International Journal of Linguistics and computational Applications (IJLCA) ISSN 2394-6385(Print)
Volume 10, Issue 2, April – June 2023 ISSN 2394-6393(Online)

The Evolution of Journalism and Quality Journalism in the Context of Today

S. Pankayar Chelvi[1*], V. Parimala devi[2]
[1,2]*Assistant Professor, Department of Englis, ,Rathinam College of Arts and Science(Autonomous),Coimbatore.*

Abstract *—* ***T****he goal of this research paper is to examine how our current conceptions of journalism and news have developed by examining a variety of elements that have influenced the evolution of journalism as we know it today. Before considering how we can anticipate our conceptions of journalism to evolve as the twenty-first century progresses, it will also consider recent advancements in the field of journalism. The nature and function of journalism in modern times are not well defined or without disagreement. There are those who argue that journalism plays a multitude of significant roles in any democracy. These include facilitating public awareness of the political, social, and economic spheres as well as guaranteeing political responsibility. Some contend that journalism is crucial to a society's cultural life as well. Although it amuses and entertains us, it may also have a significant impact on how various communities and constituencies within society are shaped and reflected. Thus, journalism can contribute to the fabric of public life by acting as the social glue that unites communities and shapes our conception of identity (Anderson, 1983). Therefore, one could argue that journalism shapes identities more than it provides news in any objective sense since it aims to establish a symbolic ritual of connection with its audience (Carey, 1989). However, more critical evaluations of journalism emphasize how it contributes to the upholding of established power structures in society. This is related to the context and setting in which journalists work as well as the time and economic pressures they face, and it is not always the fault of the journalists themselves. In the past, journalists have worked for fiercely competing news organizations, where profit has always been the primary motivator. This makes journalism appear to represent certain principles that put the needs of those with the greatest financial gain from the news production and distribution industry first. According to certain theories (Chalaby, 1998; Herman & Chomsky, 1988), these values are actually a part of the strategies used by the most influential people in society to hold onto their positions of power by defining the purpose and role of journalism in ways that support and mirror their own interests. All of these viewpoints on journalism will be examined in this research paper in an effort to determine how our current understanding of journalism came to be. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of why contemporary journalism is the way it is and what the future may hold for both it and us.*

Keywords *— Disagreement; Communities; Democracy, Constituencies; Primary Motivator; Influential People; Production and Distribution Industry.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Journalism and its Values

The resolve to serve the public in an ethically informed manner was foremost in the declaration of values released by the World Journalism Education Congress (2007) in May of that year. The statement implies that "this commitment must include an appreciation and understanding of the fundamental role that journalism plays in the creation, maintenance, and advancement of an informed society" (para. 2). Comparably, the venerable Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism was once associated with the Project for Excellence in Journalism (1997), which asserts that "the central purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with accurate and reliable information they need to function in a free society." "This encompasses a multitude of roles—assisting in the definition of community, establishing a shared language and body of knowledge, recognizing the objectives, heroes, and villains within a community, and encouraging individuals to rise above complacency," they go on (para. 1-2). The International Federation of Journalists (2003) asserts that "respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist." Journalism UK in the United Kingdom cites Article 19 of the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." As the aforementioned examples suggest, there may be variations in the precise expressions of journalism's fundamental principles and objectives; yet, a common thread is the discipline's dedication to the pursuit of truth and public education. While Klaidman and Beauchamp (1987) contend that "just as physicians and lawyers are morally required to be truthful with their patients and clients, journalists are morally obliged to deliver truth to the public" (p. 30), Harcup (2007) asserts that "our job is indeed to get at the truth" (p. 2). Journalism's emphasis on serving the public and giving them "the truth" is sometimes

explained in terms of its crucial political role as a go-between for politics and the general public. However, it would be a mistake to only view the history of journalism and its principles from a political standpoint. It is true that the rise of modern democracy and the fall of the old regime coincided with the development of periodical print culture, but it would be oversimplified to argue that the early journalists were only interested in drastically changing the social and political structures of their time during the "long march" to democracy. As we shall see, public writing has a long history in politics, but journalism's forebears also addressed other issues that had far wider cultural and economic purposes. As apparent in journalism's history and values as any political aspect is the thirst for rumors, gossip, and speculation as well as the spectacular, dirty, and horrible.

More generally, "the desire for news, with its concomitant dangers, has probably been an aspect of most societies through history," as Raymond (1996) indicates (p. 2). Conboy (2002) also draws attention to the ways in which popular printed news that transcended political imperatives was produced by fusing tradition, folk culture, and superstition with an emerging commercial imperative. Readers of news were not only entertained, but also received "intelligence" on important issues. Ballads or poetry might be used as a kind of entertainment. It could be a graphic story about a public execution or murder, or it could be about a natural calamity in a distant place. As Winston (2005) points out, this kind of information was actually far more common in the 17th and 18th centuries than political news, which may be risky to produce. The sensationalist and celebrity-focused news agendas of today's tabloids most likely have their origins in the journalistic experiments of early modern public writing. News was meant to be funny and entertaining in addition to providing terse political and economic facts. The so-called tabloid genre has always been closely associated with newspapers' primary purpose of supplying enjoyment and entertainment. According to Sloan (2001), dramatic crime stories and "human-interest" tales have been prevalent in America since the 1830s. Newspapers like the New York Sun and the New York Herald, for example, have been attempting to fill in profitable niches in the newspaper industry by providing the working class with inexpensive media that would be both educational and entertaining. According to p. 19, these so-called "penny dreadfuls" would "give the masses some thrills and chills for their money that couldn't be found anywhere else." The penny dreadful comes from a history of journalism that aimed to reveal society's murky underbelly and has what may be called a "social conscience." Most renownedly, Charles Dickens's descriptions of Victorian England both amused and delighted readers while highlighting the misery of the downtrodden (see Tulloch, 2007). Similarly, in the Pall Mall Gazette in the late 19th century, W. T. Stead uncovered child prostitution in London (Harcup, 2007). However, Conboy (2004) points out that these articles also served a significant commercial purpose, considering that this American-imported "New Journalism" focused heavily on sensationalism, gossip, and human-interest pieces in addition to dedicating many of its pages to advertising. This phenomena has been called the "journalism of entertainment" by Schudson (1978), and rival news agencies led by William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer would subsequently take advantage of it. The emergence of "yellow" journalism left a legacy that endures to this day (Campbell, 2001). The financial success of popular journalism is, in fact, evidence of the ways in which it not only uses language to contribute to the construction of our national identity, but also offers us a moral framework to help us find our way (Conboy, 2006). According to Karen Sanders (2003), journalism plays a significant part in reflecting and shaping our identities as well as strengthening the moral foundation of society. Journalists, according to her, "draw in the contours of our moral landscape." They help with the task of defining who we are, explaining the world to us, and rendering it understandable (p. 9). In historical terms, "news helped explain life," as Black (2001), speaking about journalism in England at the start of the 17th century, implies (p. 3).

Therefore, Sanders and Black contend that journalism can play a significant moral role in differentiating between right and wrong and good and bad. Indeed, we can quickly observe how this formation of moral norms takes place if we examine the moral outrage voiced in the pages of tabloid newspapers. "Tabloid forms provide the audience with existential and moral help, and support in the daily struggles to cope with an everyday life marked by the uncertainties characteristic of modernity," as Gripsrud (2000) proposes in discussing the ritualistic nature of tabloid news (p. 297). According to philosopher and journalist Michael Ignatieff (1997), journalism should also be a reflection of a deeper humanity by helping to dissolve barriers between various cultures and groups of people. Ignatieff is primarily discussing the function of impartial reporting in cases of interethnic and national conflict here. He said that a more profound understanding of the context is necessary, one that not only contributes to the explanation of why conflict arises but also aims to reveal something that goes beyond some of its causative components—our shared humanity (see Plaisance, 2002). Then, judgment and commentary are equally important aspects of journalism; obtaining the "objective truth" is not the only goal. Therefore, journalism as a literary genre may be able to reveal more about who we are as people and the societies we live in than the "factual" reporting of government agencies like the local council or courts. Journalism offers us a rich source through which we can tap into our cultural identity and its history; one need only consider the literary contributions of writers as diverse as

Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe to George Orwell and Martha Gellhorn (see Collier, 2006; Keeble & Wheeler, 2007). Thus, it is clear from this succinct synopsis that journalism has never been exclusively driven by a political need to support democracy. The unique historical circumstances in which the methods that we connect with journalism began to gain acceptance also shed light on the evolution of journalistic values over time. These are connected to the shifting social, political, and economic environments that gave rise to these practices—which later came to be recognized as journalism. For instance, our contemporary ideas of what journalism (or at least excellent journalism) should be about naturally center around the concept of objectivity in the field. Even in the 19th century, however, journalism did not adhere to the journalistic ideal of neutrality. The concept of journalistic objectivity has developed over time in a variety of settings and ways. Certain media historians contend that distinct economic dynamics between competing news firms led to the emergence of journalistic objectivity. Keeble (2001), for instance, made the argument that "journalists sought to establish their independence as searchers for objective truth, as newspapers gradually lost their party affiliations" (p. 129). Therefore, a news organization would have a competitive advantage over its rivals thanks to this emphasis on truth. An examination of the 19th-century technological advancements of the telegraph and wireless offers another perspective on the formation of journalistic neutrality. According to Carey (1989), for instance, news had to be "stripped of the local, the regional, and colloquial" (p. 2010) in order to conform to the spatial range of news made possible by technological innovation. This would have meant making news more in line with the language of science, which places a greater emphasis on authenticity and accuracy. Schudson (2001), however, disagrees with the technologically and economically oriented approaches to the historical development of the idea of journalistic objectivity. Instead, he points to the establishment of a professional culture of journalism and practices like note-taking and interviewing that aimed to establish and preserve a separation from news organization owners and their political supporters. In order to "endow their occupation with an identity they can count as worthy," journalists also aspired to develop a feeling of "collective integrity," according to Schudson (p. 165).

1.2 Embryonic Journalism

A precise date for the "invention of journalism" would invite criticism and perhaps mockery. According to some observers, the Acta Diurna (Hudson, 1873, p. xxix), which disseminated news about political events and court cases, is the source of journalism, or at least the behaviors connected to it, dating back to the ancient Roman era. Some argue that the political unrest surrounding the English Civil War in the early 17th century is when journalism first emerged (Frank, 1961; Siebert, 1952/1965). The claim that journalism was "invented" has also been made in relation to the mid-19th century press industrialization (Chalaby, 1998), when news creation was integrated into a much broader corporate organization with distinct commercial goals and interests. This approach holds that the priorities of the market shaped journalism and its principles. The history of "journalism" is not very long, if we were to search for examples across time. The word was originally used in English in the 1830s. But as Conboy (2004) points out, when the name journalism was coined from the French word journalisme, many of its "practices and traditions" had already been established. As a result, it becomes extremely difficult to judge when journalism actually started. Since context is crucial, let's begin with how Europe changed politically and economically as it transitioned from the "late middle ages" to a new era of mercantilism and international trade. With kingdoms vying for power, a new form of protocapitalism emerged from the fall of the Hapsburg Empire in the 15th century. Economic advantage was viewed as a crucial component in achieving the goals of the emerging nation-states, given the political and economic rivalry of the 15th and 16th centuries, and knowledge offered the primary means by which such an advantage could arise. Thus, information gained importance in both political and economic contexts in this new age of trade and national rivalry. The burgeoning mercantile class and those of status who had commercial and political interests in receiving such information valued information about trade and economics, international affairs, the activities in courts (though not yet in Parliament), and local rivalries (Wilson, 2005).

1.3 Journalism and Politics

The most widely held and conventional perspective on the evolution of journalism throughout history describes its rise in terms of the press's watchdog role—that is, as the fourth estate. This historical perspective traces the evolution of journalism as a conflict between the democratic spirit, which derived from the ideas of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, and authority figures, the Church and the State. The numerous political tracts that specifically aimed to subvert the political hierarchies of their day provide a very solid historical foundation for the theory that journalism and press freedom evolved as a means of political emancipation. Political dissent typically took the form of printed materials that aimed to overthrow established power structures. This type of writing can be traced back to the 16th century's agitational literature, the 19th century's "fight" for press freedom, and the modern "watchdog" role that journalism is supposed to play. This history of journalism claims that the growth of press freedom in America following its independence from Britain in 1776 and in Britain in the mid-19th century allowed democracy

to flourish by allowing public scrutiny and, consequently, political accountability.

Additionally, journalism made sure that the general public had access to information so they could decide for themselves who they wanted in positions of authority. To put it succinctly, journalism was seen as necessary for democratic society to function well. In many respects, this traditional narrative is highly credible, particularly when considering the historical backgrounds of Europe and North America. From Wilkes to Watergate, the history of journalism is replete with heroic tales of fearless journalists standing up to power, greed, and political corruption on behalf of the public. Thus, the concept of journalism is that of a public servant, speaking for the people and serving as their watchdog over the government.

From a historical perspective, the Wilkes issue in the late eighteenth century appeared to solidify the link between media and democracy. MP Wilkes published his pamphlet, North Briton, in an attempt to expose incompetence and political corruption. One could argue that the Wilkes scandal played a significant historical role in establishing the connection between the general public and the limited political constituency of Parliament, whose members were primarily self-interested. Wilkes made it feasible for the House of Commons proceedings to be published, giving the public access to intelligence and information on issues that directly affected them. Political conflicts were also being fought more and more in America through the media. It served as a vehicle for building support for political movements, most notably the fight for independence from Britain. Newspapers like the Boston Gazette played a crucial role in influencing public sentiment against the British prior to the War of Independence. Therefore, as Mott (1941) suggests when he notes that "it was a group of local radicals that filled the columns of the Boston Gazette with the kind of political articles which eventually prepared the minds of the people for the idea of independence," newspapers were being used as a means to undermine the authority of government and to advance alternatives to the political status quo (p. 75).

Tom Paine was a pivotal player in the late eighteenth-century democratic movement and would go on to establish the link between the press and politics. Paine (1995)'s works Common Sense (1776), American Crisis (1776), Rights of Man (1791), and Age of Reason (1795) would have an impact on the evolution of democratic politics in both Europe and America. Paine attempted to express the belief that political rights were the most important of man's inalienable or natural rights and that the government should be set up to uphold and represent these rights. He states that "a government of our own is our natural right" in Common Sense, and both American and British revolutionaries and reformers were impacted by Paine's democratic outlook. Furthermore, Paine made the same argument as Wilkes regarding the need of a free press in fostering a relationship between the populace and a democratic government. Naturally, the first article of the Bill of Rights in America expressed this viewpoint. But in Britain at the start of the 19th century, the tax system meant that most people could not lawfully manufacture or purchase newspapers and pamphlets, which prevented the press from helping the people in this way. Publicists from the middle class and the working class both presented arguments for the abolition of the taxes. These ideas found their way into larger movements aimed at expanding the political franchise, offering impoverished people an education system, and, for reformers from the middle class, liberating the print market from government regulation and taxation (Hampton, 2004; Hollis, 1970).

After these restrictions were lifted in the middle of the 19th century, it appeared that journalism might coexist in a democratic society on both sides of the Atlantic without interference from the state. The relationship between media and politics has contributed to the development of a set of ethical standards for journalists, who ought to try to bring the legislative and the executive branch under public scrutiny. Since the middle of the 19th century, the main goals of journalism's relationship with democracy have been to uphold accountability and give the public enough knowledge to allow them to make informed choices about their political affiliations. The idea of the fourth estate—journalism acting independently of the government but playing a crucial role for democracy—leads from the belief that media gives people the tools to examine their government. There is an alternative perspective on the evolution of journalism that runs counter to the understanding presented above. This script claims that journalism began to take shape in the middle of the 19th century and had a significant role in the mass's restriction rather than their liberation. Here, journalism is understood to be an expression of economic and political power as well as the prevailing principles of capitalism.

2. Conclusion

What then is journalism, and how are we to comprehend the evolution of our conceptions of it? The goal of this research paper is to demonstrate that there is no one definition of journalism. Instead, historical intersections of political, cultural, and economic variables have given rise to journalism and its principles. Journalism is about more than just politics and cultural reinforcement. Furthermore, while market forces may appear to influence the direction of professional journalism, modern journalism is not always concerned with the bottom line. The main argument made here is that understanding journalism's evolution across these specific historical planes is essential to understanding journalism as it exists today. Power, people, and profit are

all important aspects of journalism. Early 21st-century journalism appears to be a hybrid of professionalized cultural practices oriented at the political, cultural, and commercial spheres of society. These behaviors are inevitably limited within the framework of the cultural values emerging in relation to each of the aforementioned components.

Crucial is the notion that journalists have an obligation to the larger community. This makes it possible for journalism to strengthen a cultural sense of place that resonates with our sense of self and contributes to the development of shared understandings and experiences—a sense of community built through a dedication to both the public interest and the pursuit of the truth. What about the future, then? Looking back at what has happened in the past, we can draw the gloomy conclusion that the drive for profit and the growing emphasis on technology will further erode the value of journalism's fundamental principles. But as has been said elsewhere (Conboy & Steel, 2007), the people themselves have the last word when it comes to the direction journalism is going.

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