What are the major new challenges facing journalists and journalism in the reporting of news and news features?

“They are a dying breed. Ugland used this phrase to describe journalists” (Amy.B-Journalism-www.cfkeep.org). In this essay I aim to investigate whether journalists really are a dying breed and I want to identify some of the many challenges that modern day journalists face today. I will document how people’s consumption of news has changed and as a result how journalists are now expected to report via multiple media formats.

The introduction of the Internet is probably the most obvious cause of change regarding journalism. The Internet is readily available twenty-four hours a day and its gargantuan content is being constantly updated at a rate that is impossible to match. As a result journalists can no longer wait until the next day to report breaking news because by then the story has already circulated and it quickly becomes old news. Instead of waiting for the morning paper, journalists will now write their stories and post them online. This way people receive their news as it happens and are constantly updated. People are now used to being updated hourly, rather than daily. This is a challenge for journalists because it means that deadlines have gotten much smaller and they’re constantly under pressure to get stories out.

Even if journalists do manage to get their stories published in an online paper, they could still be beaten to the scoop by millions of other people, or ‘citizen journalists’. Social Network sites, like Facebook, mean that news spreads at amazing speeds so by the time stories are officially written everyone already knows about them. Also, Bloggers from around the world are always up to date on current affairs and because they operate on a global basis, while one hemisphere sleeps the other is updating, there’s never a break in the reporting of news (Globalization-we now live in a global village). “The trends of blogging and online news sources are also taking potential jobs away from journalists because many people do not get their information from traditional sources like newspapers anymore” (Amy.B-Journalism-www.cfkeep.org). Another problem that journalists face is that reporting on celebrities has become almost impossible because of things like Twitter. Celebrities now update fans at their leisure. This means that the media has less power because celebrities rely less on journalists as they can self-promote via the Internet and these promotions will instantly reach a global audience. The readership of even the most popular newspapers can’t match these huge audiences. The celebrities who use sites like these tend to post things as they happen so journalists have no chance of beating them in spreading certain news. Celebrities may even prefer to let people know certain things about themselves via social networking sites because they can accurately get their opinion across in their own words. This also eliminates the chance of having their views manipulated to mean something else by the press.

A 2007 pole carried out by Zogby, which asked participants ‘where do you get most of your news and information’, revealed that “39.9% of people got their news from internet sites, 31.5% got news from television, 12.2% from newspapers, 12.1% from radio, 8% from magazines and 1.5% got their news
from blogs”. They were also asked, ‘which of the following is your most trusted source of news and information’ and this question revealed that “33.2% of people got their news from internet sites, 21.3% from television, 16% from newspapers, 14% from the radio, 2% from magazines and 1.7% of people thought that blogs are the most trusted source of news and information” (www.jacklail.com). As you can see from these poll results, people receive their news through many different formats and journalists are expected to report the news through all of these. However, this poll was actually taken online so this probably makes the results a little biased. To get more accurate results, non-internet users would also have to be questioned about their news consumption.

The Internet, TV and radio are not the only changes in how people consume their journalism today. For example, people can now get the news in the palm of their hands via smart phones. As a result of all this modernization, journalists face the challenge of mastering various media formats while reporting. It’s no longer a case of writing a story and delivering that story to the people. People now come looking for the news and you’ve got to deliver it to them in any way you can.

It’s not just new media that’s causing journalists problems. Some traditional media like newspapers may also be causing problems. For example, free papers like The Metro are a problem for journalists because they provide a decent variety of news and are published daily at no charge to the reader. If people can get the news for free they are unlikely to buy or go looking for alternative news providers.

The role of the law and ethics also pose various challenges for journalists today. The Press Complaints Commission (PCC) is the organization that censors journalism and they do this with the Code of Practice or the Editors Code. This code “is the cornerstone of the system of self-regulation to which the industry has made a binding commitment” (www.pcc.org.uk). The code consists of a number of rules and guidelines that the press must adhere to. However, it seems that the press are under increasing scrutiny from the public and always seem to be portrayed in a negative way. They are consistently criticized for doing their jobs as many feel that they’re not abiding by the rules set out by the Code of Practice. A recent example of controversy surrounding journalism is The News of the World’s phone hacking scandal, which has resulted in “News International facing lawsuits from twenty people who allege their voicemails were hacked for the paper, with at least twenty more cases expected” (www.guardian.co.uk). Admittedly sometimes rules and guidelines are needed but it seems like now, more than ever, journalists are being monitored and restricted and are unable to just get on with their jobs. Sometimes a piece of journalism or a journalist will become as infamous as what is being written about so they are then thrust into the spotlight and are at the mercy of the public.

Finally, one of the biggest challenges that journalists face today is media consolidation. “In recent years, media outlets have become increasingly controlled by a few large corporations. Major companies that are not necessarily media-related are beginning to own media outlets in larger numbers. A prominent example of this is NBC, which is owned by General Electric. Ugland
said media consolidation poses problems for journalism because the fewer independent news organizations there are, the fewer people who are in control of information disseminated to the public. Too much media consolidation could lead to having only a few companies using various media outlets as mouthpieces to advance their own interests” (Amy.B-Journalism-www.cfkeep.org). In other words, journalists may have to be biased when writing in order to influence people or spread propaganda, which suits their companies’ conglomerate owner (spin doctoring). The information that they spread could be for political gain e.g. the Fox Network in America, which is owned by News Corporation is considered Republican (News Corp owner Rupert Murdock is also Republican).

In summary, some of the major new challenges facing journalism and journalists today are “having to write content across multiple formats (print, web, blog etc...) and they're asked to produce more content that ever before. They have to adapt to new media formats (e.g. Social Networking sites). They are constantly competing with other news outlets for the best stories” (http://blog.journalistics.com) and because of Globalization they are faced with the almost impossible task of trying to keep up with a 24/7, global news climate. On top of all this, they are regulated with more rules than ever before and may be forced to write things they don’t necessarily believe in order to comply with an unrelated organizations agenda.

In spite of all this some people may argue that journalism and journalists don’t face any more challenges today than they used to. They may argue that there are in fact less challenges today and that actually journalists have more opportunities now than ever before. They may feel the fact that so many conglomerates own various media outlets (newspapers, TV networks, magazines, radio stations etc...) gives journalists a platform to get their voices heard. They have a larger audience than ever to report to. The media reaches almost everyone so arguably, journalists face less challenges because they have more influence than ever.
Bibliography:

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