Before the digitization and institutionalization of data journalism, local journalism organizations were fertile ground for data-driven practices (Coddington 2015; Meyers, 2002). Similarly, Boyles (2020) supports the advantages offered by the utilization of data storytelling in framing significant local issues for the audience. The problem is that local media face significant barriers to developing local data journalism that could have significant local but also hyper-local potential (Borges-Rey, 2020).

BACKGROUND

The Growth of Data Journalism

The concept of data journalism is not new. It emerged gradually due to the introduction of information and communication technologies and the abundance of data. Another term that is employed as synonymous with data journalism is data-driven journalism (Bradshaw, 2017).

In the late 20th century, using data to write a news article was a quite difficult process that required skills that were not usually possessed by the average journalist. Journalists usually relied on information obtained from various sources (government sources, surveys, expert opinions, etc.). It is worth mentioning that there were some cases of investigative journalism where journalists were able to exploit data and publish the results in articles, but that was not a common practice. Nevertheless, conditions changed quickly due to the increasing amount of data that gradually became available through the internet, as well as the effective tools that became available to each user with the help of which they could analyze, visualize and publish large amounts of data (Sirkkunen, 2011).

Data journalism is a practice that initiates with data analysis and continues with data filtering and data visualization in a form that is directly related to the data journalism article's narrative (Lorenz, 2010; Rogers, 2013). A key element of data journalism is the production of news visualizations that in some cases supports interaction. Megan Knight (2013) defines a data journalism article as a story

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