

Chapter 7: Newspapers: The Rise and Decline of Modern Journalism



- Despite the importance of newspapers in daily life, in today's digital age, the industry is losing both papers and readers at an alarming rate.
- Newspapers still garner a substantial portion of the nation's advertising dollars, but the loss of papers and readers raises significant concerns in a nation where daily news has historically functioned as a watchdog over democratic life.

The Evolution of American Newspapers

- Colonial Newspapers and the Partisan Press
 - The first newspaper produced in North America was *Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestick*, published on September 25, 1690, by Boston printer Benjamin Harris.
 - The colonial government objected to Harris's negative tone regarding British rule, and local ministers were offended by a report that the king of France had had an affair with his son's wife. The newspaper was banned after one issue

- In 1721, also in Boston, James Franklin, the older brother of Benjamin Franklin, started the *New England Courant*. *The Courant* established a tradition of running stories that interested ordinary readers rather than printing articles that appealed primarily to business and colonial leaders.
- In 1729, Benjamin Franklin, at age twenty–four, took over the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and created, according to historians the best of the colonial papers.

- During the colonial period, New York printer John Peter Zenger was arrested for libel. He eventually won his case, which established the precedent that today allows U.S. journalists and citizens to criticize public officials. In this 1734 issue, Zenger's *New-York Weekly Journal* reported his own arrest and the burning of the paper by the city's "Common Hangman."
- Zenger ultimately won his case in 1735.
- the colonial government, ruled that newspapers had the right to criticize government leaders as long as the reports were true.
- the Zenger decision would later provide a key foundation for the First
- Amendment to the Constitution—the right of a democratic press to criticize public officials.

- By 1765, about thirty newspapers operated in the American colonies. The first *daily paper began in 1784*. These papers were of two general types: political and commercial.
- **partisan press - an early dominant style of American journalism** distinguished by opinion newspapers, which generally argued one political point of view or pushed the plan of the particular party that subsidized the paper.
- The commercial press, on the other hand, served the leaders of commerce, who were interested in economic issues.

The Penny Press Era:

Newspapers Become Mass Media

- The Industrial Revolution, spawned the conversion from expensive handmade to inexpensive machine-made paper.
- **penny papers** - refers to newspapers that, because of technological innovations in printing, were able to drop their price to one cent beginning in the 1830s, thereby making papers affordable to working and emerging middle classes and enabling newspapers to become a genuine mass medium.
- In the 1820s, breakthroughs in technology, particularly steam-powered presses replacing mechanical presses, permitted publishers to produce as many as 4,000 newspapers an hour.

Examples & Characteristics of the Penny Press

- *New York Sun*
- highlighted local events, scandals, and police reports. It also ran serialized stories
- the *Sun* fabricated stories, including the famous moon hoax, which reported “scientific” evidence of life on the moon.
- **human–interest stories: news accounts that** focus on the daily trials and triumphs of the human condition, often featuring ordinary individuals facing extraordinary challenges.

Examples & Characteristics of the Penny Press

- *New York Morning Herald*
- political essays and scandals, business stories, a letters section, fashion notes, moral reflections, religious news, society gossip, colloquial tales and jokes, sports stories, and later reports from correspondents sent to cover the Civil War.

Examples & Characteristics of the Penny Press

- gradually separating daily front–page reporting from overt political viewpoints on an editorial page,
- New York’s penny papers shifted their economic base from political party subsidies to the market—to advertising revenue, classified ads, and street sales.
- In 1830, 650 weekly and 65 daily papers operated in the
- United States, reaching 80,000 readers. By 1840, a total of 1,140 weeklies and 140 dailies attracted 300,000 readers.

Wire Services

- **Wire services - commercial organizations, such as the Associated Press, that share news stories and information by relaying them around the country and the world, originally via telegraph and now via satellite transmission.**
- In 1848, six New York newspapers formed a cooperative arrangement and founded the Associated Press (AP), the first major news wire service.

The Age of Yellow Journalism: Sensationalism and Investigation

- **yellow journalism** - a newspaper style or era that peaked in the 1890s, it emphasized high interest stories, sensational crime news, large headlines, and serious reports that exposed corruption, particularly in business and government.

2 Characteristics of Yellow Journalism

- First were the overly dramatic—or sensational—stories about crimes, celebrities, disasters, scandals, and intrigue.
- The second, and sometimes forgotten, legacy is that the yellow press provided the roots for investigative journalism: news reports that hunted out and exposed corruption, particularly in business and government.

Pulitzer and the *New York World*

- The *World* reflected the contradictory spirit of the yellow press. It crusaded for improved urban housing, better conditions for women, and equitable labor laws. It campaigned against monopoly practices by AT&T, Standard Oil, and Equitable Insurance.
- Pulitzer's paper manufactured news events and staged stunts, such as sending star reporter Nellie Bly around the world in seventy-two days to beat the fictional "record" in the popular 1873 Jules Verne novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*.

Hearst and the *New York Journal*

- In 1896, the *Journal's* daily circulation reached 450,000, and by 1897, the Sunday edition of the paper rivaled the 600,000 circulation of the *World*.
- By the 1930s, Hearst's holdings included more than forty daily and Sunday papers, thirteen magazines (including *Good Housekeeping* and *Cosmopolitan*), eight radio stations, and two film companies. In addition, he controlled King Features Syndicate, which sold and distributed articles, comics, and features to many of the nation's 2,500 dailies.

“Objectivity” in Modern Journalism

- Throughout the mid–1800s, the more a newspaper appeared not to take sides, the more its readership base could be extended
 - wire service organizations were serving a variety of newspaper clients in different regions of the country. To satisfy all their clients and the wide range of political views, newspapers began at least to look more impartial.

Ochs and the *New York Times*

- By the 1920s, the *New York Times* had established itself as the official paper of record, available in the nation's libraries and setting the standard that other newspapers emulated. The *Times* became the first modern newspaper, gathering information and presenting news in a straightforward way—without the opinion of the reporter.

- **objective journalism - a modern style of journalism that distinguishes factual reports from opinion columns; reporters strive to remain neutral toward the issue or event they cover, searching out competing points of view among the sources for a story.**

- **inverted–pyramid style**
- Often stripped of adverbs and adjectives, inverted–pyramid reports began—as they do today—with the most dramatic or newsworthy information. They answer *who, what, where, when (and, less frequently, why or how) questions* at the top of the story and then narrow down to less significant details.

Interpretive Journalism Provides Explanation

- **interpretive journalism - a type of journalism** that involves analyzing and explaining key issues or events and placing them in a broader historical or social context.
 - tries to explain key issues or events and place them in a broader historical or social context.
 - journalism took an analytic turn in a world grown more interconnected and complicated.

Walter Lippmann (1920's columnist)

3 Press Responsibilities

- (1) “to make a current record”;
- (2) “to make a running analysis of it”; and
- (3) “on the basis of both, to suggest plans.”

- In the 1930s, many print journalists and some editors believed that interpretive stories, rather than objective reports, could better compete with radio. They realized that interpretation was a way to counter radio's (and later television's) superior ability to report breaking news quickly.
- In 1933, the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) supported the idea of interpretive journalism, resolving to “devote a larger amount of attention and space to analytical and interpretative news and to presenting a background of information which will enable the average reader more adequately to understand the movement and the significance
- of events.”

Literary Forms of Journalism

- **advocacy journalism: often associated with a** journalistic trend in the 1960s but actually part of a tradition that dates to the early days of the partisan press, this approach to journalism features the reporter actively promoting a particular cause or viewpoint.
- **precision journalism: a type of journalism that** attempts to push news reporting in the direction of science, maintaining that by applying rigorous social science methods, such as using poll surveys and questionnaires, journalism can better offer a valid portrait of social reality.

Consensus vs. Conflict:

Newspapers Play Different Roles

- **consensus-oriented journalism: found in small communities,** newspapers that promote social and economic harmony by providing community calendars and meeting notices and carrying articles on local schools, social events, town government, property crimes, and zoning issues.
- **conflict-oriented journalism: found in metropolitan areas,** newspapers that define news primarily as events, issues, or experiences that deviate from social norms; journalists see their role as observers who monitor their city, institutions and problems.

Ethnic, Minority, and Oppositional Newspapers

- Ethnic papers help readers both adjust to foreign surroundings and retain ties to their traditional heritage.
- Ethnic and foreign language newspapers serve an important function, providing news and a sense of community to populations not targeted by mainstream papers.

African American Newspapers

- Since 1827, more than three thousand newspapers have been edited and owned by blacks
- They promoted racial pride long before the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.
- As civil rights legislation brought improved economic conditions for many working- and middle-class African Americans, the mainstream press began to court them as a consumer group, devoting weekly special sections to black issues and finding advertisers to support those sections. In siphoning off both ads and talent, a more integrated mainstream press diminished the status of many black papers

Spanish–Language Newspapers

- Until the late 1960s, Hispanic issues and culture were virtually ignored by mainstream newspapers. But with the influx of Mexican, Haitian, Puerto Rican, and Cuban immigrants throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many mainstream papers began to feature weekly Spanish–language supplements.
 - The first was the *Miami Herald's* section, “*El Nuevo Herald*,” introduced in 1976.

Wire Services and Feature Syndication

- Major daily papers might have between one hundred and two hundred local reporters and writers, but they still cannot cover the world or produce enough material to fill up the news hole each day.
- For this reason, newspapers rely on wire services and syndicated feature services to supplement local coverage.
- Press International (UPI), have hundreds of staffers stationed throughout major U.S. cities and the world capitals. They submit stories and photos each day for distribution to newspapers across the country. Some U.S. papers also subscribe to foreign wire services, such as Agence France–Presse in Paris or Reuters in London.

Newspapers and Democracy

- Of all mass media, newspapers have played the longest and strongest role in sustaining democracy. As a venue for the expression of ideas and the distribution of information, newspapers keep readers abreast of issues and events in their community, their nation, and their world.
- Newspapers are doing the reporting in this country. Google and Yahoo and those people aren't putting reporters on the street in any numbers at all. Blogs can't afford it. Network television is taking reporters off the street. Commercial radio is almost nonexistent. And newspapers are the last ones standing, and newspapers are threatened. And reporting is absolutely an essential thing for democratic self-government. Who's going to do it? Who's going to pay for the news? If newspapers fall by the wayside, what will we know?