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# ACCURACY, INDEPENDENCE, AND IMPARTIALITY:
## How legacy media and digital natives approach standards in the digital age

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the digital age, one of the most complex challenges for media outlets is how to re-shape the editorial responsibilities of journalism itself. Which journalistic standards, many devised last century, still fit in the digital age? And which standards form the basis of a new type of journalism being pioneered by hybrid news sites that have come of age in the digital era?

This paper focuses on the key editorial standards of accuracy, independence, and impartiality, and examines how these three principles are approached in the digital era.

The paper then concentrates on three legacy organisations (the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, and the BBC) and three digital outlets (Quartz, BuzzFeed, and Vice News) and the measures each outlet takes to uphold editorial integrity.

Based on interviews with a wide range of industry experts, scholars and representatives of both traditional and new media, the paper asks two key questions: what can legacy organisations with hundreds of years of history learn from how digital natives approach standards? Which traditional journalistic standards held by legacy organisations should be more firmly adopted by newcomers?

Finally, this paper argues a third form of journalism is emerging; one that combines the best of legacy standards with the new approaches of digital natives. Such a hybrid form requires a more streamlined, contemporary set of editorial standards that fit the internet era.

### 7 key findings:

#### *1. Digital brings new ways to uphold editorial standards*

The arrival of a hyper-linked web has given audiences greater access to a range of facts, data, and opinions. Digital natives such as ProPublica, Quartz, FiveThirtyEight, and Vox reveal their workings to build trust, while Grantland and Upworthy deliver corrections that provide context. Editorial strengths the digital era offers include:

- Using hyperlinks to demonstrate accuracy and openness
- Greater context and timeliness for online corrections
- An inclusion of more voices which aids plurality
- Transparency in addition to (not in place of) impartiality.

#### *2. Verification, blurring of content types, and native ads threaten standards*

However, there are risks for editorial standards in the digital age, such as:

- Speed and virality can threaten fairness and accuracy
- A lack of linear structure means all content is 'flattened out'. Distinguishing between content types is difficult for outlets committed to impartiality
- Native advertising and an increase in PR-driven journalism may prevent audiences from making informed choices about what to believe and why.

3. ***Standards applied to social and data journalism need further consideration***

The way figures are selected, interpreted, and analysed affects how they are presented to the audience. What conclusions are drawn from data and how to present such findings remains a challenge.

Further, organisations must continue to refine social media guidelines for journalists. With the rise of 'super-bloggers' it is even more crucial that journalists write with a distinctive voice, but do so based in professional judgment.

***4. Standards must fit the digital age***

It is crucial all media outlets ask if legacy guidelines fit the ethos of digital content production. Not all editorial standards are fit for purpose in the digital era.

The non-profit Online News Association (ONA) is doing great work in this area by developing a DIY kit of ethics that sets out some principles as core, and others as to be determined by the organisation or individual journalist.

***5. A third form of news provider is emerging***

Digital natives such as Quartz, Vox, and ProPublica are forging a new type of journalism which combines editorial integrity with a tone and presentation that is more "of the web". It is increasingly important for legacy organisations to refine their standards to fit the digital era. Without adapting, they risk losing younger audiences to the wide array of other choices online.

***6. Business site Quartz shows how standards can adapt to meet the new era***

Being digitally native has unshackled Quartz from 20th century editorial standards that simply don't fit the nature of the web. They provide interesting, shareable content based on their editorial 'obsessions'. Quartz does this while still offering:

- Links to primary sources of information
- Swift, native correction of mistakes, with context
- A breadth of viewpoints which shows plurality of perspectives
- Transparency and a 'show your work' ethos when coming from a viewpoint
- Open-source journalism and interaction provided by their online annotations.

***7. Adapted editorial standards will allow outlets to build audience and brand trust***

The emergence of any third form of publisher has the advantage of taking the most relevant editorial standards of the past, while introducing new ways to establish credibility. Therefore, any new form of standards should prioritise:

- Greater transparency
- More open forms of journalism (open source, open code, open data)
- A voice that is of the web, driven largely by individual reporters rather than news brands
- Analysis that is facts-driven rather than opinionative
- A greater breadth of ideas and perspectives
- Content which is highly shareable via social platforms, but still accurate
- Interaction which places the reader as an expert
- Better provision of context.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS


**1. INTRODUCTION** 7
1.1 Methodology 8
1.2 The problem of old versus new 8

**2. ACCURACY** 10
2.1 Viral news: Speed versus accuracy 11
2.2 Verifying user-generated and social media content 13
BBC UGC Hub: The art of debunking myths 13
Guardian Witness: Open journalism with checks in place 14
2.3 Getting the data right: a new challenge for accuracy 15
2.4 Corrections: A way to build trust 16
Forbes: The problem with deleting problems 17
Grantland: Explaining the editorial decision-making process 17
Upworthy: Corrections that reflect your mistakes 19

**3. INDEPENDENCE** 21
3.1 Forbes: Editorial contributors or PR spin? 21
3.2 Native ads and paid posts 22

**4. IMPARTIALITY** 28
4.1 Digital brings diversity: From fewer voices to many 28
4.2 The digital and social era rewards distinctive voices 29
4.3 The internet aids transparency 31
4.4 What place does opinion have in modern journalism? 32
4.5 Opinion-led journalism and impartial journalism can co-exist 33
4.6 Presenting data with feeling 34
4.7 Hijacking by partisans: BuzzFeed's community platform 35

**5. LESSONS FROM LEGACY MEDIA AND DIGITAL NATIVES** 38
5.1 The Guardian 39
5.2 Quartz 42
5.3 The New York Times 45
5.4 BuzzFeed 48
5.5 BBC 50
5.6 Vice News 53

**6. CONCLUSION** 56

BIBLIOGRAPHY 60

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES 68

APPENDIX 69

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 70

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In mid 2014 a document leak caused incredible controversy in the media world. It was not the leaking of a dossier on the Iraq war, nor was it the leaked classified documents exposing the mass surveillance programs undertaken by America's National Security Agency (NSA). The report, six months in the making, demonstrated world-renowned journalism icon the *New York Times* struggling in an era where digital start-ups were gaining impressive audience share. And to add insult to injury, the *New York Times* Innovation Report was leaked to *BuzzFeed*, precisely the sort of born-of-the-web publication that had in 2013 overtaken the *New York Times* in monthly traffic.

Journalism is facing many challenges in the 21st century, as traditional business models become more precarious and the internet becomes overcrowded with a deluge of information. In the digital age, one of the most complex challenges is how to re-shape the processes and editorial responsibilities of journalism itself. Which journalistic standards, many devised more than a century ago, still fit in the digital age? And which standards form the basis of a new type of journalism being pioneered by hybrid news sites that have come of age in the digital era?

The key questions to be examined are:

1. Do current editorial standards fit digital journalism, or does the nature of digital and social journalism require different standards?

2. Which standards do legacy and digitally native news organisations place a premium on and why? Which principles do they share? Where does any difference in standards occur?

This paper starts by looking at the key editorial standards of accuracy, independence, and impartiality. It examines how these three standards are approached in the digital era. Many of the current challenges and some of the solutions applied by media outlets are highlighted in this section.

The paper then focuses specifically on three legacy and three digital outlets to examine in detail how they are handling the above standards. What can legacy organisations with hundreds of years of history learn from digital natives? Which traditional journalistic standards held by legacy organisations should be more firmly adopted by newcomers? How can we combine the best of both worlds for audiences?

Finally, the paper identifies editorial areas that need further consideration. Some of the complexities yet to be resolved include the intersection of standards with data journalism and social media. The conclusion also argues a third form of journalism is emerging; one that combines the best of legacy standards and the new approaches of digital natives. Such a hybrid form requires a more streamlined set of editorial standards that fit the internet era.

This paper is written for several audiences – legacy organisations seeking to adapt their standards, startups wanting to devise theirs, and regulatory bodies. It is also for my own employer, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, a public service broadcaster now in the digital space, but one with an enduring commitment to journalistic standards.

### *1.1 Methodology*

Primarily, the research and case studies presented are drawn from interviews with editorial leaders, usually conducted one-on-one on location or via Skype. The paper is also informed by material gathered at the *New York Times* / BBC Social Media Summit in London in May 2014. A list of interviewees is included at the end of this paper.

These interviews were built upon via other academic research, articles, speeches, and case studies.

This paper focuses on both legacy media organisations and digital natives as a way to illustrate the differing approaches towards editorial standards. Organisations were chosen so as to provide a spread of approaches: from ones predominately producing text, to those focusing on video and audio, and news outlets which adhere to impartiality and those who prefer transparency and journalism from a perspective.

### *1.2 The problem of old versus new*

While this paper looks at the editorial standards of both legacy and born-of-the-web media outlets, the intention is not to pit them against each other. On one hand, it's a healthy debate to be having; just what sorts of standards should digital media adopt and how can traditional standards be transformed to fit the new digital ethos? Conversely, if legacy media outlets cling too firmly to principles that were largely established for a time when a media monopoly existed, will it prevent them from competing in the global digital space for audience share? Further, can the audience tell the difference between these approaches and do they even care?

The reality is that *all* journalists and media organisations have more complex editorial responsibilities in the hybrid social age. And yet a somewhat unhelpful divide between the defenders of truthful, impartial reportage and a new approach that favours transparency and participation by the audience to get a story right has emerged. *Washington Post* senior editor Marc Fisher (2014) sums this up*:*

> *All the dismissive sniping and straight-out antagonism between old-school defenders of the print craft and the young digital brains propelling start-ups came down to a debate over values: The old guard argued that they were driven by the quest for truth, and by their sense of what citizens need to know to be informed participants in democracy. Reporting was all about locking down the facts and presenting them to readers, who would know best how to take advantage of the light we shined. Digital journalists countered that their way was more honest and democratic—and quicker. If that meant presenting stories before they'd been thoroughly vetted, that was okay, because the internet would correct itself. Truth would emerge through open trial and error.*

Similarly, Australian journalist Annabel Crabb implores: "does everything have to turn into World of Warcraft, with paragons of evil and of saintliness at either end, and nothing in between? To my colleagues in the mainstream media, on the subject of online journalism, I would say: Don't knock it till you've tried it. To the blogosphere, I would say: Don't knock us when we try it" (A.N. Smith lecture, 2010).

This divide capitulated when former executive of the *New York Times* Bill Keller (2013) engaged in a lengthy debate with blogger Glenn Greenwald about the merits of their contrasting journalistic practises. Keller argued for adherence to the facts and a commitment to objective methods, while Greenwald mounted a case for journalism from a perspective, rooted in transparency and evidence.

And yet we need both methods. They can and should co-exist.

Further, any revision of editorial standards should bring the two approaches closer together. Some work has already begun on this. The Online News Association (ONA), the world's largest organisation of digital journalists, is formulating a new set of editorial standards that could fit any fleet-of-foot digital news service in the 21st century. At the 2014 International Journalism Festival, the ONA launched the first draft of this "do-it-yourself" ethics code, which provides a baseline of 10 fundamental concepts that all journalists should agree on (tell the truth, don't plagiarize, don't take money to skew your stories etc). Other principles can then be taken from the shelf to suit an individual blogger's or news organisation's beliefs. One key choice is between objective journalism and point-of-view journalism. Project leader Tom Kent (2014) says the code is deliberately adaptable. "For instance some of us have no problem with writing from a certain political point of view (as long as we're transparent about it). Others favour the traditional principles of objectivity and neutrality. Our code can encompass either approach". The toolkit also contains advice on 40 other issues such as: removal of items from online archives; anonymous sources; quoting, without permission, comments people make on social media; verification of social media sources; and corrections.

This approach, which aims to streamline core standards while simultaneously allowing for differences in method, is a sensible one. Any outlets seeking to refine and revise their own editorial standards for a new era should consider such an adaptable model. It acknowledges that while many key standards haven't changed, the method of achieving them in the digital age has. Mark Memmott, supervising senior editor for standards and practices at NPR, sums up the subtle shift in standards brought on by the internet: "the same standards apply, with a wrinkle" (interview, 2014).

## 2. ACCURACY

> *Fast is good, but right is better. We need the strongest possible commitment to accuracy and its close cousin, fairness.*
>
> - Margaret Sullivan, public editor for the *New York Times*

After news organisations, including the *New York Times*, wrongly identified the perpetrator of the Newtown school shootings in the US, Margaret Sullivan said a reader wrote to say "she had always believed that if 'I read it in the *New York Times* it's always true,' but her belief in that truth had been shaken" (Silverman, 2014).

Being accurate has always been a core tenet of journalism, but in an age of viral news, verification is an increasingly essential skill. The sheer volume of material requiring verification is crippling news organisations whose budgets are shrinking. Writing in the *New York Times*, Somaiya and Kaufman claim "truth has never been an essential ingredient of viral content on the internet. But in the stepped up competition for readers, digital news sites are increasingly blurring the line between fact and fiction, and saying that it is all part of doing business in the rough-and-tumble world of online journalism" (2013).

Some media outlets are placing the responsibility for scepticism with the audience, thereby absolving the journalism outlet of the responsibility to fact-check because it's physically impossible to keep up with the information deluge. "We assume a certain level of sophistication and scepticism of our readers," says John Cook, editor-in-chief of Gawker (in Somaiya and Kaufman, 2013). Former BBC director of news and Cardiff University journalism professor, Richard Sambrook, also identifies that "some now believe the responsibility for assessing the accuracy and quality of information should switch from the providers of news to the consumers; that in an age of plenty the consumer has a greater role to play and responsibility for what they consume" (2012, p 6). Others see this out-sourcing of fact-checking as a way to free up limited resources within a newsroom for other tasks. Those other tasks may include interpreting and contextualising the information, a skill that can move the trained journalist to a position of greater power. "The journalist has not been replaced but displaced, moved higher up the editorial chain from the production of initial observations to a role that emphasises verification and interpretation, bringing sense to the streams of text, audio, photos and video produced by the public" (Anderson et al, 2012, p 22).

Netscape founder and digital start-up investor Marc Andreessen (2014) says there are two ways to view this:

> *The glass-half-full-view is that stories get better and better over time, vectoring ever closer to the truth. As a result, overall accuracy goes up over time. That is good for publications and journalists, and also good for their subjects. The glass-half-empty-view is that the quality bar for an initial post can be lower. Sloppy stories get published since they can always be corrected later, as much or as often as needed. This gets us into deterministic 'truth' versus probabilistic 'truth' territory. In other words, from: Here it is, take it or leave it*, to: *Here it is, subject to arbitrary ongoing revision.*

Further, there are journalists such as Luke O'Neil (2014) who argue the goalposts for achieving accuracy have definitely shifted in the online era:

> *Yes, newspapers have long printed lifestyle puff pieces next to hard news, but the analogy between that practice and the current model doesn't hold. As someone who's written hundreds of newspaper entertainment pieces in my day, I can tell you they*

*still, thankfully, do not take inaccuracies lightly, even minor ones. And as someone who's written hundreds of hacky blog posts, I can tell you that it's a practice that rots your guts from inside.*

Examples of incorrect information being posted by media outlets and shared by consumers are too numerous to outline in this paper. Instead, highlighted here is a case study which shows how a media organisation can display a high standard for accuracy, despite the challenges of the fast-paced digital world.

### *2.1 Viral news: Speed versus accuracy*

In 2012 various US media outlets reported on the possible retirement of quarter-back Peyton Manning from the Indianapolis Colts NFL team (Twohig, 2012). Actor Rob Lowe, a friend of Colts owner Jim Irsay, send Twitter into a minor meltdown with the following posts:




***Figure 2.1***

*Actor Rob Lowe's Twitter predictions about Peyton Manning.*

ESPN, an established sports journalism brand, was one of the few outlets which didn't run the story. Later Chris Jones, *ESPN Magazine* editor, assured readers that "here at ESPN we support the highest standards of journalistic integrity and transparency. We want to assure our millions of viewers and dozens of readers that in an era defined by the sheer volume and velocity of information - information that's often erroneous or even totally, obviously made up - we take the accuracy of our reporting seriously. Before we pass even the smallest snippet of news along to you, we verify its authenticity. We do not bear that responsibility lightly" (2012).

In a humorous jibe at journalists who re-tweeted Lowe's assertions with no verification, Jones (2012) said "deep down in what we call 'Hunchville Station,' something didn't feel quite right. Then we remembered that no television actor has broken sports news of any significant in the history of humanity on Earth… Therefore, Lowe's tweet did not meet our Poynter Institute-sanctioned standards of journalistic excellence".

This example shows that media outlets, even under pressure when it seems other outlets have broken a story, can place a premium on accuracy over speed. And by doing so, trust in their brand is increased. Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) managing director Mark Scott points to the dangers of a 'we'll correct it later' attitude. "Being slow with the story can ruin your breaking news reputation, but similarly, a mindset that says 'never wrong for long' doesn't build confidence or credibility in what you put to air or publish, whether you are any more than a distribution channel for what you have heard" (A.N. Smith lecture, 2014). Tim

Toulmin, former director of the Press Complaints Commission in the UK, isn't as sure the audience is prepared to wait. "I don't know what the public would think if you asked them to make a choice between getting all of the news accurately but later, or get it all immediately but the story may have to be revised. I suspect they would say that they would want accurate information and wait for it, but in practice I am not sure that this is right" (in Currah, 2009, p 126).

The BBC's social media editor Chris Hamilton (interview, 2014) argues the digital audience is prepared to wait for fully-formed facts over half-baked rumours:

> *We did some research around breaking news… audiences aren't really all that interested in speed. Obviously the nature of news is that it needs to be new, we're not talking about taking days to get around to something. But in those first few minutes it's journalists who obsess about who got the story first. Most laypeople don't have quad screens with four TV channels on like newsrooms do. What they care about much more is accuracy and trust. That's where established media organisations have a role.*

He also says the need for accuracy from public service broadcasters is even greater:

> *I think just running something just because it's out there, that's where I do have more of a problem. You do see this. After Bin Laden was killed, a picture of his corpse was doing the rounds. It was included in some coverage just on the basis of it doing the rounds. No one was actually checking if it was true or not. It was doing the rounds on social media so it was picked up and slapped on air with 'we don't know if this is true but it's doing the rounds, it looks a bit like him'. For established news organisations I think that's a fairly serious line to cross.*

Digital native Gawker has a different approach: post and let the audience decide. Gawker publisher Nick Denton explains that such "half-baked posts" tell readers: "this is what we know. This is what we don't know. What do you know?" (Jarvis, 2009, p 92).

And digital start-up NowThisNews, which posts up to 50 videos a day, prioritises giving audiences the closest version of the truth *at that time*, rather than waiting for the full facts to unfold. Fisher (2014) explains the NowThisNews approach to accuracy:

> *They churn out 40 to 50 videos a day—six-second clips for Vine, 10-second spots for Snapchat, 15-second versions for Instagram, and longform work (30 seconds to a minute) for Facebook and the Web. "Everything we do is irreverent, but not glib," says the editor in chief, Ed O'Keefe, 36, a veteran of ABC News. "We remove all ornamentation, anything that distances. The YouTube generation understands that stories evolve. It's dirty and it's not always right, but it's instantaneous." There it is, the red-hot core of the difference between old school and new. I've never had a print editor who said anything like that out loud. But I have heard any number of editors who are struggling to figure out how to compete digitally embrace the idea that putting something up can take precedence over checking it out fully. This is no expression of tabloid amorality; O'Keefe is a serious journalist who is trying to find a standard that works in the new world. He doesn't want to deliver inaccuracies to his audience. Rather, he wants to give them the closest version of the truth he can while still meeting them where they are, which is on their phone, right now. Wait a few minutes, and they won't be there anymore; they'll have moved on to the next story.*

## *2.2 Verifying user-generated and social media content*

> *With the acceleration of social media sharing and constantly improving mobile technology, journalism is beginning to open up.*
>
> – US journalist Melanie Sill

The rise in user-generated content (UGC) and the use of citizen journalists in the digital age have posed several questions with regards to accuracy (Sill, 2012). Firstly, how and to what extent should UGC be independently verified by a media outlet before publication? And secondly, should content submitted by audiences and published by a media outlet be subject to the editorial standards of that media outlet? This section looks at two examples: the BBC's UGC Hub and Guardian Witness.

### *BBC UGC Hub: The art of debunking myths*

In mid 2005, BBC News established a small team to verify content submitted from the audience (Turner, 2012). Just a week later, the London bombings occurred and for 30 minutes the BBC and other media outlets were reporting that it was a power surge. But a doctor then emailed the UGC Hub a picture of the bombed bus, and the BBC scaled up its coverage of what turned out to be a significant story.

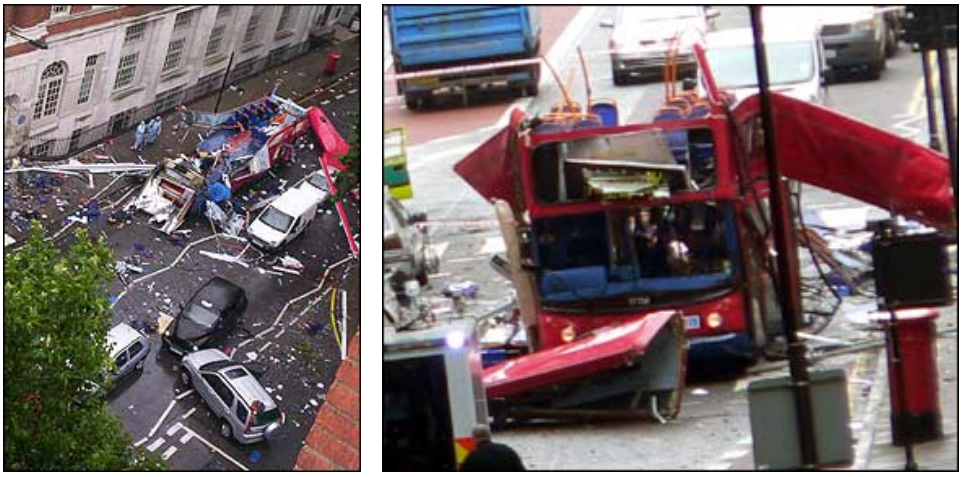


***Figure 2.2*** *User-submitted pictures of the London bus bombings in 2005*

Trushar Barot, assistant editor of the BBC UGC and social media hub, says this key news event "hammered home some lessons which might be obvious now but were big insights then:

- The audience knew more than us on this story
- They helped us tell the story faster
- They helped us tell the story better" (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2014).

In 2014 the BBC UGC Hub is an integral part of the newsroom, working 24/7 to verify images, videos, tweets, posts, and other UGC on both domestic and

international stories. The team uses tools such as Pipl, Topsy, GeoFeedia, TinEye, Wolfram Alpha, and Dataminr to verify and triangulate the masses of information coming in. Social media monitoring is a new aspect of their work, which has taken off in 2014. The team now also looks for early warnings of stories, such as activity on messaging apps WeChat or WhatsApp.

The BBC's director of news, James Harding, says the audience is now part of the news team because they too are distributing and sharing the news. "The world is one big fact-checking machine. It's very healthy for the BBC's journalism" (*New York Times* / BBC Social Media Summit, 2014).

Barot says the greatest challenge for the standard of accuracy in the digital age is the speed and volume of information. "We often as a team come under pressure when a rival news organisation has seen something on social media and they are using that video or photo on TV. A BBC TV producer will come running over, saying 'others are running it, why can't we run it?' Our answer is usually we're aware of it and we're still going through our checks". But he senses a shift in audience expectations where accuracy will be valued over speed:

> *We are increasingly realising that on social media being first is not necessarily a big issue for the audience. Being right and being trusted is more important. The self flagellation that takes place when you're not first, that's now being re-framed and we're understanding the value of getting it right.*

Harding sums up the seriousness of the BBC's heightened approach to accuracy in the age of viral dissemination. "I don't take verification lightly - there is a great deal of angst in the newsroom about it. We should give more credit to the people telling us what's *not* true. We do have to innovate on social media but we're humorless about accuracy" (*New York Times* / BBC Social Media Summit, 2014).

### *Guardian Witness: Open journalism with checks in place*

Open journalism platform Guardian Witness was launched in mid 2013 and allows the audience to contribute text, audio, and video. Users can send in story tip-offs or pitch an assignment they'd like to do for the *Guardian*. The platform also allows the *Guardian* to build communities for open, crowd-sourced journalism. For example, readers helped review the expense claims of British MPs and provided eyewitness accounts during the Arab Spring. Similarly, the *Guardian's* environment team crowd-sourced solutions to capping BP's Gulf of Mexico oil spill (Viner, 2013).

Community co-ordinator for Guardian Witness, Philippa Law, says the material submitted is pre-moderated and checked against the *Guardian's* Community Standards Guidelines (see link in appendix). She says the *Guardian* doesn't apply its editorial standards to Guardian Witness content published on the distinct portal, but if the UGC is picked up for use by the *Guardian's* main website or newspaper, editorial standards are then applied. "When material moves into our editorial content it has to meet our standards. We wouldn't use material in an editorial piece if we hadn't checked it out" (Oxford Martin School, 2014). Law says UGC doesn't replace journalism and that verification checks are still crucial.

Overall, the rise in user-generated content in the internet era has raised the requirement for material to be vetted, verified, and placed into context. Legacy and digital sites should understand that brand credibility is at stake and thus it's even more crucial in the digital era to ensure material is true before it's published or re-published. Secondly, it is clear that the digital era has provided an even greater opportunity for journalism to be open, transparent, and participatory. This greater

accountability comes with responsibilities, as Sill (2012) asserts:

> *It's time to open up journalism's processes, not just its outcomes, to more robust and effective interaction with sources, contributors and consumers. A discipline based on bringing information to light needs to be more engaged with the expanding practices and culture of information exchange in the communication era. This is key to improving journalism's service and expanding its value and effectiveness as a public good.*

## *2.3 Getting the data right: a new challenge for accuracy*

Data journalism brings a fresh complexity to the standard of accuracy. Though the practice of data journalism is decades old, it has risen to prominence in the internet era courtesy of websites which combine data journalism with personality-driven blogs. Nate Silver's FiveThirtyEight (published independently, then by the *New York Times* and now by ESPN), Wonkblog (published by the *Washington Post)* and Ezra Klein's newly launched site Vox have cult-like followings.

So how credible and accurate is the data these sites source? Aron Pilhofer, formerly of the *New York Times* and now executive editor of digital with the *Guardian*, says "anyone who knows anything about statistics knows enough to know it's not an exact science. Any statistical model is built on the assumption that five per cent of the time it will be wrong and spectacularly wrong. So depending on how you build it, it's going to be wrong once in a while" (interview, 2014).

Visualisation specialist at the University of Miami in the US, Alberto Cairo (2014), recently described several such "worrying cracks that may undermine core principles". Describing an article the *Washington Post* published about physical violence against women (titled 'One way to end violence against women? Married dads'), Cairo stated:

> *Bad data is pervasive in traditional newsrooms. If you think I'm exaggerating, read the recent and infuriating Washington Post op-ed, which gets causality wrong, is oblivious of ecological fallacies, misinterprets sources, and ends with a coarse, insulting, and condescending line.*

Cairo also described a piece by Vox (titled 'Stop forcing people to wear bike helmets') as an example of cherry-picking and connecting studies to mount a case.

> *It's possible to 'prove' almost anything if you act like this. I can 'prove' that vaccines cause autism – they don't – just by selecting certain papers, particularly those based on tiny samples of simple correlations, while ignoring the crushing majority that refutes my intuitions. Gladwellism – deriving grand theories from a handful of undersubstantiated studies – may be popular nowaways, but it's still dubious journalism.*

In 2014, the Nate Silver-led data blog FiveThirtyEight issued a correction after it published animated maps showing kidnappings in Nigeria. Journalist Mona Chalabi (2014) based her maps and graphs on the Global Database of Events, Language and Tone, but FiveThirtyEight later pointed out the database was not a repository of *all* kidnapping events, but of media reports about kidnappings.



FiveThirtyEight

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RESPONDING TO READERS

**Mapping Kidnappings in Nigeria (Updated)**

7:03 AM | MAY 13 | By MONA CHALABI



**Editor's note (May 16, 3:35 p.m.):** This article contains many errors, some of them fundamental to the analysis.

The article repeatedly refers to the number and location of kidnappings. But the Global Database of Events, Language and Tone (GDELT) — the data source for the article — is a repository of media reports, not discrete events. As such, we should only have referred to "media reports of kidnappings," not kidnappings.

***Figure 2.3***

*FiveThirtyEight admits it wrongly interpreted kidnapping data*

Because of the way the figures were interpreted, the animated map also over-represented kidnappings in the city centre. The website's correction stated the piece "did not meet FiveThirtyEight's standards for publication. We apologize for the mistakes. We will do better. The original article follows below."

This example further highlights that editorial standards for data journalism need greater attention by news organisations. The way accuracy is achieved with data should be forefront of mind in newsrooms. Alex Howard, who completed a report on data-driven journalism for Columbia University's Tow Center for Digital Journalism (2014), stresses that while data has been given a fresh spin of late, the same editorial principles should hold firm:

> *These are new tools, new techniques, new opportunities and there are new risks that go along with them, but the ethics of creating knowledge from data aren't fundamentally divorced from the ethics of creating knowledge from talking to people as sources (in Doll, 2014).*

There is also the question of how journalists use data to draw conclusions and to mount an argument. This issue will be dealt with in the later chapter on impartiality.

## *2.4 Corrections: A way to build trust*

> *Corrections enhance credibility. Standing up and admitting your errors makes you more believable; it gives your audience faith that you will right your future wrongs.*
> – Media analyst Jeff Jarvis

Jarvis (2009) highlights one of the ways the digital era has strengthened editorial responsibility; clever and open news organisations now use their mistakes to *build* trust. Gone are the days when a correction was begrudgingly buried deep inside a newspaper.

However, tracking corrections online must be done with responsibility. Sometimes it's too easy for a news outlet to simply change online text without acknowledging what has been changed and why. Andreessen (2014) says "even top print newspapers and magazines frequently revise stories online, sometimes dozens of times, often without tracking changes". Savvy audiences have high expectations for corrections to be clearly marked. Further, journalists should no longer be reluctant to let audiences in on what they don't know. As the *New York Times* public editor Margaret Sullivan asserts "we can say what we know and what we don't know at a particular time, and we can be quick to admit it when we know something is wrong and when we get something wrong" (Silverman, 2014).

Editor of new formats at Trinity Mirror, Martin Belam, insists that corrections are one area where new media have an advantage over old. "One of the things about the more 'participatory journalism' where the audience can join in with the newsgathering, if someone points out that we've made a mistake with the data or the statistics then we are gracious about it, we fix it and apologise and that's very authentic for the web. It gives it a different flavour that is more native new media" (interview, 2014).

There have been several corrections from media outlets in the past year, all of which have been handled differently. This paper examines three significant ones.

### *Forbes: The problem with deleting problems*

Business magazine *Forbes* bungled the removal of a story about Facebook CEO Sheryl Sandberg which was considered sexist. *Forbes* uses a contributor model which allows selected contributors to post without any vetting or editorial checks in place.

After a backlash against his piece, contributor Eric Jackson (an investment firm manager) simply deleted the post. But executive producer with Forbes.com, Coates Bateman, then insisted the original piece be added to the correction. "We wanted to make sure that our audience and our readership didn't feel like we were hiding something from them" (in Tenore, 2012).




***Figure 2.4***

*Forbes contributor Eric Jackson issued an apology, after intervention*

### *Grantland: Explaining the editorial decision-making process*

In 2014 sports and culture website Grantland issued a lengthy correction after the publication of an in-depth feature called 'Dr V's Magical Putter' about an inventor named Essay Anne Vanderbilt. The journalist worked for seven months on the story and during that time inadvertently outed Dr V as transgender to one of her investors. Dr V committed suicide a few weeks later and at that point Grantland had no plans to run the story due to a lack of news values.

But after Dr V's suicide, the journalist re-wrote the piece to incorporate the entire story and after careful consideration and many rounds of subbing, Grantland published the piece. After initial praise for the feature, it later became apparent the story didn't handle the transgender issue appropriately. Editor Bill Simmons (2014) issued a brave and lengthy retraction, spelling out the reasons Grantland felt the piece failed the audience and the story's subject.




**The Dr. V Story: A Letter From the Editor**

How "Dr. V's Magical Putter" came to be published

BY BILL SIMMONS ON JANUARY 20, 2014 | PRINT

"How could you guys run that?"

We started hearing that question on Friday afternoon, West Coast time, right as everyone was leaving our Los Angeles office to start the weekend. We kept hearing that question on Friday night, and all day Saturday, and Sunday, too. We heard it repeatedly on Twitter and Facebook. We sifted through dozens of outraged emails from our readers. We read critiques on various blogs

*Figure 2.5*

*Grantland's editor Bill Simmons issued a lengthy apology*

Further, Grantland commissioned a guest editorial from Christina Kahrl (2014) – a board director with GLAAD, which promotes the image of transgender people in the media. This detailed the problems the story had in dealing with transgender issues.

**What Grantland Got Wrong**

Understanding the serious errors in "Dr. V's Magical Putter"

BY CHRISTINA KAHRL ON JANUARY 20, 2014 | PRINT

When you're a writer, you want something you create to have a long life, to be something that readers will remember and revisit for years to come. If such was Caleb Hannan's wish, it's been granted, because his essay on "Dr. V and the magical putter" figures to be a permanent exhibit of what not to do, and how not to treat a fellow human being.

*Figure 2.6*

*Grantland commissioned an external expert to contribute to apology*

The detail, honesty, and fullness of the Grantland correction displayed the highest level of editorial integrity in order to restore trust in Grantland. Editor Bill Simmons was also careful not to lay the blame with the writer of the piece, but instead took full responsibility for the chain of events leading to the story's publication. The story remains online but is headed now with a paragraph that links to both Simmon's

correction and the editorial by Kahrl so that readers have the full context if they still choose to read the feature. This example demonstrates how digital outlets can issue more fulsome and transparent corrections than they might have done pre-internet.

### *Upworthy: Corrections which reflect your mistakes*

The curation site Upworthy took a novel approach in 2014 when it issued a correction as a GIF (a short animation popular on the internet). Upworthy had previously featured a YouTube video which claimed McDonald's chicken nuggets contained odd objects and colourings. The post was titled 'Correction: That Time We Let Pretend Science Ruin Real Science And Decided To Apologize For It' and included a series of animated GIFs of the editors apologising. Upworthy also highlighted the original complaints from its readers.

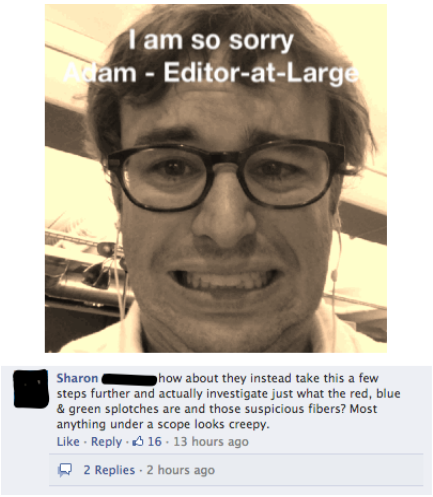



*Figure 2.7*

Curation site Upworthy issued a correction as an animated GIF

Poynter blogger Craig Silverman applauded Upworthy for bringing a new form to the correction, but also warned that corrections must bring clarity, not confusion. "GIFs carry some baggage, with people seeing them as flippant and jokey in most contexts. So, consider whether the tools and narrative devices you use in a correction will hurt or help your efforts" (Poynter, 2014). Luke Lewis, UK editor of BuzzFeed, had nothing but praise for Upworthy's GIF-heavy correction. "What old media companies do is they bury their apologies and make them seem really begrudging, and they're on page 22 right at the bottom of the page. What Upworthy were trying to do was say 'we had an article that was wrong go viral, so now we're trying to make the apology go viral' and I thought that was great" (interview, 2014).

Greater transparency and the experimentation with the *format* of corrections are new ways digital media are achieving the standard of accuracy. It is also clear that different approaches to accuracy have sprung up in the digital age, with some organisations prioritising verification and others posting half-formed pieces of a story. The latter, of course, is not dissimilar to the way legacy organisations approached breaking news in several updated editions of a newspaper, in radio bulletin updates, and rolling TV coverage. Journalists have always given the fullest facts known at the time and updated them when more information has come to light. However, the viral nature of highly shareable digital news makes competition to post a story first more intense. John Pavlik of Rutgers University argues the digital age gives even more room for media outlets to check the facts before publishing "by freeing journalists from the artificial, technologically induced deadline delirium of twentieth-century journalism, the digital age may usher in an era of journalism dominated less by the clock and more by the need to get the facts - and the story -

right" (2001, p 95). But the reality in 2014 is that without hourly radio deadlines or a 24-hour newspaper deadline, the digital era has brought about an expectation that stories will be posted even sooner. How to balance this appetite for instant news with the need for truth will remain a challenge for both digital natives and legacy media.

## 3. INDEPENDENCE

A significant challenge for the digital era is the increasing use of press releases, advertorial, and native advertising, and whether this damages the independence of a news outlet. Academic researcher Andrew Currah (2009) attributes part of this trend to a decrease in newsgathering budgets. "There is a clear danger of a sharp reduction in spending on original newsgathering, including investigative reporting, as well as a further increase in the processing of pre-packaged PR material, a weakening of editorial standards, and a news agenda shaped more and more by the noise of the crowd" (p 7). Shrinking revenue streams for commercial media in particular threaten the independence of the free press.

Many legacy organisations prevent journalists from participating in political parties, from profiting from stories, and in the case of business reporters, from owning shares in companies they report on.

Clear demarcation of paid content is also critical to editorial independence. As the BBC's economics editor Robert Peston asserts "there is also pollution, from a dangerous elision between news that pays and news that matters" (Charles Wheeler lecture, 2014). This section concentrates on two threats to independence faced by digital news: journalism free from vested interests, and native advertising.

### *3.1 Forbes: Editorial contributors or PR spin?*

Business magazine *Forbes* realised it could "not run a news business and produce quality content in the digital era with a cost structure built for analog times" (Christensen, 2012). The website's editors now manage a network of 1,000 'contributors' who might be topic experts, academics, authors, or business leaders. The contributors post their own stories online and are accountable for their own metrics. Christensen (2012) states that in one year *Forbes* doubled the number of unique visitors to its website and both search referrals and social media referrals grew. Chief product officer at *Forbes*, Lewis Dvorkin (2011), says "we've entered a world of Entrepreneurial Journalists, incentive-based content creators who build a brand under their name and attract an audience to their topic-specific expertise".

The *Forbes* contributors are solely responsible for their own accuracy and editing which horrifies proponents of carefully sub-edited journalism. Dvorkin (in Sonderman, 2012) disputes the claim that it's irresponsible not to have fact-checkers or editors go over a story before publication. "It's about accountability. It's your brand, it's your page, and you need to get it right. If you don't, you won't be able to build an audience," Dvorkin said. "I worked at *Newsweek* for five years. Reporters would write stories with a whole bunch of [fact checking requests] so a fact checker could go do it. What kind of accountability is that? $100,000-a-year people depending on someone making $25,000 to get their story right". Having contributors from roles outside journalism can add a diversity of perspectives, but without applying editing processes or any set of editorial standards, the reader can't be guaranteed the information is accurate and independent.

There's also the question of potential conflicts of interest. Sonderman (2012) identifies that "conflicts of interest are a potential weakness in the model. Especially among unpaid contributors who are writing to promote themselves, their books or their businesses, you have to wonder how their 'other motives' subtly frame their writing". Contributors are required to disclose to *Forbes*, in writing, any conflicts of interest and the biographical details of each contributor are posted on the website.

The *Forbes* contributor model is further confused when the blog posts of a *Forbes* contributor are included alongside those of a *Forbes* BrandVoice contributor who is posting advertorial. According to *Forbes*, "BrandVoice lets marketers post interesting and relevant content on *Forbes.com* while tapping into the social web through *Forbes'* powerful, search optimised publishing platform." It brings into focus the difficulty for the reader in identifying which editorial is truly independent, which is from a contributor who may have a vested interest, and which is advertorial or PR material dressed up as a story. Such deliberate blurring of content can fool a time-pressured reader who has a right to expect independent journalism.

### *3.2 Native ads and paid posts*

The so-called separation of 'church and state', which clearly delineates between the editorial and advertising sides of a media organisation, has been eroded in the digital era. In the past few years, many news websites have moved away from traditional 'banner ads', clearly defined ads that sit to the side of editorial content. This decade has been about native advertising and branded content, where the ad format matches the visual design, function and context of the user experience.

Writing for Reuters (2013), media analyst Felix Salmon categorises the different types of native advertising, ranging from features written by advertising staff, to promoted tweets or suggested Facebook posts:

| **The Native Matrix** | | *Who is it written by?* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *Editorial staff* | *Sales staff / ad agency* | *Brand execs* |
| *Who is it published by?* | *Publisher* | **Public relations** | **Sponsored content / native advertising*** | **Brand journalism / Thought leadership** |
| | *Brand* | **Content marketing** | **Marketing** | **Blogging** |
| ** Sponsored content is designed to be read; native advertising is designed to be shared.* | | | | |

***Figure 3.1*** *Felix Salmon's Native Matrix which describes forms of paid content*

A number of media outlets utilise some form of native advertising; BuzzFeed is perhaps the most successful in its ability to incorporate sponsored posts that are widely shared.

But legacy organisations also use this method. The *New York Times* launched its first 'paid post' in January 2014. Computer company Dell received a blue box on the *NYT* homepage, alongside the masthead. Users who clicked on the box were taken to a distinct URL (paidpost.nytimes.com) where a disclaimer was included: "This page

was produced by the Advertising Department of the *New York Times* in collaboration with Dell. The news and editorial staffs of the *New York Times* had no role in its preparation."

Standards editor Philip Corbett stresses the *New York Times* is very focused on ensuring the labeling of paid posts is clear. "One of the things we thought about was not everybody would come to this material in the same way. For one thing we thought it wasn't enough that the link or point of entry on the home page was clearly labeled a paid post, but that when you got to the material itself it still had to be very visibly different and clearly labeled for what it was. So if you came to it from some other route you would still be very clear about what you are looking at" (interview, 2014).

The *New York T*imes also spent much time ensuring any search for content in a paid post would turn up in a search engine as advertorial rather than editorial. "Another thing was, what about a Google search? I know we wanted it to be clear even in search results that you were getting a paid post, not *New York Times* newsroom journalism" (Corbett, 2014).




***Figure 3.2***

*Dell's paid post was placed next to the New York Times' masthead*

According to *Advertising Age* (Sebastian, 2014), the *New York Times* insisted on a number of regulations when dealing with Dell:

1. **Times staff pitched story ideas to Dell.** One of Dell's first paid posts delves into the topic of millennials in the workplace. The author is a freelancer that the *Times* contracted. A *Times* editor - not from its newsroom, but instead part of an internal 'content studio' - pitched ideas to Dell around these topics that weren't related to Dell products. Dell approved the story ideas, which the *Times* farmed out to freelancers.
2. **Paid posts will live forever on the *Times*' site.** When the three-month campaign ends, Dell's paid-posts will remain on the site and discoverable through the *Times*' search function. A spokeswoman for the *Times* said paid-posts will not appear among editorial stories in search results and they will not be indexed on Google in the same way as news stories.
3. **Paid posts will not be shared via the *Times*' main Twitter account or Facebook page.** Social media remains a place to share editorial stories only. Readers who use the sharing tools attached to the paid posts will see a pre-generated tweet that indicates it is a 'paid post.'
4. **Readers cannot comment on paid posts.** That is a functionality that is not part of the paid posts.

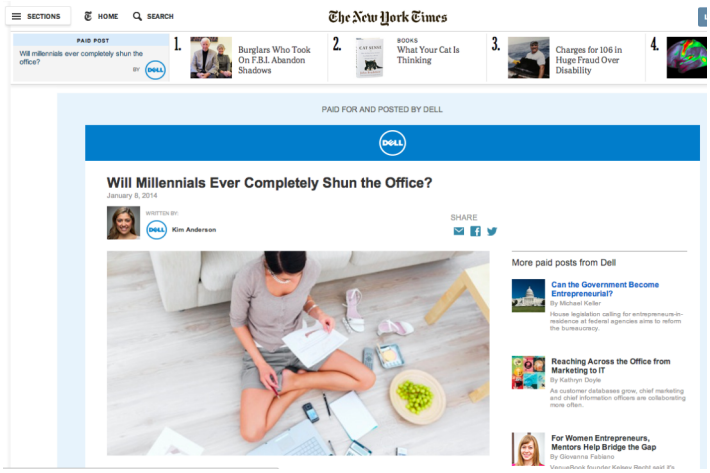



***Figure 3.3***

*Dell's paid post was hosted on a separate URL, with different search engine indexing*

The inclusion of branded content has been controversial within *NYT* itself. Writing in *PR Week*, Cramer-Krasselt marketing expert Scott Smith discussed an apparent clash between recently dumped editor of *NYT*, Jill Abramson, with the business side of the paper. "According to reports, Abramson's primary concern with native advertising was her belief that it could mislead readers into thinking the *Times* was the source of the work rather than an advertiser" (2014).

Smith goes on to praise the sign-posting that business site Quartz uses on its ads. Rather than feature traditional banner adds, Quartz places native ads within the same content stream as pure editorial copy. "Quartz's native advertising program incorporates brand content into its editorial stream without compromising the integrity of the other content there. It accomplishes this with clean design and disclosure" (Smith, 2014).

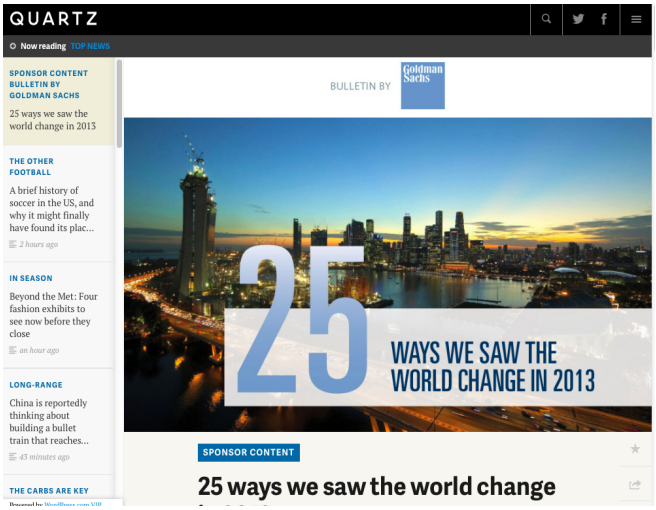



***Figure 3.4***

*Quartz sponsor content sits within its editorial stream*

In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, Quartz president Jay Lauf said "I do think ensuring you're in no way trying to fool a reader is critical, and we've found the clearer the labelling on the content the better it performs," (in Marshall, 2014). Already advertising analysts such as Ben Kunz of Mediassociates say the strategy is working. "As an advertiser, native gets beat up, but Quartz has a nice native format. It comes off as a value to the reader. They've done a good job of defending editorial standards and native, which is smart" (in Sternberg, 2013).

Quartz competitor the *Economist*, which derives much of its income from subscribers rather than ads, does have content marketing on its site but places it on a different URL where the advertiser's content is hosted (more in line with the *NYT* approach). The *Economist's* digital editor Tom Standage is concerned by the placement of ads in the editorial stream. "I worry that native content can at times be a 'bait and switch', where readers are deceived into thinking that an ad is editorial, because it is presented in a way that closely resembles editorial, and is mixed in with editorial. Some publishers are happy to do this, but we are not, and in the long run I don't think it's a good idea to pursue a business model that relies, essentially, on deception. I am not suggesting that Quartz relies on deception, because it does label its in-stream advertising posts. But theirs is not a model the *Economist* would feel happy with" (interview, 2014).

Quartz perhaps learned some lessons from the well-documented outrage when its sister publication the *Atlantic* chose to include a sponsored post from the Church of Scientology. Standage (2014) explains why this was problematic. "I don't have a problem with native ads per se, but our view is they should be clearly labelled and segregated (in the *Economist's* case, on a separate CMS/editorial system). This means, for example, that comments can be moderated separately from editorial content, which is one area where the *Atlantic* had problems with its Scientology advert. The advertiser wanted to block some commenters, but that meant they were also blocked from commenting on editorial material".



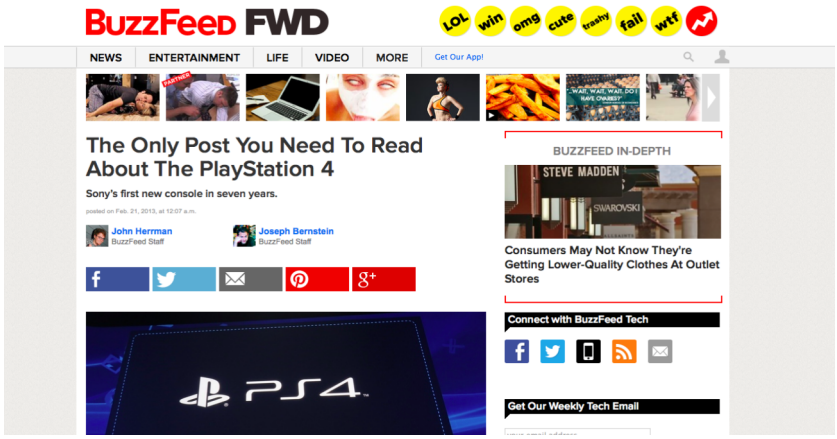
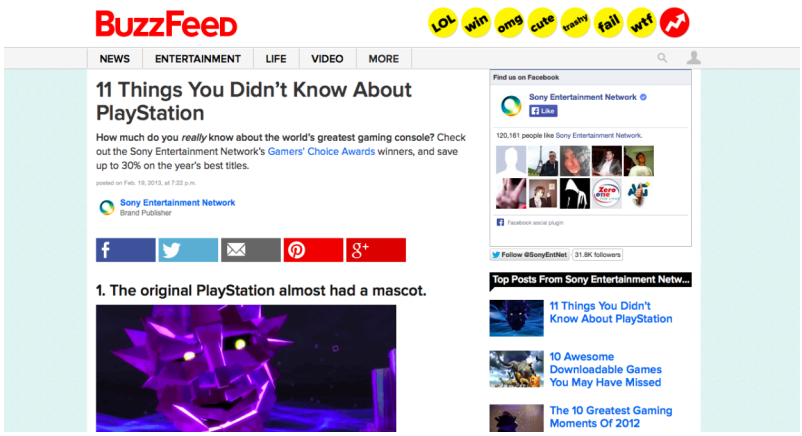

***Figure 3.5***

*There was much criticism of the Atlantic's Scientology sponsor content*

Dan Gillmor of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism says this issue shows just how firmly media outlets must prioritise transparency in order to be trustworthy. "'Sponsor Content' is the kind of mushy expression that media companies use when they're running ads they don't want to admit are ads... The visceral response from critics stemmed from an impression that the *Atlantic* was renting its news pages to anyone who could come up with the cash, and in a way not designed to be clear about distinctions of content" (2013).

Meanwhile, BuzzFeed's editor-in-chief Ben Smith is fairly aggressive in his defense of blurring the line between editorial and advertising content, saying publications like the *Economist* and the *Washington Post* have both dabbled with "special advertising sections". He insists BuzzFeed reflects a zeitgeist where news and information are constantly served up in a blended format. "I think anyone who thinks that all these different kinds of contents can, or are, being separated isn't looking at Facebook or Twitter. If you think readers can't deal with that, where are you? It's not the future. It's the present" (Roberts, 2013).

In mid 2013 blogger Andrew Sullivan, on his website Daily Dish, took issue with Smith's claims:

> *Let's take a specific example which caught my eye the other day. Here is BuzzFeed's post on Sony's Playstation 4 posted yesterday at 8.07 pm.*
>
> 
> 
>
> *Despite being billed as 'The Only Post You Need To Read About The PlayStation 4,' it was actually preceded by this post on BuzzFeed the day before about the same event, titled '11 Things You Didn't Know About PlayStation'.*
>
> 
> 
>
> *The difference is that the February 19 post was 'sponsored' by PlayStation and the February 20 one was written by two staffers with by-lines. Go check them both out and see the differences (an off-white background and acknowledgment of the sponsor) and the similarities (in form, structure and tone, basically identical). To my eye, the two are so similar in form and content.*

In a May 2014 interview for this paper, BuzzFeed's UK editor Luke Lewis shrugged off such criticisms, saying "it couldn't be more clear. If you look at a sponsor post on BuzzFeed, it's in a different colour, the brand is right there at the very top, the right-hand rail of the article is dedicated to the brand. They own that part of the page. So it's very obvious, there shouldn't be any ambiguity at all really" (interview, 2014). BuzzFeed owner Jonah Peretti adds "brands have a voice online... It's going back to

the *Mad Men* era, where it was about helping brands tell stories. Our goal is to help brands create compelling, authentic stories" (Rowan, 2014).

Whether the audience is savvy enough to spot the difference between true editorial, a community post that's by an individual contributor, a community post that's uploaded by an advertiser, or sign-posted advertorial is a matter of conjecture. The BBC's technology correspondent Rory Cellan-Jones (2013) highlights this issue, stating "Jonah Peretti insists there was a distinction between 'church and state', advertising and content. That may not be anything like as clear to BuzzFeed readers who click on '13 Signs You're Addicted To Fashion Blogs' without noticing that it is sponsored by Blackberry UK".

At the time of writing, BuzzFeed is making changes to its sponsored content. This could be seen either as a noble commitment to clearer distinction between their editorial and their ads, or as an admission that the sponsored content on their site is in fact confusing. According to *AdWeek*, "the site will now label branded content with a small, bold yellow box stating it is 'promoted by' a particular marketer, and brand pages will be labeled 'brand publisher' instead of 'featured partner'… The move is in line with social networks like Facebook and Instagram, which designate sponsored content with less pomp and circumstance than publishers such as the *New York Times*" (Castillo, 2014).

Even the BBC has been urged to consider native advertising (Turvill, 2014; Conlon, 2014). A report by Sir Howard Stringer (2014), commissioned by the BBC's director of news James Harding, suggested BBC News could make up to $2 million in revenue a year through native advertising:

> *The BBC should consider this. More generally it will need to have a more open stance towards innovating in advertising outside the UK and a greater willingness to consider whether it can make new formats work for its brand if it is to continue to generate the income it needs.*

It is evident the editorial standard of independence is threatened by the inclusion of native ads and sponsored posts, designed to mimic editorial posts. Clear labeling and transparency about both who paid for the sponsored content and who wrote it is critical for audiences, and both Quartz and the *New York Times* have displayed integrity on this vexed issue. But when an advertiser pays for a sponsored post, albeit clearly labeled, but then also lands an editorial post just days later (as the BuzzFeed PlayStation example indicates) questions about independence arise.

Sign-posting must be prioritised to prevent a race to the bottom where all media outlets feel pressured to blur the lines between ads, sponsored content, and pure editorial copy. The separation of advertising from editorial was a challenge in the pre-internet era when newspapers and magazines would write advertorial that mimicked editorial stories, but the flattening out of web content and the lack of a linear pathway means the treatment of native advertising in the digital era is even more complex.

As the *New York Times* media correspondent David Carr points out, the very nature and design of the web often makes ads indistinguishable from editorial content. "There are lines sort of evaporating between what is marketing content and what is editorial content and what is government content – that all gets flattened out on the web so it all sort of looks the same, and the trade dress disappears. So are you reading news from a verifiable, reliable source, or are you reading propaganda?" (in Hicks, 2012). How such flattening of content types plays out in the coming years will certainly have an impact on a media outlet's editorial credibility and on brand trust.

## 4. IMPARTIALITY

> *The reporter should always bear in mind that his mission is to reproduce facts and arguments...and that he is not required, save upon exceptional occasions, to express either his own opinions or those of his journal... In what is termed descriptive reporting, it will be necessary for him to express opinions, but they should only be such as are based upon well-ascertained facts, and should not be coloured by his own personal views, political, religious, or social. Hence the importance of cultivating a strictly judicial habit of mind.*
>
> - E P Davies, *The Reporter's Handbook and Vade Mecum*, 1885

> *We've been conditioned to want to give both sides relatively equal praise and blame... I'd personally feel better if our coverage didn't look so lopsided. But first the campaigns have to be relatively equal. So far in this campaign, you can look fair, or you can be fair, but you can't be both.*
>
> - Ezra Klein, Wonkblog for the *Washington Post*, 2012

The BBC Trust's *From Seesaw to Wagon Wheel* report (Bridcut, 2007) stated that impartiality is achieved by "bringing extra perspectives to bear, rather than limiting horizons or censoring opinion". In my view, author and former broadcast executive David Cox defines impartiality most clearly: "Impartiality involves no more than the attempt to regard different ideas, opinions, interests, or individuals with detachment" (in Sambrook, 2012, p 5). Much has been written about the virtue or otherwise of impartial reportage, and the overlapping nature of impartiality, objectivity, balance, and fairness. This paper concentrates solely on what's new about impartiality in the digital era.

### *4.1 Digital brings diversity: From fewer voices to many*

In the 19th century, impartiality and neutrality were considered vital tenets of robust journalism in many western countries. This was largely because newspapers had a monopoly on news; most cities had one newspaper, a sole voice on which to rely for information. Thus it was crucial this sole newspaper approached sources and stories in an impartial way, without undue influence or prominence given to a particular side of a debate.

Audiences in the 21st century do not rely on a single voice for news. In the 20th century, broadcasters entered most markets and the newspaper business expanded. In the 21st century, the internet offers even greater choice and diversity. While this allowed some newspapers to loosen their approach to impartiality, ironically it's led to greater impartiality overall because there are many places for a news consumer to access a wide array of views. As Pavlik (2001) states:

> *The rise of online journalism transforms this issue. As new sources of news emerge and as the public turns to an ever-widening array of news sources, the practices and standards of those diverse sources are increasingly uncertain. Perhaps by moving outside the ideology of objectivity, these alternative news sources may help to put the facts into a more complete context and perspective. Perhaps society collectively will then be able to triangulate on the truth in a way that traditional journalism cannot, because of its objectivity ideology (p 93).*

The digital era, with its rise in explanatory and long-form journalism, has brought a renewed focus on providing context. Jonathan Stray (2013) identifies that "context has been a hot topic for those trying to re-think internet-era journalism".

It is this provision of context, coupled with a greater plurality of views, which contributes to a higher standard for impartiality in many media organisations. As former BBC and now independent editorial advisor Andrea Wills states "at its simplest, impartiality is about not taking sides and that's still important. But gone are the days when journalists could get away with the 'he said / she said' or the flip side of a coin style of news reporting. It's context and breadth of view that digital can provide - a huge variety of different voices expressing views from all points of a debate. Many outlets won't adhere to the public service values of impartial journalism, but ironically overall we are getting more variety, nuance, and extremes of view in our media thanks to the internet" (interview, 2014).

### *4.2 The digital and social era rewards distinctive voices*

Increasingly, journalists are encouraged to blog with a distinctive voice and to have a social media presence (Haigh, 2012). Currah (2009) points to a "growing preference for comment and opinion over hard news, which tends to enhance the appeal of news brands to global audiences on the web, not least because 'star commentators' and so-called 'super-journalists' provide a personality - a cultural lens - through which consumers can navigate and digest the news" (p 87).

While there have always been star commentators, "individual voice is amplified through social media" (Bell, 2014). Therefore the digital era requires many more journalists to use their professional judgment to analyse rather than just report the news. An example is political reporter Robert Costa at the impartial *Washington Post* who has "put forward a new model on how to dominate a beat… to cover a story on Twitter, on blogs, stories, and bigger pieces" (Wemple, 2013). Similarly, head of online at Channel 4 News, Anna Doble (interview, 2014), says journalists often express more opinion in their blogs than they would in their TV package:

> *Why not let people who understand their patch talk with passion about it? Alex Thomson, our chief correspondent, is very passionate and knowledgeable about the Afghan war and Britain's involvement. He knows a lot about Rangers Football Club and the allegations of corruption there. He's had all sorts of battles on Twitter with people accusing him of being biased. But in the round, he's never stepped over any lines. He's always been fair and heard people out, and in fact featured the people who've attacked him in his blog post the next day. So it is a new area for broadcasters, but if you get your tone right, and these guys are professional enough to know what's acceptable, then showing passion and knowledge in a blog post is essential, rather than something you should fear.*

This same logic led the BBC to establish 'Editor' positions, so that in covering a beat, a reporter can use their professional judgment of the facts and evidence to draw informed analysis and conclusions. It distinguishes between three types of social media accounts:

- Official BBC social media accounts such as @bbcnews or @bbcbreaking
- A general BBC employee's personal SM account
- A personal SM account operated by news journalists or known BBC 'officials', such as economics editor @robertpeston or political editor @nickrobinson.

Social media editor Chris Hamilton (interview, 2014) explains that "if you're official you tend to be someone who's on air. The reason we have that delineation is it's quite helpful for our audiences; people out there looking at what our 'officials' are up to. Also for the 'officials' themselves, it conveys a sense of 'this is part of what you're doing, whether it's for radio, TV, online platforms, what you're doing for Twitter is

also an extension of that'. It means we can use their social media output from Twitter on our [BBC] content".

Hamilton also acknowledges the complexity of the hybrid age where audiences want to engage with human, conversational, and real voices on social media.

> *The current guidance for our 'official' tweeters says that they should more or less stick to their beat, but actually we're going to change that because there's this realisation that it's essential to a successful social media presence that your personality is included in the mix. So we have Robert Peston, our economics editor, who will talk about Arsenal, the football club he supports. One of the things our new guidance will say is you have to remember most people are following you for your work. That's what they are really interested in. But being human is good. I think you can be human and still maintain standards and the quality you'd expect from a BBC voice without having to stray into either very personal life info or personal views.*

But though the BBC encourages its 'officials' to have a voice on social media, especially when the 'officials' cover a beat and are therefore a genre expert, Hamilton argues that is very different from having an opinion. "That's the reason we have people like Robert Peston and our other editors in an area of expertise. They are expected to give analysis as part of the mainstream output on TV, radio and digital spaces including social media. So we would expect him to say 'big announcement from bank X today, it shows how they are trying to cope with the climate around mortgage approvals'. I think there is a difference between analysis and context, and then opinion, which is what BBC people don't have" (interview, 2014).

An example of such opinion saw Jasmine Lawrence, an assistant editor for BBC News, taken off coverage of European elections after tweeting an anti-Ukip remark. The hashtag #WhyImVotingUkip was initially embraced by the party's followers before being hijacked by some of its detractors. Writing on her personal Twitter account, Lawrence accused Ukip of having sexist/racist views, contravening the BBC's rules on impartiality.




***Figure 4.1***

*A tweet posted by a BBC News editor contravened guidelines*

BBC editorial guidelines (see appendix) on election coverage make it clear that BBC election staff must not express their political views on public platforms: "BBC editorial staff and anyone involved in producing election related content must avoid compromising the BBC's impartiality or bringing the BBC into disrepute by their activities, such as by expressing their own views on political matters, either on personal websites or social media, eg personal Twitter accounts".
It's a tricky balance for an individual journalist to construct timely tweets or Facebook posts that are short and pithy with a strong voice, while providing analysis

or context based in professional opinion that is still impartial. As CNN's social media manager Anna Gonzalez says "the highest engagement is a direct result of tweets with voice. That doesn't mean you editorialise stories, but you take the radical approach of tweeting like a human" (in Lichterman, 2014).

Similarly other digital natives are experimenting with a voice they wouldn't have used pre-internet. Media commentator Ken Doctor (2014) explains this in an article about Quartz:

> *It's the voice of Quartz - serious, pointed, and yet casual - that gives it a personality. Delaney credits global news editor Gideon Lichfield, who came to Quartz after 16 years at the Economist, with establishing that style. "It's hard to express," says Delaney, "but it's conversational, global, digital, and smart. Treat readers' time well. Above all, don't talk down to the readers. And don't take yourself too seriously." The effort, that serious casual, borrows much from what we've all learned in last 20 years on the news web.*

David Leonhardt, editor of the Upshot data site *(NYT*) agrees the open, two-way, and multi-media traits of digital journalism do require a different voice.

> *We newspapers adopted this tone that worked for a long time that was based on the idea that people were getting their news from the bundle of newspapers that arrived at their door every morning. When you are trying to explain the implications of something that people already know about, I think you want to use a voice that's different. That's more conversational, that sometimes uses the first and second person. It's not as if smart people avoid using first and second person when they talk. Sometimes, it's hard to be clear about your point when using the 20th-century-form journalism. You can be a lot clearer using a different form (in O'Donovan, 2014).*

Younger audiences in particular are turning to digital, mobile, and social platforms to consume news (as evidenced in the RISJ Digital News Report 2014). What this means for legacy organisations is they must at least consider whether their neutral journalism appeals to new audiences who no longer have a monopoly of media choices but a plethora of content from which to choose, much of it on social platforms. "Does a neutral voice hold the same value today as it did a century ago? Is the emphasis on impartiality in news actually an impediment to a free market in ideas?" (Sambrook, 2012, p 3). While the incredible rise of blogs and social media in the digital age brings news opportunities for news outlets and their audiences to share and link to interesting content, for news outlets the requirements for accuracy and diversity remain. Because social platforms largely reward conversational, humorous, and controversial posts, impartial legacy media in particular must navigate this area carefully.

### *4.3 The internet aids transparency*

Author David Weinberger (2009) coined the phrase 'transparency is the new objectivity':

> *Transparency gives the reader information by which she can undo some of the unintended effects of the ever-present biases. Transparency brings us to reliability the way objectivity used to.*

Could transparency replace objectivity and even independence, as Rosenstiel (2013) argues? To be a trusted and credible news source in the digital age you need to be transparent about the motives of both sources and journalists. Australian journalist

Annabel Crabb says such transparency also allows the audience a greater say in how stories are produced, something that wasn't available to them prior to the digital era of open journalism. "We have traditionally been protective about letting people into our methods. But I think that's yesterday's caution. Why shouldn't people watch how journalists work? Why shouldn't they see how a story develops? Why shouldn't they be permitted a view on whether our methods are reasonable or not?" (A.N. Smith lecture, 2010). Digital natives like ProPublica and legacy organisations such as the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* are, in the digital era, using open, multi-layered, multi-contextual approaches to stories with embedded hyperlinks to multiple sources. This transparency most certainly lifts the standard of impartiality.

Yet standards editor with Associated Press, Tom Kent, has wisely warned against discarding impartiality as "easy roadkill in the rush to new journalism techniques" (Sullivan, 2013). Transparency must still be coupled with the hallmarks of solid journalism: checking facts, attributing accurately, uncovering new information, and exposing falsehoods. Journalism ethics writer Stephen Ward (2011) insists "transparency cannot, by itself, solve the problem of editorial integrity… transparent journalists can be biased, inaccurate, or irresponsible".

Transparency also relies on the audience to actively engage rather than passively consume, thereby transferring some of the responsibility for seeking out alternatives to the audience. As Ward (2006) declares, "this new ethics of transparency… assumes that news consumers are media-savvy and it moves some of the burden of responsibility away from the journalist to the audience". In this way, transparency can be overwhelming for the audience. Audiences still rely on journalists to distill complex facts, filter through information to pull out the important aspects, and to contract lengthy arguments into consumable stories. As Kent argues "try following links to a reporter's mission statement when you're listening to news in the car" (2014). Leonhardt understands this: "Consistent with that voice is the idea of showing our work. I don't want to show it most of the time on the first pass, because a lot of our readers don't want to see all our work. But the beauty of the web is you can publish it and people who want it can go get it" (in O'Donovan, 2014).

### *4.4 What place does opinion have in modern journalism?*

Academic Jay Rosen (2010) has been critical of news organisations that avoid having an opinion. His 'Voice From Nowhere' theory states:

> *'Grounded in reporting' is far more important than 'cured of opinion'… That's the value added. That's the sign of seriousness. That's the journalism part. Original reporting and the discipline of verification - meaning, the account holds up under scrutiny - should be strict priorities. Whether the composer of the account has a view, comes to a conclusion, speaks with attitude (or declines these things) is far less important.*

In an interview for this paper, Rosen (2014) points to the *New York Times* data blog the Upshot as an example of a legacy organisation relaxing a once strict neutral tone for one that includes the conclusions digital audiences now expect:

> *If you look carefully at the logic for the Upshot, what they are doing is creating a space where it is possible to say 'look this is in real big dispute, but the data says this - conclusion' which they wouldn't have done years ago. Now when they launched the Upshot they didn't say 'New journalism religion at the New York Times!' They just changed it and then they don't have this big argument because it's easier to just change it without announcing you are changing. At the Washington Post it was even more dramatic. When Ezra Klein became a key person at the Post, during the 2009/10*

> *period he carried the Post's healthcare cover – he was the guy for the readers. He did it with a lot of attitude and a lot of freedom to say 'this is rubbish or this is good'. At the time, if you looked at his formal title on the organisational chart at the Washington Post, he was an opinion columnist in the business section, an opinion writer. But in effect he was lead reporter on the healthcare crisis. But the Post didn't want to have this religious war about news and opinion and point-of-view and attitude. It just liked the way Ezra Klein worked. They have already changed and accommodated it, and the last thing to change is the official journalism religion.*

Even the BBC's former director general, Mark Thompson (now of the *New York Times*), argues that opinion-led content has a place. He says although the BBC would likely never abandon impartiality, that existing rules to guarantee impartiality in television were becoming outdated in the internet age: "In the future, maybe there should be a broad range of choices? Why shouldn't the public be able to see and hear, as well as read, a range of opinionated journalism and then make up their own mind what they think about it?" (quoted in Sherwin, 2010).

Sir Howard Stringer (2014) has furthered this cause. While admitting the BBC cannot offer an opinion of its own due to its rules on impartiality, urged it to "explore curating opinion online" by having an international op-ed page on its website. "The BBC's global reputation helps it get significant interviews… There is no reason why a BBC international opinion service should not have the same draw for international figures" (2014).

### *4.5 Opinion-led journalism and impartial journalism can co-exist*

Kent explains that some "see objectivity as the calling card of the elite, rooted in a belief that 'professionals' can so completely cover a complex story that journalists' voices are all people need to hear. Still others believe objectivity has never existed at all because perfect objectivity is impossible. Much like a perfect vacuum or a perfect circle, it can be imagined but never really created, so its loss is without cost" (2013). Yet Aidan White of the Ethical Journalism Network demonstrates the complexity and even danger of striving for truly impartial news reportage: "To be ethical journalists, particularly those covering politics, they must stop quoting two sides of a story when one side is lying. At the very least they must tell their audience when that side is lying" (in Kent, 2013).

Of course, it's possible these two approaches to journalism can co-exist, and even learn from each other. It should be possible to write committed partisan pieces from a viewpoint, if they are based on evidence. And it should equally be possible to write a passionate and well-argued piece of journalism that is impartial. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's head of editorial policy, Alan Sunderland (2014), strongly argues:

> *It is a complete nonsense and a straw man argument to suggest that impartial journalism is nothing more than 'he said/ she said' recitations of facts and other people's opinions. That's not impartial journalism, that's bad, lazy journalism. Because impartial journalism involves not just reciting facts but weighing up and assessing facts objectively, and letting the weight of the evidence drive the piece rather than the weight of your own or somebody else's personal or political perspective. That is the essence of the editorial task we ask journalists to do.*

Hybrid sites like Vox, Quartz, and Politico are publishing content with many of the same editorial standards upheld by legacy media, but they are also being transparent when they cannot give a full picture or when information is rapidly shifting. They also promote a 'show your work' ethos of transparency about their viewpoint. Fisher

asks "as the lines between old and new increasingly blur, are the two schools of journalism's core values blending into a hybrid?" (2014).

What has changed in the digital era is not the standard of impartiality but the method to achieve it. New media prefer transparency and plurality to achieve impartiality, old media achieve it with objective methods. But it's also important to recognise what *hasn't* changed and to acknowledge that both forms of achieving impartiality can co-exist. Sunderland (2014) states:

> *Of course people now have more information at their fingertips, and they also have the capacity to get more involved and add their own voice into the mix. They can access a global range of content on any given issue, and assess dozens of different perspectives to form their own conclusions. Why do they need someone else to dispassionately weigh up the evidence when they no longer have to be passive and they can do it themselves? But in case you haven't stopped to count, there are still only 24 hours in a day. I would contend that what has not changed is the desire of people to find reliable information without spin, in a concise and accessible form.*

### *4.6 Presenting data with feeling*

The rise in data journalism raises new conundrums for impartiality with regards to how analysis and conclusions deriving from data are presented. Howard (2014) states "even good data and solid research may be misrepresented or mistaken, a risk that will grow". What editorial choices are made about what data to include and what to leave out, and is the commentary surrounding such data impartial? As Sambrook says "data is not neutral. It's about what evidence you select and how you use it. What you choose to use and to ignore is subjective" (interview, 2014).

Sites like ProPublica, a non-profit investigative journalism site, always link to the original source of the data so readers get an objective take on the statistics. Silver and Klein have carved out a niche where their interpretation is valued by the audience. When Silver's blog FiveThirtyEight belonged to the *New York Times*, was it subject to the paper's strict standard for impartiality? *NYT* standards editor Philip Corbett (interview, 2014) says:

> *Nate Silver and FiveThirtyEight was certainly a departure for the Times. It had its own questions and challenges probably because it came to us as pre-existing thing... and because of that I think people were aware of his political opinions to an extent that they probably aren't for most of our reporters. On the other hand, I would say if you read most of what Silver wrote, it's really not opinionated. He's not writing political screeds, he's writing analysis. Some of it is very sharply drawn and can have an edge to it certainly. It was a somewhat different beast but we were able to negotiate any boundaries pretty comfortably.*

Now that Silver has taken his blog to ESPN, the *New York Times* has launched a new explanatory and data-driven site called the Upshot. Again the tone signals a departure from traditional *New York Times* copy, according to Corbett:

> *They clearly wanted a tone of writing that was more conversational, more direct, using a lot of first or second person, than you would get in any news story in the newspaper. There too I don't think it's a completely different approach as we've long had feature sections and columns that are more conversational. In terms of the Upshot coming to conclusions, I think it definitely is willing to do that. The distinction is that I don't think the Upshot writers are offering their editorial opinion on what is good or bad, or what policies the country must adopt. It's really more in the nature of news analysis. They are looking at the data and are willing to come to*

> *conclusions in an analytical sense about what the data suggests, without having an editorial perspective or advocating a partisan point of view* (interview, 2014).

Editor David Leonhardt says the *Upshot* will write in "a direct, plain-spoken way, the same voice we might use when writing an email to a friend. We'll be conversational without being dumbed down" (Gil, 2014). He also hints that this is deliberate shift away from the impersonal third-person stance of the *New York Times'* news pages:

> *We newspapers adopted this tone that worked for a long time that was based on the idea that people were getting their news from the bundle of newspapers that arrived at their door every morning. When you are trying to explain the implications of something that people already know about, I think you want to use a voice that's different. That's more conversational, that sometimes uses the first and second person. It's not as if smart people avoid using first and second person when they talk* (in O'Donovan, 2014).

Martin Belam of Trinity Mirror, who edits the Ampp3d data blog insists you should present accurate data, but also draw conclusions from it. "We're always honest and accurate with the data and then we will put some interpretation on that data. The interpretation doesn't have to come from a neutral point of view. I think you can interpret the data with feeling, because that's what tells a human story" (interview, 2014).

There are also traits of data and explanatory journalism where editorial standards are strengthened. Leonhardt (in O'Donovan, 2014) argues that a transparent and conversational tone with adequate linking to original sources increases a reader's trust. And Belam (2014) adds that the digital audience deserves and expects strong conclusions in a voice that is "of the web":

> *You grow audience by being approachable and friendly and interesting. And by making content that people want to share, not by hiving out news and opinion. I would see it as a problem if everybody were doing it everywhere. I can't imagine the BBC News at Ten blurring news and opinion. I can't imagine The Mirror's front page blurring news and opinion. But for Ampp3ed stuff it's fine.*

### *4.7 Hijacking by partisans: BuzzFeed's community platform*

Media outlets also need to consider the diversity of viewpoints offered not only in their own content, but that published in their branded community areas. Further guidelines are needed to ensure these areas are not taken over by partisans, hiding beneath a branded masthead.

BuzzFeed's community platform tool allows users to create and publish a BuzzFeed story. A story from the community platform can also be selected by an editor for inclusion on BuzzFeed's home page, alongside standard content.

In 2013, an anti-abortion group used BuzzFeed's community platform to circulate controversial messages through social media (Eordough, 2013). In response, BuzzFeed issued new guidelines to explain what sort of webpages could be made with its platform tools. Tech website Gigaom declared "the new policy is, on one level, a logical response to a swelling number of community submissions. But on a deeper level, it reflects how BuzzFeed, as it grows in clout, is having to define its editorial voice and develop a political and ethical identity" (Roberts, 2012).

The platform can also be used by advertisers as part of their marketing strategy. Book publisher Harper Collins contributed a post called '17 Problems Only Book

Lovers Will Understand', which was transparently tagged with a Harper Collins by-line, did look very much like standard BuzzFeed content (Roberts, 2013).

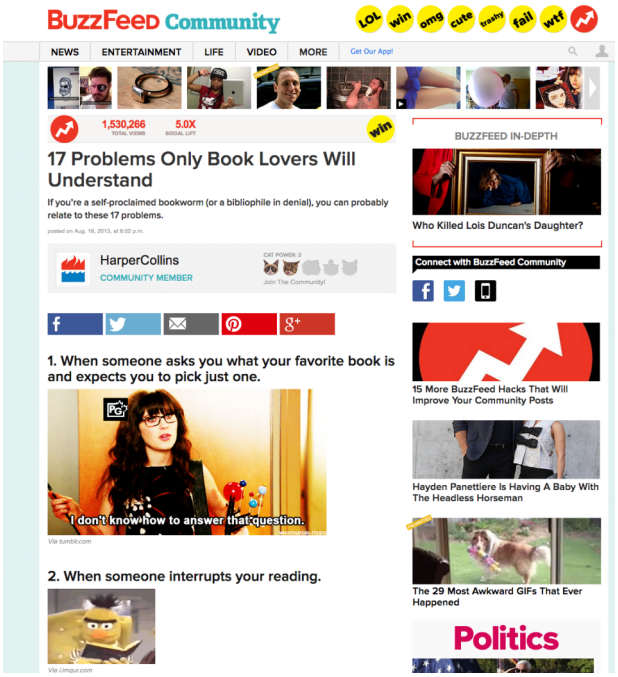



***Figure 4.2***

*BuzzFeed's community platform features content by advertisers*

BuzzFeed's Ben Smith told Gigaom that "people at companies who manage social media pages now turn to BuzzFeed. One of the reasons people come here is that all the other platforms are optimized for sharing inside one network. But our stuff is optimized to share on all the networks — Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and so on" (Roberts, 2013).

But as Roberts points out, it's not only book publishers or cereal brands using BuzzFeed community pages. "Political and activist outfits are also taking to the BuzzFeed platform, often sowing controversy at the same time… The Heritage Foundation used BuzzFeed's publishing platform to lampoon President Obama's health care plans. The look and feel of the story, titled 'The One Time I Was Really Really Excited About Obamacare' is vintage BuzzFeed: kooky photos, animated gifs, celebrities and big, punchy text lines; 'real' BuzzFeed stories adorn the side of the page" (2012).

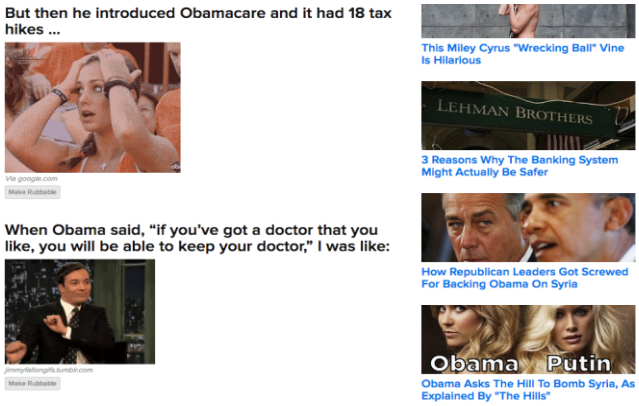



***Figure 4.3***

*Lobby groups post content on BuzzFeed's community platform*

*Source: Gigaom*

BuzzFeed's UK editor Luke Lewis admits the community platform has been tricky for BuzzFeed, a digital site that prides itself on actively encouraging contributions and sharing from its users. "It's been a difficult one for us to work out really. The community part of BuzzFeed is great and we love it and it enables people to sign up and be part of it, but it can be abused" (interview, 2014).

He points to a UK politician using the community section of the site as concerning. "We've had a lot of people signing up for tendentious reasons, such as political pressure groups, think-tanks, even political parties like the chairman of the Tory party Grant Shapps. His office signed up for BuzzFeed and wrote a piece laying in to Labour's energy policy. We were a bit uneasy about it because it's just not in the spirit of BuzzFeed's community" (2014). Such hi-jacking of community pages may not be quite as problematic if BuzzFeed was only known for humorous internet memes and entertaining viral content. But now that BuzzFeed strives to be "the leading news source for the social, mobile world" (Peretti, 2013), it seems evident that stricter controls of their user-generated content will be necessary. Lewis (2014) agrees there is an increasing reluctance to promote such material:

> *Well [the Grant Shapps piece] didn't break any of the Community Guidelines so we just left it there but we didn't promote it. We are far more reluctant these days to promote community stuff to the homepage because there can be a conflict there. Occasionally, once or twice a day, there can be a piece that's so great we do use it, but we are more inclined now to encourage people to sign up, the community is great, but we kind of leave it there as its own thing, rather than mixing it too much with our editorial.*

## 5. LESSONS FROM LEGACY MEDIA AND DIGITAL NATIVES

With the digital era presenting new challenges and approaches in editorial standards, just how are media outlets dealing with this on a practical level in the newsroom every day? How do they adapt their standards when faced with the added complexity of the social web (Newman, 2011)? As Cindy Royal of Texas State University states, "the majority of my value in engaging with news is my ability to share it. Platforms make this happen, Basically, share it, or it didn't happen" (2014).

In the internet era, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Google+, and Instagram are increasingly the places where people consume at least some portion of their news diet. Both the Reuters Digital News Report 2014 (which surveyed 18,000 people in 10 countries) and Pew's 2014 State of the News Media Report (which looked at US consumption) found that half of Facebook and Twitter users get news on those sites (Ellis, 2014; Newman, 2014).

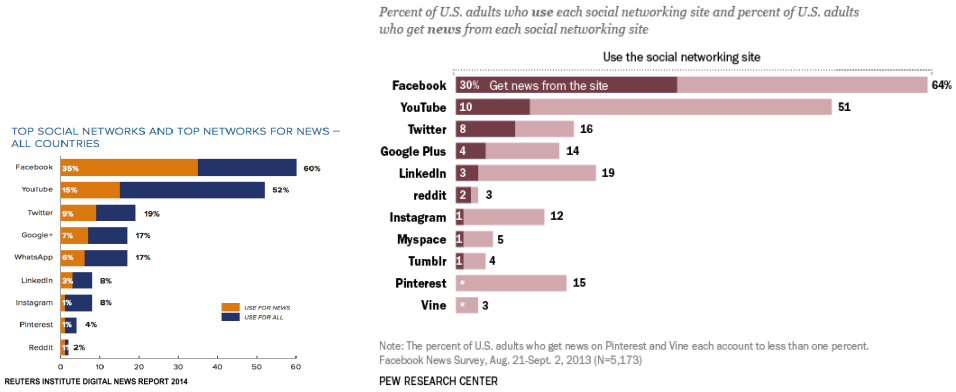



***Figure 5.1*** *Half of Facebook and Twitter users discuss news on those platforms*

In this social and digital age, what can traditional media organisations learn from the digital-only hybrids? How are the hybrids devising and revising their guidelines as they try to garner bigger audiences? What are the editorial standards for newcomers? Who is building trust most effectively with their audience and how?

This section provides a snapshot of editorial standards for differing media outlets – both legacy and digitally native. Outlets were chosen so as to give a broad selection of media types, from publicly funded to paywalled, traditional to born-of-the-web, impartial and from a viewpoint, as well as a selection of outlets concentrating on text, video, audio, and data.

| ORGANISATION | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| The Guardian | Print and digital, transparently left-leaning, aims for fairness |
| Quartz | Digital native business site, places premium on fairness |
| The New York Times | Print and digital, impartial approach |
| BuzzFeed | Digital native, news and entertainment |
| BBC | License-fee funded TV, radio, digital, regulated for due impartiality |
| Vice News | Web-only (for news content), subjective, documentary-style |

### *5.1 The Guardian*

The *Guardian* began its life as the weekly *Manchester Guardian* newspaper in 1821. It became a daily in 1855 and was nationally recognised under the editor CP Scott from 1872. In 1936, ownership of the paper was passed to the trustees of the Scott Trust, and in 2005 it transitioned from broadsheet to a Berliner mid-size format. The *Guardian* moved into digital early, first publishing online in 1995 and by 2001 grabbing the title of the UK's most popular newspaper site. In 2011, under the editorship of Alan Rusbridger, the *Guardian* announced it would become a digital-first organisation, with the internet site at the heart of its operations. In recent years it has significantly expanded its digital strategy, launching a ground-breaking data blog, various apps, and the Guardian Witness site for user contributions.

The paper was the first in the UK to appoint a readers' editor in 1997. Following that appointment, the *Guardian* published its editorial code on its website in 2002, the first UK newspaper to do so. Ian Mayes, the readers' editor at the time, wrote "it is a set of guidelines that covers both professional practice and personal behaviour where the latter involves, or might be considered to involve a conflict of interest. It is intended to reinforce the paper's commitment to openness and accountability" (2002). It covers areas including attribution, corrections, privacy, and dealing with conflicts of interests.

"It's not a translation of these values [for the digital age], it's a transliteration."

– Chris Elliott

Where the *Guardian* differs from the BBC and the *New York Times* is in the area of viewpoint. Speaking at Oxford University in June 2014, Rusbridger explained:

> *We decided five years ago that there was a fork in the road. We would be open to other people doing interesting things, people who provide a more realistic account of the world, people who wouldn't have got a job on the newspaper a few years ago.*

He went on to comment about his hiring of the journalist Glenn Greenwald, a man some media pundits describe as a blogger and advocate, rather than a journalist. "He's not a conventional journalist. He's an advocate for his views, a lawyer, a blogger. The *New York Times* wouldn't have hired him," Rusbridger admits. But on the explosive NSA story, the *Guardian* was careful to apply its editorial standards to all material, including content by Greenwald and documentary maker Laura Poitras. "He quite liked being edited," Rusbridger explained and the masthead had a shared understanding of the editorial rigor it would apply to the story. At other times, The *Guardian* has had to discontinue its work with some 'journalists' when the editorial framework was not compatible with that 'journalist's' methods. "Julian Assange at his best shared traits of journalism, some rigor and seriousness. But at other points he departed quite strongly from us. In the end we couldn't continue. We had a framework, an understanding, and an agreement with Greenwald that we didn't have with Assange" (Wadham College Law Society, 2014).

Current readers' editor Chris Elliott explains that while the approach is sometimes partial, they are careful to still apply stringent journalistic methods. "The *Guardian* doesn't really believe in impartiality as such…We believe very powerfully in a strain of campaigning journalism as powerful journalism" (interview, 2014). He says the *Guardian*, in all its output both print and digital, aims for fairness. "These days what you promise your readers is that you will try to have an open, fair, transparent process – these are the new three key words by which you try to set standards".

The digital era has brought some challenges. The *Guardian* devised a set of Community Standards and Participation Guidelines (see appendix) to cover reader comments, discussion threads, and the Guardian Witness UGC site. Elliott (interview, 2014) says it is not as simple as transposing its Editorial Code to everything it does online and in social media:

> *I've been trying to work out what this process is, taking the 150-200 years of ethical and editorial values. It's not a translation of these values [for the digital age], it's a transliteration. It's that difficulty you have when you try to put Arabic into English and it becomes this act of transliteration. I think that's what we're seeing. We recognise vaguely an awful lot of principles that we've always understood and lived by. But it's the Captain Kirk line: 'It's life Jim, but not as we know it'*

Elliott also stresses the system of verifying information before it is published in digital forms such as a blog is "much more robust than readers assume". *Guardian* blogs producer Paul Owen backs this up (in Harper, 2013):

> *If we are using tweets or posts from people we don't know, we try to find out about them. During the Woolwich [murder of a soldier in a London street] live blog we contacted many people who were tweeting and spoke directly to them. We would look at their history of tweets or videos and ask if this is the first time they have posted. Some tweets have been geo-tagged so you can tell where the tweeter was. We would try to check a photo by looking at Google Maps on Street View to see if the buildings match... None of these things are foolproof, but the key thing is to be upfront with the reader about what we can and cannot verify. Sometimes we have to say, we cannot verify this, but it does square with what we're hearing from other sources.*

On this approach to accuracy, Elliott says "I think that's legitimate and I think the key here is transparency… there are occasions where you have circumstantial evidence and you reach a point where you would like to put that evidence to your readers carefully. But you absolutely tell them what you think you know and what you don't know" (interview, 2014).

In an interview for this paper, *Guardian* political blogger Andrew Sparrow (2014) says the web assumes stories are constantly shifting:

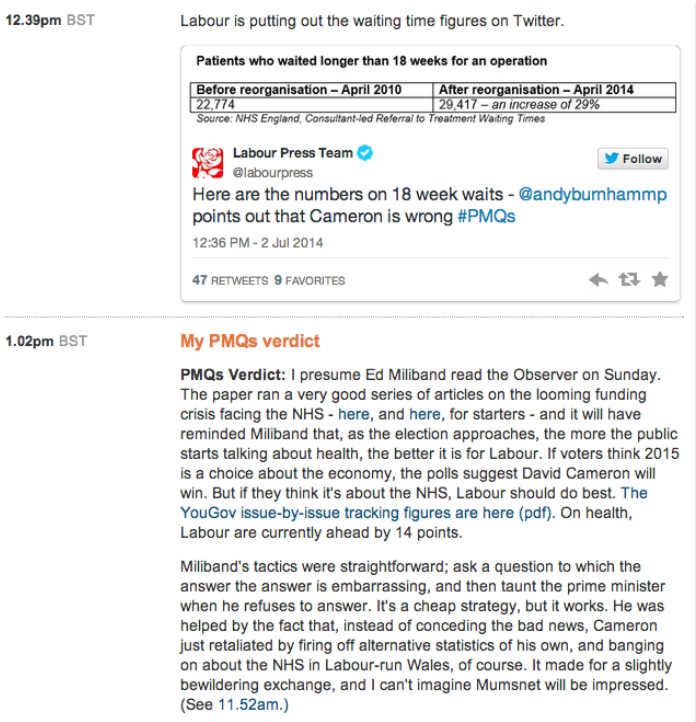
> *The ability to correct stories online means there is a slight presumption that if we're not 100 per cent sure we can always go back and check it afterwards. I don't think journalists got more cavalier about accuracy, but I think we're less frightened of making mistakes because you're not wrong [for 24 hours], you may be wrong for 20 minutes. Where there is more of a difference is once you get into live blogging rather than writing news stories for the website. A blog is more conversational and also quicker and more immediate. And more reliant on external sources because we aggregate a lot and use Twitter sources.*

But there are also challenges when applying an editorial code designed for the print medium to the digital era. Elliott points to the news / comment segregation as one such concern, though he believes this evolution was already underway prior to the internet era. "We should try to separate fact from comment but the web makes it hard. We do slip. You've got news reporters who do a news story and then they go on Twitter and I think it's hard for them sometimes; a word here or an adjective there. But broadly, we do believe in the principle of separating them" (2014).

On this notion of comment, Sparrow (2014) has a slightly different view, and believes the nature of a blog and the fact he's blogging as a political specialist, allows him to occasionally include comment in a way that "would never have made its way into a conventional news story". He says:

> *My view, which has evolved since doing live blogs, is that there is a role for some sort of comment. Readers want it and expect it. Only up to a point and I still see my role as a reporting one, to set out the facts, explain why it's happened. I see myself working in the old traditional role of a reporter who sets out the facts and lets the reader make up their mind and in that sense the fairness that's embedded in the code is crucial, because if you're committed to telling the truth you have to look at both sides of the story.... That said, because the format of blogs allows you to combine reporting with analysis, the division between analysis and opinion is [blurred].*

While comment might be more prominent in a blog than in a news story, Sparrow says the inclusion of a broad range of comments within a live blog counteracts any claims that his blog is opinionated. "Blogs like mine use a lot of aggregation… In this respect, in being open to multiple viewpoints, blogging is an inherently liberal medium. When reading a newspaper report, you want the reporter to be objective, because that's the only voice on the topic that you will hear" (in Elliott, 2014).



**12.39pm** BST

Labour is putting out the waiting time figures on Twitter.

**Patients who waited longer than 18 weeks for an operation**

| Before reorganisation – April 2010 | After reorganisation – April 2014 |
|---|---|
| 22,774 | 29,417 – *an increase of 29%* |

*Source: NHS England, Consultant-led Referral to Treatment Waiting Times*

**Labour Press Team** Follow
@labourpress
Here are the numbers on 18 week waits - @andyburnhammp points out that Cameron is wrong #PMQs
12:36 PM - 2 Jul 2014
47 RETWEETS 9 FAVORITES

**1.02pm** BST

**My PMQs verdict**

**PMQs Verdict:** I presume Ed Miliband read the Observer on Sunday. The paper ran a very good series of articles on the looming funding crisis facing the NHS - here, and here, for starters - and it will have reminded Miliband that, as the election approaches, the more the public starts talking about health, the better it is for Labour. If voters think 2015 is a choice about the economy, the polls suggest David Cameron will win. But if they think it's about the NHS, Labour should do best. The YouGov issue-by-issue tracking figures are here (pdf). On health, Labour are currently ahead by 14 points.

Miliband's tactics were straightforward; ask a question to which the answer the answer is embarrassing, and then taunt the prime minister when he refuses to answer. It's a cheap strategy, but it works. He was helped by the fact that, instead of conceding the bad news, Cameron just retaliated by firing off alternative statistics of his own, and banging on about the NHS in Labour-run Wales, of course. It made for a slightly bewildering exchange, and I can't imagine Mumsnet will be impressed. (See 11.52am.)

***Figure 5.2***

*Sparrow's political blog blends news with analysis, and aims for fairness*

Further, Sparrow points out that blogging on a specialty subject allows a journalist more freedom to bring in comment and analysis. "When a politician makes a speech, you want to know what they said. But, if you are interested in politics, you will also want to know what impression the speaker made, how it went down, whether it was a triumph or a dud:

> *To report all this properly, to explain not just what happened, but how it happened and why it happened, it is hard to avoid subjective judgments. This isn't always appropriate in conventional newspaper journalism, but it works in a live blog and I genuinely believe it creates richer, more informative reporting (in Elliott, 2014).*

Finally, the *Guardian's* experimentation with the digital medium - from the introduction of data blogs, to making better use of user contributions via the Guardian Witness microsite, to its early foray into the blogosphere - has allowed it to discard outdated formulas of news reporting. "If journalism is the first draft of history, then live blogging is the first draft of journalism" (Sparrow, 2014).

### *5.2 Quartz*

Business site *Quartz* is a relative newcomer, launching in September 2012. The digital-only business publication is owned by the Atlantic Media Company and is proudly mobile-driven, with an image-heavy presentation designed for consumption primarily on tablets and smartphones.

Quartz competes with traditional business brands such as the *Economist*, Bloomberg, Business Insider, and the *Financial Times*. The editor in chief is Kevin Delaney, previously a managing editor with the *Wall Street Journal*, and its global news editor is Gideon Lichfield, previously the deputy digital editor for the *Economist*.

> "One of the features of being an online medium, which is different to print, is everybody who encounters Quartz sees a different Quartz."
>
> – Gideon Lichfield

According to Omniture, Quartz's traffic average is 4.7 million unique visitors a month, with 60 per cent of those referred from social media. Roughly 40 per cent of traffic comes from mobile devices. In 2013, Quartz's digital audience topped the *Economist's* for a period – a significant milestone for the new publication (Gigaom, 2013, based on ComScore figures).

*Quartz* has a set of Ethics and Advertising Guidelines, which it publishes on its site. These set out the publication's conflict of interest policy, the separation between editorial and advertising staff, and its independence from any shareholders or investors other than its owner.

Its style guide sets out standards on accuracy, fact-checking, and corrections. Lichfield says *Quartz* doesn't have fact-checkers like *The Economist* or some other legacy media still have. "I think our attitude to that is we try to encourage accuracy by having a very clear policy on corrections that is visible. So if something has to be corrected, we make it prominent. We make our facts reliable by showing where they are coming from. We try to encourage on social media and through the annotations on our site to get people to correct us if we get things wrong, and we try to be transparent about those corrections if they've happened" (interview, 2014).

Lichfield says Quartz is also comfortable to say what it doesn't know. "Because so much of the kind of reporting we do, partly because of the pace, is a work in progress – we will also say 'we don't know'. Which I think is something that in traditional media you're not quite comfortable with. You either had to try to pretend to know everything or only write about the things that you know about. But for us we'll say 'we don't know right now, and when we find out more we'll update this post' and I think that's a feature of online media. Things are understood to be much more fluid... and there's more of a reliance on the internet, to some extent, to tell you when you're wrong" (interview 2014).

To help crowd-source these types of corrections and to encourage more interactivity, Quartz has an innovative 'annotations' system which allows readers to contribute and comment on articles in a way that is featured more prominently than the traditional readers' comment section, which is usually at the bottom of the article.

"Our aim with Quartz from the start has been to rethink any conventions of websites that didn't serve the readers," says Delaney. "We felt strongly that reader comments were traditionally too often hidden, and unanchored from the original content they were about. With annotations, we're allowing Quartz readers to comment right next to specific points in articles and share those views with their colleagues and friends." (Quartz press release, QZ.com, August 2013).

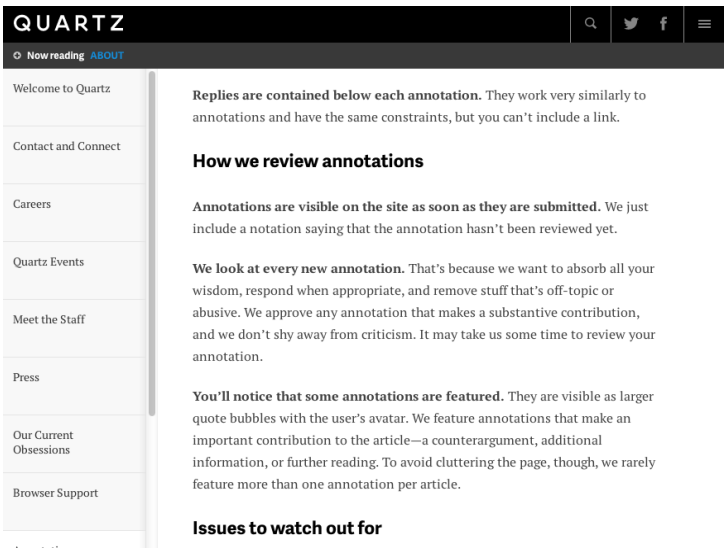



***Figure 5.3***

*Quartz features annotations as a way of bolstering accuracy*

It's an innovative approach to interaction and in an effort to help ensure the quality and integrity of their brand, **all** annotations are read and sometimes commented on by Quartz journalists. Quartz post-moderates the annotations and features annotations that are insightful. "We look at every new annotation. That's because we want to absorb all your wisdom, respond when appropriate, and remove stuff that's off-topic or abusive. We approve any annotation that makes a substantive contribution, and we don't shy away from criticism." Quartz also places a premium on transparency by embracing "openness: open source code, an open newsroom, and open access to the data behind our journalism" (QZ.com).

The business outlet advocates perspectival journalism, so long as the workings are transparent. Lichfield says "we're different from your average daily newspaper in that we don't do the neutral viewpoint, neutral voice type of journalism. We do stuff that's opinionated and has a take. In that sense we're similar to The *Economist* in that someone can take a position but be clear in its argument for it and show its argument and show its facts. We rely heavily on linking to source things" (interview, 2014).

Quartz cleverly organises its editorial viewpoint around its 'obsessions' – themes which are based on "the seismic shifts that are changing the shape of the global economy. We call these topics our 'obsessions' and they evolve over time" (qz.com). This novel approach to standpoint both defines the Quartz niche, and frees them from covering stories everyone else is doing. As former editor of both the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*, Marcus Brauchli, asserts "unless your version of the story is dramatically different… your version of the story is a waste of time and the newsroom's budget. What people need to figure out is what they can do that isn't being done" (Politco, 2014). This is precisely what Quartz has achieved. "In our case, certainly our audience expects interestingness. It expects a certain degree of contrariness in some cases... it wants to have the world interpreted for it, to take positions on certain things, but it doesn't want predictable positions. We don't have a

political line on anything. But our audience wants to be told 'here's what we think, but here's why we think it'" (Lichfield, interview 2014).

Lichfield is also an advocate of fairness over impartiality. "I think the audience expects fairness, which is subtly different from impartiality or neutrality or objectivity or all these words we bandy around as ideals for journalism. For me, the standard is fairness… So one of our policies is that you always give people a chance to respond. If you have an argument to make, you show the reasons why you're making that argument and acknowledge where the argument might be weak or what the counter argument might be. I think those are our basic principles" (2014).

### *A tale of two cities:*

When Barack Obama's energy secretary Steven Chu resigned, Quartz published two articles about it.

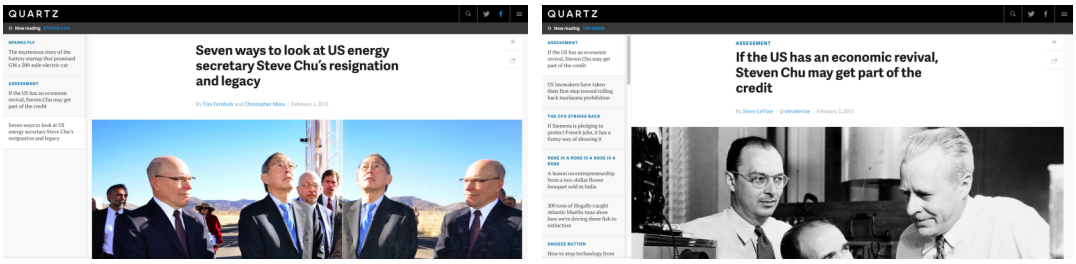



***Figure 5.4:*** *Quartz published two different takes on the Chu resignation*

Lichfield points to this as proof that journalism which shuns impartiality does not necessarily lead to an echo-chamber of one-sided opinion. "We sometimes have two stories by different writers on the same topic contradicting each other. At one point we thought 'is that a problem'? An example of that is we wrote two conflicting pieces about Barack Obama's energy secretary Steven Chu… And in the end we said 'look, it doesn't matter, they've each made their case and that's fine'.

Lichfield (2014) also states "one of the features of being an online medium, which is very different to print, is that everybody who encounters Quartz sees a different Quartz. It's not like you get a copy of the *New York Times* or a copy of the *Economist* or the *Guardian* and every reader sees the same object and could potentially read all the stories in it. And expects it as an entity to have a particular voice or standpoint or consistency". Further, the way readers arrive at Quartz content online is different to the way readers come to printed material:

> *Every reader who comes to Quartz usually comes to it via social media, most of our traffic is not through qz.com so therefore the stories that they see, the selection that they come across is going to be different. So to imagine that they even care about whether the site as a whole is consistent is kind of pretentious on our part. So we think of every item we do as having an independent existence or life (2014).*

This theory, and the fact that so many readers now arrive at content via social media links and therefore aren't consuming a holistic and contextualised set of stories of an issue on one newspaper page - certainly poses questions for editorial integrity, especially for legacy organisations. It means each piece must stand alone; that one story cannot rely on another for balance.

In terms of opinion and comment, Quartz has a traditional approach. "The way we deal with outside contributors is like anywhere else that runs OpEds. We have certain people that we've started to work with regularly or other people who pitch us something on a one-off basis, we have an editor who works with them, they have to suggest ideas, the articles get edited. So we present them as opinion pieces, meaning 'this is someone who has a point of view', take it as coming from this person… We haven't contemplated anything like the *Forbes* model which is basically to give them a blog and let them write what they want. So far that's not something we'd be comfortable with" (Lichfield, 2014).

In all, Quartz believes being digitally native has allowed it to uphold the editorial standards it sees as still critical in the 21st century: accuracy, transparency, avoiding conflicts of interest. But being a mobile-first, web-only company has allowed it to re-think which editorial standards it can adapt for a shifting age of news consumption. "We do have a blank slate to start from where we basically get the chance to look back and say 'what is important to what we're trying to do, what is the purpose we're trying to service, how do people encounter our journalism, and how do they read it interpret it? What is it that matters to us if we want to have a good brand? What are the things that give it credibility?" explains Lichfield (2014).

Overall, there's plenty to learn from this business newcomer. Quartz illustrates how a digital start-up can re-shape editorial standards to suit the online space while maintaining editorial integrity. While born of the web, Quartz has benefitted from the lessons learnt by the Atlantic Media Group when publishing the *Atlantic*. It's also interesting to note the two most senior editors, Kevin Delaney and Gideon Lichfield, have legacy media backgrounds. They therefore bring some of the hallmarks of quality journalism, while being adept enough to discard ones they see as no longer relevant. Writing about Quartz for the *Guardian*, columnist Frederic Filloux observed:

> *I used to think the breadth and depth of older large newsrooms could guarantee their survival in a digital world plagued by mediocrity and loose ethics. But considering great pure players like Quartz… I now come to think we are witnessing the emergence of a new breed of smaller, digital-only outlets that are closing the gap, quality-wise, with legacy media (2013).*

### *5.3 The New York Times*

At the time of writing, the *New York Times* is asking itself a lot of probing questions as it seeks to strengthen its digital output. The company's internal Innovation Report, leaked to BuzzFeed in May 2014, took six months to produce and shows that the masthead, which produces some of the best journalism in the world, is struggling to adapt to the online era. Huffington Post founder Paul Berry is quoted in the report, saying: "At the *New York Times*, far too often for writers and editors the story is done when you hit publish. At Huffington Post, the article begins its life when you publish" (Sulzburger et al, 2014).
In interviews for this paper, *New York Times (NYT*) staff identified several areas of editorial complexity in the digital era:

- Impartiality – maintaining a firm grip on the core principle of impartial reportage on all platforms for all stories

- Time pressures – upholding the principles of the *New York Times* in an age of constant publication rather than a 24-hour print cycle

- Flattening out of content online, where different types of news (such as opinion) aren't as distinguishable as they were in print
- Experimenting with new journalistic platforms such as social media
- Paid posts and native advertising (which was dealt with in previous chapter).

A commitment to the standard of impartiality remains paramount at the *New York Times*, even more so in the digital space. Former executive editor Bill Keller highlighted this in a back-and-forth exchange with blogger Glenn Greenwald (published by *NYT*). He stated "impartiality is a worthwhile aspiration in journalism, even if it is not perfectly achieved… the need for impartial journalism is greater than it has ever been, because we live now in a world of affinity-based media" (2013).

In an interview for this paper, associate managing editor for standards, Philip Corbett (2014), says a core tenet of the approach by *NYT* is that:

> *We feel our fundamental journalistic standards should be the same across the board, regardless of the platform. We constantly recognise and realise that when people read something from the New York Times it doesn't matter if they read it on their phone or their laptop or in print, they are still thinking of it as The New York Times. If they feel we messed something up or fell short, they're going to say what's the matter with The New York Times? They are not going to distinguish well this appeared in print, but this was online so therefore there's a distinction there. The readers and viewers see it all as the product of the New York Times newsroom and judge us accordingly.*

When you drill down, this means *NYT* will apply its standards of impartiality and accuracy to blogs, social media feeds, and interactives. And yet there are some examples where the standards, while still steeped in a newspaper tradition, might be subtly shifting. On blogs, Corbett says "the parallel I would see is to the traditional columnist. For decades we've had columnists who work in the newsroom who write news page columns that are a little bit of a hybrid. They're not really partisan editorial opinions but they clearly have a perspective or point-of-view that reflects the writer and their voice" (2014). Certainly there are many media observers who argue blogs with a viewpoint or specialisation are not only more engaging, they also provide better news coverage, because they can dominate a beat. "This is more than just individuals being able to publish their views directly; the Lance Armstrong doping case was covered better and far earlier by NYVelocity, a specialist bike-racing blog, than it was by the professional (and decidedly unsceptical) sports press" (Anderson et al, 2012, p 20).

The flattening out of online content also presents challenges for the presentation of impartial journalism in the *NYT*. The traditional newspaper contained a roadmap of sorts, and readers could follow the logical progression of information. Today it's harder to make clear to a reader just what kind of material it is they are seeing. "That's the plus side to the print side of the paper, there's almost a geography to it that makes it clear which kind of story you are reading. But if you're coming in from a link or somewhere else, you vaguely know this is some *New York Times* thing that you're reading. We have to be conscious of that (Corbett, 2014). It's this arrival of readers through so-called side doors that concerns the *New York Times*. Aron Pilhofer, who recently left *NYT* to take up a position with the *Guardian*, says this is an area for further discussion.

> *I think the word is dis-intermediation! This has huge implications. The structure of a printed newspaper is meaningful. And how you consume a printed newspaper and how it is built gives you a lot of signals about what else is there and what you are reading actually represents. When you come to a piece, not randomly, but through a side door, none of that structure, none of those signals to a reader are immediately apparent. Or they are very subtle. So I think it's harder for news organisations to make clear the difference for example between a piece of commentary or analysis versus a piece of straight-up news. That may not be a problem, but that is a very obvious difference in [digital]* (interview, 2014).

The *New York Times* has also adopted an interesting approach to its social media policy. Most media outlets now employ an over-arching 'don't bring the organisation into disrepute' rule on the personal SM accounts of their journalists. Digital natives interviewed for this paper were less concerned with imposing guidelines on what individual reporters can post on their own social media accounts, just opting for a common sense approach, while most legacy ones did have specific guidelines.

"It doesn't matter if people read it on their phone, laptop or in print. They see it all as the product of the *New York Times* and judge us accordingly."

– Philip Corbett

However, the *New York Times* has deliberately steered clear of formal guidelines for use of social media (Sonderman, 2012), which is unusual for a legacy organisation. Corbett (2014) explains:

> *That's partly because we feel our basic standards for ethics apply across the board and can be applied to social media. The other thing, frankly, is we would be more likely to discourage our journalists to use social media as a platform if we came up with rules and punishments. That didn't seem like the right message at a time we've been encouraging more and more journalists to become active in social media and to embrace its possibilities. Our guidance comes down to two principles; first of all social media is a public activity, period. Whatever your privacy settings on Facebook, you should be aware that anything you post online on any platform can be shared widely. So it's a public activity. And you work for the New York Times morning, noon, and night. Anybody that reads anything you post online on any platform, you should assume they know you work for the New York Times.*

How the *New York Times* reinvents itself as a digital-first news outlet following its publication of the Innovation Report (2014) may dictate how it revises its editorial standards from this point on. The *NYT* must ask if a neutral tone really fits the language of the web and social platforms. There is no reason why, as with the experimentation with a more conversational tone with its data blog the Upshot, the the *New York Times* can't relax its tone while still maintaining its core editorial principles and commitment to impartial journalism.

### *5.4 BuzzFeed*

BuzzFeed initially rose to prominence as a purveyor of 'listicles ('31 Thing You Can Make Out of Cereal Boxes'), cat videos, and quizzes ('Which Rare Disease Will You Convince Yourself You Have By Reading Web MD Too Much?'). The site's founder is Jonah Peretti, who was also a founder of the Huffington Post in 2005.

The statistics are quite staggering: 100 million video views per month, 130+ million unique visitors a month, and 60 per cent of those are 18 to 34-year-olds (Source: Google Analytics, Quantcast). BuzzFeed's content is designed to be highly shareable and a whopping 75 per cent of its traffic comes via social links (Source: Google Analytics).

Thanks to some smart hiring, 2012 was the year BuzzFeed made serious inroads in the delivery of news and longform journalism. Peretti appointed former Policito writer Ben Smith to the role of editor, former *Newsweek* and CNN journalist McKay Coppins is the site's political reporter, while former Spin Magazine editor Steve Kandell is the site's longform editor. BuzzFeed has argued there's nothing wrong with juxtaposing a video of a hedgehog on a skateboard with an article outlining plans for Obamacare. "The fabric of politics has always been gossip and jokes and crazy personality stuff and memes," Smith told the *New York Times*. "I mean, Dukakis in the tank, that's a meme. Political coverage that wants to be solely high-minded is missing huge chunks of the actual interplay of personality and power that is what actually drives things" (Quenqua, 2013).

"Anyone who thinks that different kinds of content can be separated isn't looking at Facebook or Twitter. If you think readers can't deal with that, where are you?"

– Ben Smith

Peretti described the site's transition from listicle creator to credible news organisation to Venture Village.

> *When Buzzfeed first started, we summarised trends on the web: this and that is happening at the moment. We didn't have a team, we'd publish four things a day. Now, we publish 400 things a day. We have an investigative journalism team and correspondents reporting from Syria, Kiev and Nairobi* (in Wirminghaus, 2014).

Peretti also told NPR he is building their news service because BuzzFeed has worked out that news content, not just lists, can be shareable and viral. "We realised… we didn't have news, we didn't have reporters. We didn't have any of the things that were starting to become increasingly shared across the social web" (Folkenflik, 2013). In 2014 BuzzFeed launched a 'Just News' tool that allows users to select just the news content, signaling a further play into serious news territory. It is BuzzFeed's inclusion of serious news that warrants a more serious consideration of editorial voice and standards.

In early 2014, BuzzFeed posted its first ever style guide (Silverman, 2014), which includes advice on attribution, the use of anonymous sources ("five randos isn't as useful as one person who actually knows what they're talking about"), and how to issue corrections.

On accuracy and verification, BuzzFeed has been criticised (Weigel, 2013; Salmon, 2013) for circulating information that was later proven false. The most high-profile hoax was when a TV producer live tweeted his verbal fight with another passenger. BuzzFeed reported on the back-and-forth between the two plane passengers in a story titled 'This Epic Note-Passing War On A Delayed Flight Won Thanksgiving' and the report went viral.




*Figure 5.5*

*BuzzFeed re-posted tweets about a 'war' that never happened*

But like most too-good-to-be-true stories, it was in fact too good to be true. *BuzzFeed*, probably unconcerned given the traffic the story had generated, had to issue a correction when TV producer Elan Gale revealed it was a prank.

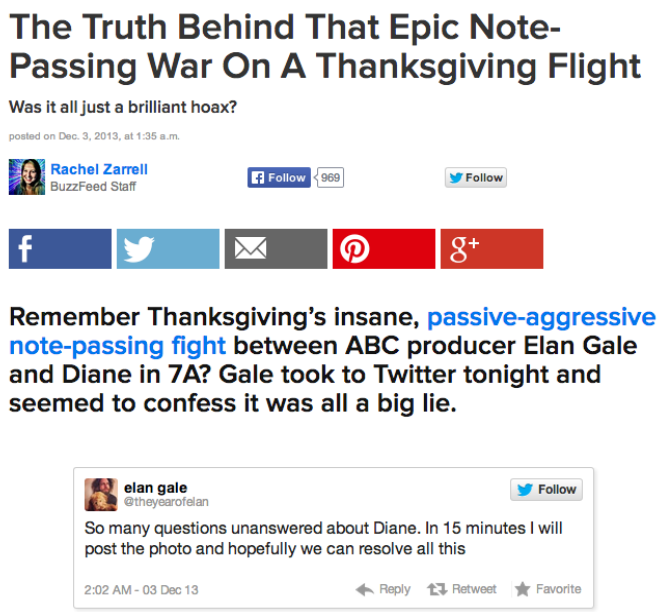



*Figure 5.6*

*BuzzFeed's post following the 'brilliant hoax'*

The reporter, Rachel Zarrell, seemed unconcerned when posting the correction:

> *You got us, Elan! And 140,000 new Twitter followers to boot.*

Not to mention the hits and shares BuzzFeed received. Slate's David Weigel (2013) stated "I'm a little disturbed by the glib response from BuzzFeed. What is

aggregation for, anyway? And are people willing to create a lower standard for 'reporting' - Zarrell is a reporter, who has worked for other news organisations - if it's only about a viral story?" Media commentator Felix Salmon says accuracy is crucial to any site with a news offering. "If your company was built from day one to produce stuff people want to share, then that will always end up including certain things that aren't true. That's not a problem if you're ViralNova… but it becomes a problem if you put yourself forward as practitioners of responsible journalism, as BuzzFeed does" (2013).

While many media organisations, including legacy ones, have been hoaxed, the digital era brings the danger of shareability without responsibility. Sites like BuzzFeed and Upworthy place shareability above any other virtue, which could mean a story like the airplane fight is simply too good to check. The danger is that as long as a story goes viral and gets the eyeballs, does it really matter if it's true or not? As Esquire journalist Luke O'Neil (2013) points out:

> *The media has long had its struggles with truth – that's nothing new. But what is new is that we're barely apologizing for increasingly considering the truth optional. In fact, the mistakes, and the falsehoods, and the hoaxes are a big part of a business plan driven by the belief that big traffic resolves all sins.*

Luke Lewis, UK editor of BuzzFeed, says the website is concerned about the way it handles corrections. "The important thing in the social media age is that you be really up-front about [corrections]. In our guidelines it's quite clear that if you make a correction to an article, if that article was tweeted then you also have to tweet the correction. So we are as transparent as possible. Otherwise the danger is, you write an article that turns out to be a hoax, it goes massively viral, and some publishers will quietly continue letting it be viral. We definitely don't want that to happen" (2014).

Then there's the question of impartiality. It's not one that occupies a lot of thinking time at BuzzFeed according to Lewis. "It's not a huge issue for us. We really don't do much in the way of opinion. I feel like that sort of thunderous opinion piece is an old media thing. I think the idea that if you're a publisher you have to be politically aligned, left or right, is quite old fashioned as well. So BuzzFeed is neither left nor right and doesn't do that much in the way of opinion so it's not a huge issue for us".

Smith hints at favouring an objective reporting method. "There are times, like Glenn Greenwald, where if you hold yourself and your views are very, very clear, a source may come to you, because they know exactly where you're coming from and bring you something amazing. But more often I think people may not see you as an honest broker, and I think you can just so easily lead yourself to see what you want to see, and not be talking to people who are going to check you" (in Hewitt, 2014).

### *5.5 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*

The BBC is arguably the biggest news brand in the world, taking into account its size, output, and reach into so many countries. The BBC is funded by the UK's TV licence fee and is regulated by the BBC Trust for accuracy, independence, and impartiality to ensure the BBC fulfills its duty under the Royal Charter. It is also subject to rules set out by the UK's independent broadcasting regulator Ofcom on areas such as fairness, privacy, and harm and offence. However, while Ofcom has power to regulate broadcasting, it has no jurisdiction over newspapers, nor over content which appears online (even if it is content derived from a broadcast). Technically, this contradiction

allows TV reporters to be partial on their blogs. For example, Jon Snow of Channel 4 News could be partial on his SnowBlog, even though any report he does for television must be impartial.

The BBC has a set of editorial guidelines, a lengthy document that includes the outlet's commitment to accuracy, fairness, independence, privacy, and impartiality. In relation to its digital presence, the BBC also has written guidance about the use of social media and microblogs. The way the BBC approaches these platforms was outlined in the previous section in impartiality and social media.

On the question of whether the BBC's standards for accuracy and verification make it harder to compete with global media organisations that may not have the same standards, the BBC's social media editor Chris Hamilton (2014) says there's room for both approaches.

> *I have a benign view in that I think we can all live together. I don't think this is a zero sum game where one side will win out over the other. There's an appetite for 'wow look at this incredible picture' which gets shared and shared and then it turns out it's fake or it's from three years ago. It's not a question of competition.*

Impartiality is the key distinction in the BBC's journalism, a trait that not all legacy organisations strive for. Neither the *Guardian* nor the *Economist* claim to be impartial, while the BBC and the *New York Times* still consider it an essential pillar of journalism.

At the heart of the BBC's impartiality principles is that news must "be treated with due impartiality, giving due weight to events, opinions, and main strands of arguments" and that the BBC must "seek to provide a broad range of subject matter and perspectives over an appropriate timeframe". There can be no doubt that this approach allows an audience to draw its own conclusions, free from any slant or spin. There has been criticism though, that on controversial issues such as climate change, the BBC's commitment to "reflecting a wide range of opinion across our output... so that no significant strand of thought is knowingly unreflected" has allowed so-called false balance to creep in at times. Pavlik (2001) has identified this conundrum before: "Journalist[s] can hide behind the cloak of objectivity, fairness, and accuracy, without addressing the more fundamental issue of whether what s/he reported is actually true. In other words, a story may be impartial, but that doesn't make it true" (p 93).

"When there are so many voices out there and privates axes to grind, then there is something simply priceless about a voice you can trust."

– James Harding

In his 2011 review of the accuracy and impartiality of the BBC's science output, Professor Steve Jones of University College London, while describing BBC science content overall to be "of a very high calibre", criticised the amount of air time the broadcaster devoted to covering the views of climate change sceptics. "For at least three years, the climate change deniers have been marginal to the scientific debate but somehow they continued to find a place on the airwaves. Their ability to do so suggests that an over-diligent search for due impartiality – or for a controversy – continue to hinder the objective reporting of a scientific story even when the internal statements of the BBC suggest that no controversy exists." The BBC Executive responded by saying "the treatment of a scientific story will depend upon its nature

and context. Sometimes it is appropriate to present it as a debate within the scientific community whereas at others a range of views, including from non-experts, is justified given the social, political and cultural context" (2011).

The second question about a commitment to impartiality is whether it sometimes leads to what New York University's Jay Rosen describes as 'The View From Nowhere' journalism:

> *If, as I believe, it's getting harder and harder for users to trust journalists who say, 'I don't have a point of view, I'm just telling you the way it is'. If the users don't trust that, there's not that much that journalists can do – because trust is not their transaction to run. Just because their textbook says this is the trusted way, doesn't mean people will actually trust it… The BBC can parade forever saying 'we're impartial, we're impartial, we're impartial' but if people don't actually trust the BBC, then being more impartial isn't actually going to change it. In my view the terms of trust are changing slowly and it's getting harder and harder to trust the view from nowhere and it's getting easier to trust people who say 'this is where I'm coming from'* (interview, 2014).

BBC director of news James Harding argues the digital era makes it even *more* critical to adhere to impartiality, stating "when there are so many voices out there, so many hidden patrons and private axes to grind, so many confusing opinions for news, then there is something simply priceless about a voice you can trust" (WT Stead lecture, 2014). Similarly, the ABC's Alan Sunderland (2014) says:

> *The flood of information in some cases has made it harder rather than easier for people to sort through the noise and find what they need. Finding different perspectives and raw data has never been easier, but finding a reliable and fair summary of the information they need when they need it is just as hard as ever and in some ways harder. I would contend that what has not changed is the desire of people to find reliable information without spin, in a concise and accessible form.*

However, Harding has also stated that on social media, BBC journalists can relax the rigidity of being opinion-free and use transparency and context as ways to explain a story. He says social media allows the BBC audience to get a "greater sense of what's actually happening, not just in the news but in the *making* of the news. One of the things that's extremely powerful about new forms of media is they slightly debunk the 'voice of God', they remove an aloofness" (*NYT* / BBC Social Media Summit, 2014). Similarly, Sir Howard Stringer, in a report commissioned by BBC News (2014), criticised the BBC's web presence as having the "neutral tone of a news bulletin" compared with the more engaging presence of its rivals (Conlon, 2014). Stringer argues:

> *The sites that are growing quickly - whether it is Vice or Buzzfeed or Upworthy - are the ones that have a really distinctive character… the BBC needs to think about how it can add character and personality.*

How best to adapt its editorial standards to allow for such "character", to further "remove an aloofness", and to allow its reporters to draw conclusions based on professional judgment should be key questions the BBC asks as it drafts new social media guidelines and editorial standards in the coming 18 months.

### *5.6 Vice News*

Vice Media began its life as a news and culture magazine called the *Voice of Montreal* in the 1990s in Canada. In 2014, Vice Media incorporates a magazine, a website which includes a news channel, a film production company, and a record label. The company also produces the TV program Vice On HBO, which airs in the United States, with each episode featuring two video dispatches from far-flung locations. In August 2013 media mogul Rupert Murdoch's 21st Century Fox invested a reported US $70 million in Vice Media (*Financial Times*, August 2013). Vice Media previously had deals with MTV and CNN to provide video content.

In December 2013, Vice Media launched its global news channel Vice News, incorporating both video and text posts, and this part of the company is the focus of this paper. Vice News, through its website and its YouTube channel, pumps out video dispatches which clock anywhere from 57,000 hits (as of June 2014 for the dispatch 'Ousted Prime Minster Sparks New Protests' on Thailand), to millions of hits (as of June 2014, the three-part 'Sneaking Into North Korea' series has had more than 7.1 million views on the Vice News YouTube channel alone). Vice News were the envy of traditional media in mid 2014 when they gained unrivalled access to travel with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Vice executives say this five-part series has been viewed more than 7.5 million times on YouTube (in Carr, 2014). The company also says it has 230 million eyeballs a month across all the Vice channels.

> "We have been accused of being subjective, and yes we are subjective. It's almost impossible to be objective."
>
> – Shane Smith

The Vice empire is overseen by Shane Smith who not only brings in the deals with the likes of Murdoch, but also stars in many of the video dispatches. Film producer Spike Jonze, a sporadic Vice contributor, told the *New York Times* that while Smith can present the gritty videos he also "happens to be, coincidentally, a really good salesperson, so he can turn around and sell it to the suits" (Williams, 2010).

The first season of Vice On HBO was criticised by some as subjective stunt television with little of the context so necessary to set up stories from places like Syria and Venezuela. Alexander Kaufman of the Huffington Post summarised some of the questions being asked of Vice: "Wasn't this just a stunt, sending Dennis Rodman to North Korea? Could you really count this as journalism? Do you think it's cool to exploit the plight of North Koreans? Aren't you guys just a bunch of hard-drinking hipsters from Williamsburg?" (2014). Kaufman went on to say the 2014 series of the show "appears to have fewer stunts and a lot more substance."

Kevin Sutcliffe, head of programming EU for Vice News, describes its video approach as a street view of the world. He told an audience at the Frontline Club in London (2014):

> *You might call it more relaxed. It's involved, it's embedded, it's responsive, it has an emotional connection between the reporter and the people who are consuming it. Those things make it seem fresh and less part of a corporate enterprise, which a lot of news feels like.*

Sutcliffe, a former Channel 4 News staffer, says this more subjective and involved style allows reporters to get to the heart of a story, no matter the format of the piece. "It's a journalistic approach with our editorial site; we've got written work, and

photography, as well as the video. The video approach feels fresh because it feels like you're getting to the heart of things and you're seeing a reaction from our people; that our journalists are not reporting for the BBC or Al Jazeera. They are also people. That's important (2014). Speaking to the New York Times in mid 2014, Vice News editor-in-chief Jason Mojica said his reporters avoid the voice-of-God tone many correspondents use and instead tries to bring the viewer closer to the action of the story. "A lot of the way in which news has traditionally been presented was not necessarily of interest to young people" (in Carr, 2014).

Impartiality is not a goal for Vice News. In March 2014, Smith told the BBC Media Show:

> *We definitely approach it from a documentary, film-making standpoint of 'go there, press record and let the story unfold', rather than the more traditional journalistic shoe-horning the story style. We have been accused of being subjective and yes we are subjective. It's almost impossible to be objective when you're going from New York into sub-Saharan Africa into a conflict and saying 'well I am going to be completely objective'. I don't think that's possible.*

For example Alex Miller, a senior editor for Vice News, filmed several dispatches from Venezuela during the protests in Caracas in March 2014. The videos capture the spectacle of the uprising with several conversational documentary-style pieces to camera by Miller. Responding to criticism that Vice News video reports always place emphasis on the action and never on the geo-political context of an uprising or conflict, he responded "We have a particular style and it can be quite subjective. I went that day to an enormous rally in the centre of town…Yes it's quick journalism and perhaps if I sat on it for a week I would have made something more beautiful. But that's what happened. That's what I saw so I don't see how that can be mis-informing anyone" (Frontline, 2014).

Sutcliffe also points to the DIY aesthetic of *Vice News* reporters and the fact Vice News is largely digital-only and therefore rarely constrained by column inches or television minutes, as two factors contributing to their success. They are very much an organisation of the 21st century. "Technology has changed, that's the point. The way we would approach Ukraine is that we're tweeting, putting things out on Vine, on Instagram, we're posting long-form video, we're posting [shorter] dispatches from two places. In a way the form is interesting. But also the overall approach is very different to 30 years ago when there were four channels" (Frontline, 2014).

It's here that legacy media might struggle to keep up with Vice News. Many legacy media organisations can be slowed down by more rigorous fact-checking, better sourcing of a range of viewpoints, and the need for impartiality. But as Tom Giles, editor of Panorama for the BBC says, it is the nimble, digital-only format of Vice News that allows them to grow their audience:

> *In a terrible way, we are prisoners of our form. The reason [Vice News] feels liberating is because they don't have to worry about how it's going to fit on this channel, or how is that going to get marketed at 8.30 on BBC1, is it going to work as an hour at 9.00? And those decisions are like super tankers going remarkably slowly, and backwards sometimes, into some tiny port. By the time we have finally got the permission to get the money and get the commission, [Vice News] have gone out and done it anyway and put it out in a completely new form in a completely new landscape… In many ways the digital fragmentation is what is scaring legacy media. If you're on a legacy channel like BBC1 you are looking inevitably at declining audiences…. The general shift is away from the mass audience for our form. [Vice News] don't have those constrictions (Frontline Club, 2014).*

Vice News host and producer Aris Roussinos was one of only two video reporters in South Sudan to capture a conflict there in 2012 (the other was a BBC crew). He says publishing to the web actually allows for greater, not less, context and accuracy on a story. "On a cable news network that [south Sudan] story would be a three-minute clip with no context or background. Because we're on the internet, we can expand the story. We are not hemmed in by run times. I think there's an appetite there for knowledge so why not feed it" (Frontline, 2014). Certainly on the issue of South Sudan, *Vice News* has gone to considerable efforts to present a holistic story and even urges its audience to consume the full suite of videos and stories. The Vice News website states:

> Saving South Sudan *is a multi-platform exploration of the horrors of the country's newest civil war. We devoted an* ***entire issue*** *of the magazine to Robert Young Pelton and Tim Freccia's sprawling 35,000-plus word epic exploration of the crisis in South Sudan. It's a companion piece of sorts; watch the documentary and* ***read the issue*** *or vice versa. But you won't get a full scope of the situation without doing both.*

On advertising, Vice News has been able to assert its independence by generating revenue from their other channels. Vice says sponsored content and advertising sit more comfortably on their other channels than on Vice News and the site is free from sponsored clutter. What the cash injection from 21st Century Fox means for Vice's independence is yet to be seen, but so far Smith says there's no issue. "The only company that was forward thinking enough to say we're going to do a small minority investment, but give you the help you need to get into India for example or Europe, South-East Asia, or South America was 21st Century Fox. So now we have this incredible platform globally to help us get into… different platforms and territories and to turbo-charge our growth. But we still control and run our company" (interview with Hewlett, BBC Media Show, 2014).

Vice News is stealing audiences from traditional media in two ways. Firstly Vice News uses a human, first-person, street-view of stories that appeals to younger news consumers. Secondly Vice News, unlike legacy organisations, isn't constrained by the need to cover every angle of every breaking story. How Vice News commissions stories and the sorts of editorial rigor it applies to news documentaries and feature articles will be critical to any further success for them.

## 6. CONCLUSION

It is clear that digital journalism can allow for greater commitment to editorial standards. From better linking to primary sources of information, to greater commitment to transparency, there has never been an age more able to incorporate open, high-quality journalism. Newer forms of journalism such as user-generated content, social media, and data journalism are exciting and innovative ways to engage audiences in an active conversation about the news. The challenge is for media outlets to use these tools to adhere to editorial strengths of verification, accuracy, independence, and a plurality of perspectives.

### *Threats to standards: Verification, blurring of content types, and native ads*

This paper identifies some risks for editorial standards in the digital age:

- Speed and virality can threaten fairness and accuracy.
- A lack of linear structure means all content is 'flattened out'. Distinguishing between content types is difficult for outlets committed to impartiality.
- Native advertising and an increase in PR-driven journalism may prevent audiences from making informed choices about what to believe and why.

Verification of a vast volume of information – and the speed at which consumers want to access and share such news – must be placed above the need for virality. It is too easy for organisations that place shareability above all other virtues to circulate false information and excuse it as simply reporting on what's happening on the internet. As the BBC's Chris Hamilton asserts: "Just running something just because it's out there…is a fairly serious line to cross" (interview, 2014). While some argue merely 'passing on' what is out there is what aggregators such as ViralNova do, for any organisation wanting a reputation as a credible news provider, this is unacceptable. BuzzFeed must be mindful of this as it expands its news service.

"If journalism is not separate from advertising, then it has lost something important in a democratic society."

– Andrew Sullivan

The flattening of the web and lack of linear structure (Hicks, 2012; Corbett, 2014; Pilhofer, 2014) make the distinction of types of content difficult. Analyst and researcher Lara Fielden (2011) backs this up: "Younger consumers are engaging with content in new ways, not as passive recipients but as active participants… However, without a consistent, proportionate and transparent settlement for media regulation, receptive to new providers, the ability to discriminate between sources of content is wholly compromised. Consumer confidence and trust is put at risk."

Similarly, native advertising should be labeled and distinguished from editorial content, even via search. Without transparent labeling, a brand compromises trust and undermines the effectiveness of editorial content. *Wall Street Journal* managing editor Gerard Baker warns of an emerging "Faustian pact" with advertisers that could erode reader trust. And as Andrew Sullivan of Daily Dish said to BuzzFeed's Ben Smith: "If journalism is not understood to be separate from advertising, then it has lost something incredibly important in a democratic society" (Rowan, 2014).

### *Digital brings new solutions*

Born of the web outlets have offered new ways to uphold editorial standards, including:

- Using hyperlinks to demonstrate accuracy and openness.
- Greater context and timeliness for online corrections.
- An inclusion of more voices which aids plurality.
- Transparency in addition to (not in place of) impartiality.

The arrival of a hyper-linked web has given audiences greater access to a range of facts, data, and opinions. Digital natives such as ProPublica, Quartz, FiveThirtyEight, and Vox reveal their workings as a way of building trust. Other digital-only outlets such as Grantland and Upworthy are delivering corrections that provide more adequate context for the audience. And as Upworthy's GIF correction demonstrates, they are doing it in a format that best suits their tone and their audience.

Community debates are rarely black and white and a hyper-linked internet brings more perspectives and voices to audiences. And for proponents of journalism from a perspective, where facts are used to argue a certain case, transparency provides a way to bring integrity with this approach. Both styles of journalism are needed in the digital era.

> *There's room out there both for defenders of impartial journalism and those who continue to insist it should be replaced with opinion-with-transparency. In a world that already has enough intolerance and polarization, we should keep testing and improving all approaches to journalism instead of slamming the door on techniques that retain significant value* (Kent, 2014).

### *Matters for further consideration as standards evolve*

An unresolved challenge for impartial outlets such as the *New York Times*, the BBC and the ABC involves the way audiences now come to a distinct piece of content 'through the side door' via social links. News consumers don't always have the surrounding context and signposts they once had when reading a newspaper front page or consuming an entire news bulletin. This might mean some organisations should offer impartiality within a *single* news piece, rather than a suite of stories.

A further matter for discussion is how to apply accuracy and impartiality standards to data journalism. The way figures are selected, interpreted, and analysed affects how they are presented to the audience. What conclusions are drawn from data and how to present such findings in impartial news organisations remains a challenge.

And finally, organisations must continue to refine social media guidelines for journalists. With the rise in appreciation of 'super-bloggers' it is even more crucial that media organisations encourage staff to write with a distinctive voice, but to do so based in professional judgements, rather than fact-less opinion.

### *Standards that fit a digital age: A third form of news provider is emerging*

It is crucial all media outlets ask if legacy guidelines fit the ethos of digital content production. Not all editorial standards are fit for purpose in the digital era.

The non-profit Online News Association (ONA) is doing great work in this area by developing a DIY kit of ethics that sets out some principles as core, and others as to be determined by the organisation or individual journalist. Though at the time of writing this project is yet to be completed, it's already clear this model could offer new ideas for both legacy and digital news outlets. As Ward (2010) points out "media ethics need to be rethought and reinvented for the media of today, not of yesteryear".

Ideally, media outlets should consider bringing their standards closer together. More streamlined standards that encompass many legacy traits while discarding irrelevant ones will help audiences understand and decode the news.

> "We are witnessing the emergence of a new breed of smaller, digital-only outlets that are closing the gap, quality-wise, with legacy media."
>
> – Frederic Filloux

What will emerge is a new form of news publishing altogether. The coming years should free us from the outdated legacy-versus-digital dichotomy. The Tow Centre's Emily Bell (2014) says "we are still waiting, though, for a third model of news publishing to emerge. A news organisation that holds institutional strengths, beliefs and resources at its core but allows the rise of the independently oriented journalist some freedom to succeed or fail…" (the *Guardian*). Rosen too hopes for a "future form... in novel fashion" but says "the messiah hasn't come yet" (PressThink, 2013).

Already, digital natives such as Ezra Klein's Vox, and the US democracy site ProPublica are experimenting in this space. It is likely the forthcoming First Look Media (owned by Pierre Omidyar) will also place a premium on many of the above traits. It will be increasingly important that legacy organisations such as the BBC, the *New York Times*, and my own employer, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation re-examine their standards to more closely reflect these hallmarks. Without such a shift, they risk losing younger audiences to the wide array of other choices online.

The digital outlet studied here that is closest to this new model of news publishing is Quartz. Being digitally native has unshackled them from 20th century editorial standards that simply don't fit the nature of the web. They provide interesting, digestible content that is easily shareable, based on their editorial 'obsessions'. Quartz does this while still offering:

- Links to primary sources of information
- Swift, native correction of mistakes, with context
- A breadth of viewpoints which shows plurality of perspectives
- Transparency and a 'show your work' ethos when coming from a viewpoint
- Open-source journalism and interaction provided by their online annotations.

The emergence of any third form of publisher has the advantage of taking the most relevant editorial standards of the past, while transforming and introducing new ways to establish credibility. Therefore, any new form of standards should prioritise:

- Greater transparency
- More open forms of journalism (open source, open code, open data)
- A voice that is of the web, driven largely by individual reporters rather than news brands
- Analysis that is facts-driven rather than opinionative
- A greater breadth of ideas and perspectives
- Content which is highly shareable via social platforms, but still accurate

- Interaction which places the reader as an expert
- Better provision of context

Filloux (2013) sums it up: "We are witnessing the emergence of a new breed of smaller, digital-only outlets that are closing the gap, quality-wise, with legacy media. In the context of an increasingly segmented and short-on-time readership, I can only wonder how long the legacy newsroom's strategic advantage of size and scope will last".

In all, a new type of journalism in the digital age, with standards which evolve to meet the audience's expectations in that era, should ensure that quality, open journalism flourishes. But while the digital era has provided many ways to improve journalism standards, media outlets need to make better use of these new methods and incorporate them into newsroom workflows. Legacy organisations that don't adapt their standards and methods will struggle to compete as this third form of journalism emerges. "It may be that all journalism wins. Maybe we are entering into a new golden age of journalism, and we just haven't recognised it yet. We can have the best of all worlds, with both accuracy rising, and stories that hew closer to truth" (Andreessen, 2012).

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## LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

The following people were interviewed for this paper:

Martin Belam, editor of new formats, Trinity Mirror's Ampp3d (UK)

Philip Corbett, associate managing editor for standards, the *New York Times* (US)

Anna Doble, head of online, Channel 4 News (UK)

Chris Elliott, readers' editor, the *Guardian* (UK)

Chris Hamilton, social media editor, BBC News (UK)

David Jordan, director of editorial standards, BBC (UK)

Luke Lewis, UK editor, BuzzFeed (UK)

Gideon Lichfield, global news editor, Quartz (US)

Mark Memmott, supervising senior editor for standards and practices, NPR (US)

Aron Pilhofer, executive editor of digital, the *Guardian* (UK) (*recent departure from *NYT*)

Jay Rosen, New York University and consultant with *First Look Media* (US)

Richard Sambrook, Cardiff University (UK)

Andrew Sparrow, politics blogger, the *Guardian* (UK)

Tom Standage, digital editor, the *Economist* (UK, *via email)

Alan Sunderland, head of editorial policy, Aust Broadcasting Corporation (Aust)

Andrea Wills, independent editorial advisor (UK)

## APPENDIX: EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

The Guardian – Editorial Code
http://www.theguardian.com/info/guardian-editorial-code

The Guardian – Community Standards and Participation Guidelines
http://www.theguardian.com/community-standards

Quartz – Ethics and Advertising Guidelines
http://qz.com/3446/ethicsandadvertisingguidelines/

The New York Times – Standards and Ethics
http://www.nytco.com/who-we-are/culture/standards-and-ethics/

BuzzFeed – Style Guide and Corrections
http://www.buzzfeed.com/emmyf/buzzfeed-style-guide

BuzzFeed- Community Guidelines
http://www.buzzfeed.com/community/guidelines

BBC – Editorial Guidelines
http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/

BBC – Social Media Guidance
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/14_07_11_news_social_media_guidance.pdf

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