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# New Media and Journalism

Implications for Autonomous Practice within Traditional Constraints

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## Abstract

This is a study of news production by eight major news organisations in the UK and Canada. Through observation of daily routines and semi-structured interviews, 124 journalists were included in the final sample. The overall aim of this research was to explore the interrelationships between new technologies, the potential autonomy accessible by journalists and the structure of constraints under which they operate. The news marketplace has become congested while audiences have fragmented and public news-producing behaviours have soared, facilitated through the ubiquity of new media. These developments were crucial to the analysis of mainstream news production within a media environment that has left news organisations struggling to retain audiences and their own credibility. New technologies adopted by news organisations have altered routines both within newsrooms and out in the field. News values have shifted towards 'live' coverage while workflow has been improved and convergence become the norm. At the same time, new media available within the public realm – including the internet, online publishing tools and advanced mobile phone technologies – are also available to individual journalists. However, it is those journalists already familiar with technology who are more likely to incorporate them into their own daily routines, along with the wider range of sources now available within the information producing strata of society.

Research findings relate to the specific locations in the news production process at which new technologies, journalistic autonomy and constraining factors have the most impact. For this purpose, a model was developed along with an autonomy-constraint ratio. Key findings are that the transmission phase of news production presents the least amount of autonomy for journalists while the newsgathering phase offers the greatest amount of autonomy. Due to the temporal and theoretical limits of previous research frameworks, an autonomy-centred approach is proposed as a means of complementing the existing constraints-based approaches that have tended to dominate news production studies.

**Keywords:** autonomy, citizen journalism, immediacy, new media, news production, user generated content.

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## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own independent work, except where otherwise stated. It has not been written or composed by another person and all sources have been appropriately acknowledged by giving explicit references. A detailed list of these references is appended.

I further declare that this work has not been previously submitted or accepted in substantially the same form for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.



## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

This is a study of television news production and the interrelationships between new technologies, the autonomy of journalists and the wider systems of constraints under which they operate. While previous production studies frequently highlighted the impact of constraining factors on the production of news, the influence of technological developments and the potential for journalistic autonomy provided the foundation upon which this research departs from prior research frameworks. This departure was related to the focus of much of previous work in the area that neglected the role of autonomy as well as the time frame within which major production studies were undertaken, which was the 1970s and 80s. The general research framework and conclusions of these major production studies were seen to influence much of the work that followed.

As a result of these factors, the present study sought to explore the nature of news production within what has been popularly termed the 'new media age.' Not only are news organisations producing news in a much more varied and crowded news marketplace, but they are producing news for audiences who consume it in different ways. As well, the wider public more generally has been slowly transforming in tandem with the increasing ubiquity and pervasiveness of new media. Both the terms 'new media' and 'new technologies' are employed within this research. The reason for this is that while 'new technologies' encompasses technological developments that have been adopted within newsrooms and out in the field as well as technological developments that are in the hands of the public, the latter are more commonly known collectively as 'new media.' Both journalists and the public have access to new media in the form of the internet, blogs, mobile phones, BlackBerrys and digital imaging technology. However, technological developments that have occurred within news organisations are also important to this study. These developments include the electronic delivery of news agency feeds, non-linear editing suites, server technology and transmission equipment such as sat phones and BGANs.

What is important in relation to technological developments is the ways in which the daily routines of journalists have been transformed as well as the news-producing behaviours of the public. The latter refers to the production of news-related material by citizens, either in the form of images and videos or text. Some of this production is sent directly to news organisations while the rest is typically published online for other purposes. While these news-producing behaviours have had an impact on the news production process, the key issue of concern is how all of these developments have impacted the news production process as a whole. More specifically, the aim of this study is to uncover the level of autonomy potentially accessible to journalists within their daily routines in relation to the level of constraints that function to manage the news that they produce. As such, it was important to incorporate the full range of positions within the hierarchies of news organisations as a means of assessing the interrelationships between new technologies, autonomy and constraint from varying perspectives.

The research methodology involved observations of newsroom activities and news production in the field as well as interviews with journalists. Eight mainstream news organisations were included in the sample, with fieldwork taking place in thirteen different locations within Canada and the United Kingdom. Overall, 124 journalists were involved in either observations or interviews.

In the final analysis, different phases of news production were categorized in relation to the degree of autonomy and constraints that was typically found within each phase. As well, the points at which technological developments had made the most significant impacts were assessed. Findings revealed that new technologies that had aided the ability to be 'live' and on location, combined with the increasing value assigned to immediacy, created conditions under which journalists at the base of the hierarchy (reporters and correspondents) experienced the lowest level of autonomy and the highest level of constraints. Production phases that were more balanced between autonomy and constraints included the input, selection and assignment and storywriting phase. The highest level of autonomy and the lowest level of constraints were found within the newsgathering phase of production. It was here that journalists at the base-level could employ new media within their daily routines in ways that increased their relative autonomy. Nevertheless, journalists who had a greater knowledge of new media and

superior technical skill sets were more likely to take advantage of the autonomy that was accessible within this production phase. On the whole, mid-level journalists were generally responsible for propagating professionalized norms and news values, largely initiated at the top-level, and also supervising base-level journalists while employing editorial control. While some mid-level journalists were openly critical of constraining factors – particularly within the realm of transmission – in practice conformity remained prominent.

This study begins with a historical overview of the research within the sociology of news production. The research framework of constraints is illustrated while the main arguments relating to the production of news are explored. It is within the context of this initial literature review that the results and final conclusions are discussed. Following the literature review, Chapter 3 offers a description of the methodological approach. The conceptual development of this research project is also discussed and the methods and sample are described in detail. As well, an explanation of the method of analysis is presented.

The fourth chapter provides an introduction to the four results chapters that follow it. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to expand upon the hierarchical structure of news organisations that is initially presented within the methodology chapter and offer a general overview of the path of a news item through the phases of news production. Key decision makers are also noted and differences between Canadian and UK news organisations are discussed along with differentiations between the various output platforms used by organisations within the sample. Following this, Chapter 5 is the first results chapter, which focuses on the intake phase of news production. This chapter is split into two main sections, describing first the traditional elements of news flow and then the contemporary elements which have developed out of public news-producing behaviours. Chapter 6 moves on to the next phase of news production which contains descriptions of the variety of base-level journalists (general assignment reporters, beat reporters and foreign correspondents) and their relationship to the selection and assignment phase. Also, processes of selection and assignment are explored and a final section is devoted to the news values that operate within today's news organisations. Newsgathering, storywriting and transmission phases are the subject of Chapter 7.

Varying forms of implicit and explicit control stemming from the mid- and top-level of the hierarchy are described in order to demonstrate their function within these production phases. The role of new media is also emphasized in this chapter, particularly in relation to newsgathering. As well, newsroom technologies that impact storywriting are included along with the impact of advancements within transmission technologies. Chapter 8 is the final results chapter, which focuses on external pressures. The role of audiences is highlighted within this chapter in relation to the means through which their needs and interests are judged, the rise of interactivity and the transformation of complaints. Discussions of other external pressures relate to governments and the public relations industry. The particular case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is considered in this context.

The final chapter involves a discussion of the results and final conclusions. The discussion centres on the development of the TAC model (technology-autonomy-constraints) and an associated autonomy-constraint ratio. It is through these devices that the overall results are analysed. Arguments derived from the initial literature review are then incorporated into the final conclusions of this research project. As well, suggestions for future research themes are offered.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter tracks the trajectory of research within the sociology of news production with the aim of illustrating the nature of the research frameworks that have generally been applied. The continued use of specific frameworks led to a focus on particular aspects of journalism practice as a means of identifying the most significant constraints on news production. With such a strong tendency to seek out constraining factors, research outcomes have been largely inconsistent with the way in which journalists themselves view news production; this is seen most clearly in their difficulty with accepting the conclusion by many production studies that news is manufactured and therefore a mere social construction, not 'reality' itself. At the same time, the daily choices journalists made within this overarching system of constraints lost prominence in these analyses. Essentially, then, much of previous research in this area overlooks the *potential* agency available to journalists within their daily routines. To be fair, research has implicitly highlighted the structural and ideological mechanisms that prevent journalists from exercising whatever degree of autonomy they do possess if their choices are deemed inappropriate by superiors (i.e. repeatedly straying from suggested story angles or otherwise mishandling stories) but this is only considered under the framework of constraints. Also, some of the more salient practices of disciplining or otherwise punishing journalists – for instance, 'blacklisting' offenders, systematic exclusion, etc. – have significantly decreased in importance since the rush of production studies in the 70s and 80s. Today's journalists may have greater autonomy within their daily routines and perhaps other approaches of infusing 'correct' newsroom ideology may still be at work (or even operating with greater force than previously suggested), but these conditions must be considered within the context of the current media environment. The increasingly crowded marketplace within which news organisations compete for audiences is also complicated by the fragmentation of audiences and the ubiquity of new media. Shifting public behaviours have led to an increase in documentation and online publication of damning reports of mainstream news coverage while new media tools have

transformed the ability to mobilize disconcerted audiences, leaving news organisations struggling to retain credibility. Journalists likely remain constrained by the traditionally described structural and ideological factors but they are also making room for the production of news by 'citizen journalists' and simultaneously responding to an environment in which the ability to publish and widely broadcast one's views has risen very dramatically as the costs to do so have decreased substantially. From this analysis, then, it should not be understood that investigations of the power inherent within traditional constraints are unhelpful to our understanding of news production; rather, this critique seeks to emphasize the necessity of also focusing on the autonomy that journalists can potentially employ within these constraints in an age where public news-producing behaviours have increased along with the ubiquity of new media tools and technological developments more generally.

This chapter offers an overview of the main issues explored within the news production literature base with the aim of illustrating the nature of news production. The depictions that follow are frequently limited in two ways: temporally due to the time period at which the large majority of research was conducted; and theoretically due to the predominant frameworks that continued to compel researchers to focus on constraining factors. It begins with a summary of two academic accounts that evaluate the literature available within the sociology of news production and a determination of the position of the main argumentative thread within their descriptions. This is followed by a depiction of the two main phases of news production research: (1) the 'gatekeeper' approach which focused on the issue of selection; and (2) the 'social organisation' approach which focused on the routinization of production practices more broadly. The next section illustrates how research exposed the nature of news as a social construction and not a 'mirror of reality' via the routinized efforts to plan news coverage in advance and the influence of logistical requirements on production as a whole. This is followed by a discussion on the 'information-producing strata' (i.e. those sources that operate within news production) along with the means through which production routines attempt to achieve the goals of impartiality and objectivity. An exploration of internal and external pressures follows, largely through researcher's analyses of editorial meetings as well as relationships between news organisations and the state. Next, those news values deemed most

significant to production are evaluated, leading to the final section about the means through which journalists consider their audience.

## 1. Schudson and McNair's Evaluations of the Literature

Since 1989 American sociologist Michael Schudson has been reviewing the literature within the broader area of the sociology of news and has published consecutive articles for each edition of *Mass Media and Society* that outline the different approaches that fall within this strand of research. In his most recent version (Schudson 2005: 18), the literature base is divided into four approaches: economic organization, political context, social organization and cultural. The first two were previously combined into a political-economic framework which was influenced by Marxist tendencies to highlight the role of economics first and political structures second. Through this analytical lens, considerations of the impact of ownership structures, the commercialization of news organisations and the increasing conglomeration<sup>1</sup> of mainstream outlets are prominent, while the influence of political contexts with respect to different approaches to government control over information, the conscious or unconscious acceptance and reaffirmation of the status quo and the 'cultural hegemony' of dominant groups in society are also studied. The majority of research specifically analysing the production component of television news – particularly the explosion of newsroom observation studies in the 70s and 80s – falls within Schudson's social organization approach. News as social construction is dominant here, along with a focus on the routinization of production, the crucial role of sources and ideological forces within the newsroom and their operation in the production of professionalized values, norms and attitudes. The last category, cultural approaches, considers the relationships between 'facts' and symbols in order to highlight the 'symbolic determinants' of news. Stereotypes, language issues, images and cultural explanations are explored, usually through content analysis. The body of this chapter will consider the constraining factors identified predominantly within the

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1 For instance, Bagdikian (2004: 3) has narrowed the number of corporations dominating American media to five global-dimension firms who collectively "own most of the newspapers, magazines, book publishers, motion picture studios, and radio and television stations in the United States."

framework of the social organization approach since the most influential research for the production of broadcast news lies within this domain.

Recently McNair (2006) has published his conclusions of the trajectory of this literature base as a whole, seeking to advance a paradigm shift away from 'control' and towards 'chaos.' In this way, the analytical focus would presumably shift "from the mechanisms of ideological control and domination to those of anarchy and disruption; to the possibilities allowed by an emerging *cultural chaos* for dissent, openness and diversity rather than closure, exclusivity and ideological homogeneity" (McNair 2006: vii, original emphasis). However, from McNair's vantage point, prior research is lumped into what he calls a 'control paradigm,' which essentially places Schudson's (2005) economic and political categories at the forefront of the perceived literature base to the detriment of other approaches that have also contributed to our understanding of news. Despite this, the 'control paradigm' is offered as inclusive of all of Schudson's categories. For instance, McNair (2006: 45) argues that the social organisation approach does not "deny the control paradigm, so much as relocate the mechanisms of control and dominance away from the ruling-class conspiracies observed by Chomsky and Herman to the more fluid interactions of media professionals going about their business." Here he agrees with Chomsky that the attempt by researchers "to explain control without the appearance of control was so woolly as to be meaningless" (McNair 2006: 45). However, other accounts have gone further in their attempt to deconstruct and offer more nuanced understandings of McNair's 'control paradigm.' In fact, The Glasgow University Media Group's notion of a 'contested space' parallels some of McNair's own arguments by highlighting the competing interests striving to "explain the world in ways which justify their own position" (Philo and Berry 2004: 95). However, instead of incorporating these accounts McNair draws largely on the Frankfurt School and the work of Marx and Engels and contrasts these decidedly pessimistic approaches with a 'pragmatic cultural optimism' that considers power as 'more fluid and fragile' and thereby less useful for elites who wish to control news content. Whereas the 'control paradigm' emphasizes structural constraints and is underpinned by economic determinacy, the 'chaos paradigm' acknowledges the *desire* for control on the part of elites, while suggesting that the performance, or exercise of control, is increasingly interrupted and disrupted by unpredictable eruptions and bifurcations arising from the impact of economic, political,

ideological and technological factors on the communication process. These lead to unplanned outcomes in media content: dissent from elite accounts of events rather than dominant ideology or bias; ideological competition rather than hegemony; increased volatility of news agendas; and this routinely, rather than exceptionally (McNair 2006: 3-4). While McNair's focus on 'chaos' leads us to believe that dissenting coverage occurs haphazardly, there is little room within the highly structured nature of mainstream news production to allow for it.

To McNair, the traditional constraining factors appear to have weakened over time as news production becomes subject to a chaotic factorial of influences. He also implicitly (and later explicitly) criticizes previous research for dismissing or otherwise rejecting anomalies in news content – coverage that does not conform to the 'control paradigm' – so as not to deter focus from their main arguments. For instance, the recurring critique that 'fundamental criticism' of state policies in mainstream news coverage is 'rare' and merely 'tokenistic' (McNair 2006: 37) is interpreted as an 'avoidance or dismissal' of these anomalous cases that, if they had instead been accepted, would supposedly extinguish the argument being presented. It is the case that some anomalous cases may have been depreciated in previous analyses yet this does not automatically diffuse the arguments of Chomsky and Herman (2002) nor Philo and Berry (2004). Both of these works were criticized by McNair, with the latter argued to have presented an analysis of news coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is out of context. In this case he also suggests that current affairs television provides another source of journalism consumed by audiences but neglected by Philo and Berry and cites output that appeared during the year after their study was published, purportedly as 'evidence' that 'explanatory, contextualising' broadcast journalism does indeed exist. It is indeed necessary to consider the breadth of material accessible to the public – including online sources – if one is to claim that public understanding of the conflict is severely damaged by the lack of 'in-depth, analytic and explanatory' material but Philo and Berry's methods focused only on news bulletins<sup>2</sup> and therefore their arguments did not generalize outside of the empirical evidence they had collected. Additionally, McNair condemns the lack of agency attributed

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2 And rightly so since television news bulletins were the "main source of information on world events for a large majority of the population" (Philo and Berry 2004: 200).

to audiences within the 'control paradigm' (consider, for instance, Chomsky's 'brainwashing under freedom') and within media effects research (although he neglects prior research<sup>3</sup> which has already noted the agency he claims has been ignored). McNair finally suggests that his chaos model "asserts the fundamental unpredictability of media effects, and the importance of context in assessing the range of potential meanings to be drawn from media messages" (2006: 49).

It is important to consider the details of McNair's propositions since they share at least one important aspect of the argument presented within this research – namely, the difficulty with the general focus of much of previous research on constraining factors. However, his 'control paradigm' does not accurately represent the range of constraint-based research within this area while the proposed 'chaos paradigm' inevitably continues to apply the framework of constraints. McNair attempts to deconstruct the level of control that elites now have at their disposal by focusing on the alleged non-linearity of the traditionally assessed 'media-power-society relationships.' Yet in doing so this approach remains fixated on the control mechanisms it wished to leave behind.

The limited instances of research which have focused more seriously on the notion of journalistic autonomy are dominated by the analysis of news content as opposed to production practices. As well, this research is typically characterized by a concentration on government control over the press and the specific degree of independence journalists have within their relationships with 'official sources,' all of which inevitably leads to a concentration on political news (for example, Bennett and Livingston 2003; also see other articles in the same issue of *Political Communication*). As a result, it is argued here that a new approach to news production research must emerge alongside the relatively stable categories described by Schudson (2005). In this way, research can focus on the instances of autonomy available to journalists within the controlling internal organisational constraints identified so prominently in past production research as well as the external structural controls that seek to manage news production.

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3 See, for instance, Philo (2001).

## 2. The Two Phases of Research: An Obsession with Constraints

The study of production processes has largely been undertaken with the underlying aim of revealing the most significant reasons for problematic news output (i.e. lack of context, background and history; high dependence on official sources; support for the status quo serving as a distraction from underlying social, political and economic issues). Therefore, the study of production has largely been a proxy through which greater understanding of potential biases in the content of mainstream news could take place. As such, research has largely neglected the means through which journalists acting within the system of constraints are capable of influencing news output.

Apart from Weber (1946 [1921]), Park (1922) and Hughes (1940) who considered some issues relevant to the sociology of news production,<sup>4</sup> the first phase of research took place in the 1950s and focused solely on issues of selection: why were particular news items passed on for inclusion in news output while other news items were ignored? Essentially, this approach recognised that audiences are not privy to the entire range of news events that occur in the world; instead, news is merely a selection of those items deemed worthy enough to be shared with audiences. This was an important first point of departure for news production research since it showcased elements of human nature inherent within news production that equated to the recognition of news as a value-laden, cultural product.

Initially this led to a focus on 'gatekeepers': those newswriters whose position entailed presiding over a 'gate' which minimized the flow of news entering the news organisation and optimized those items passed along. To investigate gatekeepers, researchers asked editors to save pieces of wire copy that had been discarded throughout the normal news day and give reasons for each rejection. The most famous of gatekeeper studies is that of White's (1964) investigation of 'Mr. Gates,' a wire editor of a morning newspaper in the United States. White and others in this methodological strain (Flegel and Chaffee 1971;

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4 Schudson (2005) identifies these three writers as representative of the initial academic approach in this area and considers the 'gatekeeper' studies as the next step. He very briefly mentions the following contributions from Weber, Park and Hughes: "the social standing of the journalist as a political person ... the US immigrant press and news itself as a form of knowledge ... [and] an early study of human interest stories" (Schudson 2005: 173).

Snider 1967; Warner 1970) ultimately highlighted the role of individual values of newswriters as a crucial factor in the determination of news output: “Through studying his overt reasons for rejecting news stories from the press associations we see how highly subjective, how based on the ‘gatekeeper’s’ own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations the communication of ‘news’ really is” (White 1964: 171). In these analyses, making the news was essentially akin to processing information and therefore the most important stage was considered to be the selection of those items worthy enough for inclusion out of the volume of information inputted into the news organisation. Therefore, the gatekeeper’s individual preferences and prejudices constituted a key value set that was seen as playing a large role in selection, subjectively constructing the entire process. Geiber (1956) also took on White’s methodology, but he found selection to be quite similar between editors. He emphasized the stronger gatekeeping presence of the wire agencies<sup>5</sup> and, importantly, the bureaucratic pressures within the newsroom that encouraged editors to focus on the ‘goals of production.’ The latter conclusion coincides with the ‘task-oriented’ nature of news production that was highlighted in the next phase of research as the routinization of journalism practice.

Following these analytical frameworks, research generally shifted towards the study of a more complete image of the production process than the narrow vision held by gatekeeper studies wherein the ‘terminal gate’<sup>6</sup> was privileged.<sup>7</sup> At this point methodological approaches shifted and researchers began gaining access to newsrooms and observing the inner workings of the entire process while also interviewing newswriters. This led to detailed accounts of the full range of production processes – excluding the upper-most level of editorial meetings<sup>8</sup> (Epstein 1973; Fishman 1980; Gans 1980; Gitlin 1980; Golding and Elliott 1979; Schlesinger 1987; Sigelman 1973; Tuchman 1978). These accounts presented a wealth of information and insight into the inner workings of news organisations and offered indications as to the most significant factors

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5 The terms wire agencies and news agencies are used interchangeably.

6 White (1964: 171) referred to this position as the “terminal ‘gate’ in the complex process of communication.”

7 Research has continued within the gatekeeper framework, either in the form of revisions to White’s original model or in application of the concept in the context of the internet and online news. For instance, Poor (2006) describes how public figures can avoid the traditional gatekeeper by going online even though the gatekeeper remains important for processes of identity verification and access control.

8 For instance, meetings chaired by the BBC’s Director General or Editor of News and Current Affairs, etc.

that limit news output. As such, this literature review focuses on the outcomes of this body of research while highlighting the traditional constraining factors that framed their accounts.

### **3. News as Social Construction: Exposed through Routines**

What appears to be a key aim of much of this research was the desire to expose as myth the notion that news is merely a reflection of reality, composed of random and unpredictable events fixed by the external world. To this end, Epstein (1973) explored the 'mirror metaphor' that many journalists clearly subscribed to. While speaking to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, NBC Vice-President Robert D. Kasmire professed that "There is no doubt that television is, to a large degree, a mirror of society. It is also a mirror of public attitudes and preferences" (Epstein 1973: 13). Similarly, Golding and Elliott drew on journalist John Whale's 1970 description to demonstrate the mirror analogy at work: "Our product is put together by large and shifting groups of people, often in a hurry, out of an assemblage of circumstances that is never the same twice. Newspapers and news programmes could almost be called random reactions to random events" (Whale 1970, cited in Golding and Elliott 1979: 6). As well, during a House committee testimony, CBS President Frank Stanton declared, "What the media do is to hold a mirror up to society and try to report it as faithfully as possible" (Epstein 1973: 13-4).

Despite these claims, Epstein (1973: 16) disposed of the analogy: "A mirror makes no decisions, it simply reflects what occurs in front of it." If these journalists were correct, news production would not involve decisions about news angles or modes of presentation nor would policy ever subvert the reflected image. However, journalists consistently found difficulty with the idea that news was manufactured (Golding and Elliott 1979) and, as one journalist told Schlesinger (1987: 47), it was "surprising to find there's a grand design." Schudson (2005: 173) further elaborates on this point, trying to capture what 'news as social construction' is meant to imply:

In the most elementary way, this is obvious. Journalists write the words that turn up in the papers or on the screen as stories. Not government officials, not cultural forces, not 'reality' magically transforming itself into alphabetic signs,

but flesh-and-blood journalists literally compose the stories we call news. Journalists make the news just as carpenters make houses and scientists make science.

However, after 16 years of revising his analysis of the state of the sociology of news, Schudson (2005: 172) admits that journalists may have had a point and thus rejects the argument that “social, cultural, political and economic factors separately or together can explain why news is the way it is.” These factors may help shape those ‘institution-driven’ news events (i.e. press conferences, interviews, etc.) that *are* in fact “directly created by journalists or by other people acting with journalists in mind” (Schudson 2005: 173), but Schudson suggests that social scientists must begin viewing news more inclusively by considering those events that are not directly created by journalists (i.e. hurricanes, tornados, murders, etc. that are commonly referred to as ‘event-driven’ news<sup>9</sup>). Still, even these events have been shown to be very heavily constructed in terms of news values (Glasgow University Media Group 1993).

Nevertheless, researchers within this phase in the trajectory generally proceeded with the task of analysing news as a social construction, determined by decisions made within an organisational setting. This led to an intense focus on the routinization of production as the most significant constraint on news output. Within the production of news, researchers identified and emphasized their discovery of a “strongly patterned, repetitive and predictable work routine” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 83). In order to manage the volume of assorted incoming information, some form of organisation and structure was deemed necessary. Through the exposure of these patterned routines, they were able to demonstrate that news is very predictable – in fact, “[t]he more predictable an event, the more likely it will be covered” (Epstein 1973: 146) – and is a direct result of routinized procedures, rules and policies that enable the fulfilment of organisational needs. With such a dominance of routinization in the adopted research framework, value sets of individuals still influence some (largely minor) elements within the production process, but ultimately were not considered as crucial a factor as previous research had suggested. Therefore, news production research developed towards the examination of a broader

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9 The rise of event-driven news, as documented by Livingston (2003) and Lawrence (2000), has influenced Schudson’s perspective here.

image of the communication process, yet one still limited by its predetermined notions of constraints and thereby assumed desires to locate those deemed most significant.

### **3.1 Planning Routines: Relevance of the News Diary**

The detailed accounts of newsroom practice offered by this analytical framework that centralized the routine dimension of news production provided a vivid image of those routines deemed particularly significant. Researchers described the planning that takes place via the news diary, stressing how the very existence of the diary and its relevance for news production subverts the common journalistic view of production as unpredictable, random reactions to events. The news diary represents a listing of future events considered potentially worthy of inclusion in the day's news output. Golding and Elliott viewed it as a record of "predictable events that automatically merit coverage by their unquestionable public importance [and] also a register of less significant events vying for inclusion in the 'automatic' category" (1979: 93). Adopting a similar perspective, Schlesinger described typical diary items as "staples of reporting: news conferences, demonstrations, meetings between unions and employers, the publication of government reports, House of Commons business, Royal comings and goings, sport and so on" (1987: 67). These types of events are performances designed for the media and fall under the categories of pseudo-events, as identified by Boorstin (1964), and institution-driven news. Advanced diaries were also described, along with varying other events lists dependent upon different organisational settings. Through the picture elucidated within these academic studies, production was dependent upon the diary to a large extent and thereby these planning procedures acted as constraining mechanisms since they "list the bulk of each day's likely output" (Schlesinger 1987: 56). Epstein indicated the level of dependence on pre-planned news items that existed within these organisations: "at NBC there was at least one day's advance warning from the 'news makers' on 90 percent of the stories used on the evening news. Wholly unpredictable events, such as natural disasters, accidents and crimes accounted for less than 2 percent of the filmed stories" (1973: 31).

### 3.2 The Importance of Logistics

What is also included in the diary is logistical information: staff availability at home and abroad, details of crews<sup>10</sup> and equipment, schedules for feeding in reports and times at which material from abroad via satellites and other arrangements (e.g. Eurovision link-ups) are accessible. This information was seen as incredibly important to any news organisation since logistical requirements are intrinsically linked to time and space considerations, as well as financial concerns. Logistics routinely became a crucial factor in decision-making processes and therefore could be the sole determinants as to whether a news item would progress through the production process and continue on as a potential story for inclusion or be readily dismissed. This is especially the case for broadcast news as opposed to radio or print media because the difficulty of logistics and the pressure of time are major impediments said to be constantly at the top of newswriters'<sup>11</sup> minds, requiring serious consideration. Stories written for newspaper or radio coverage could be put together within a few minutes and dispatched to the appropriate office through the wires and interviews quickly accomplished via telephone. Television news, on the other hand, required "hours, if not days, of lead time to realize a film story of even a minute's duration" (Epstein 1973: 133). In order for a story to reach the final state that audiences see during the news broadcast, the following steps needed to occur: an "appropriate camera crew and correspondent must be dispatched to the scene of the event, equipment set up, the story photographed; then the film must be processed, edited, narrated and returned for projection" (Epstein 1973: 133). Thus, the magic number 'six' tended to be divulged by editors and producers; that is, at least six hours were required from the assignment of news crews to stories to the final rundown and broadcast (Epstein 1973). However, these six hours did not take into account stories that were assigned to locations outside of the regular working area of camera crews.

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10 Golding and Elliott (1979: 98) described these constraints inherent within crews assembled for the production of broadcast news: "at its most cumbersome [a crew] involves a full team of reporter, cameraman, sound-man, lighting man and associated equipment which cannot possibly be as mobile or flexible as one man and a note pad."

11 These decisions tended to be made by more senior members of the newsroom, such as the Executive Producer.

Since media organisations are also businesses that need to consider their available budgets, the number of camera crews they employed was equivalent to the number of stories needed to satisfy their news bulletin each day. As an assignment editor for NBC explained to Epstein, “we regularly only have nine or ten crews a day assigned to domestic news, and we need a minimum of nine or ten stories to feed the news shows” (1973: 32). Economic logic trumped the search for news and promoted what the aforementioned assignment editor termed coverage of ‘routinized events.’ Choosing between two news items of a similar newsworthy status, assignment editors would consider the extra cost and time that would necessitate covering a story outside of the organisation’s regular ‘beat.’ However, if logistical arrangements coincidentally aligned themselves with a story of some potential worth, the item may be included:

For example, twenty journalists all agreed that the three policemen who were accidentally injured on the Isle of Man whilst watching the TT races were not worth allocating a crew for, but if a crew had already been there then the accident would have been covered (ITN programme editor, 12.30 p.m. News). (Harrison 2000: 110)

In addition, predictable news, in direct opposition to the journalistic mythology of ‘digging’ for news, was seen as much safer and cost-effective since the act of sending a news crew to the event’s location would be sure to yield a story: “To cover the more uncertain news happenings would require additional film crews and correspondents, above the minimum necessary to produce the requisite diet of filmed stories, and would thus involve an additional cost to the organization” (Epstein 1973: 32). Returning to the faulty mirror analogy, Epstein reminded us that “[w]hat is reflected on television as national news depends, unlike a ‘mirror,’ on certain predecisions about where camera crews and correspondents will be assigned” (1973: 16).

Collectively, all of these logistical considerations acted as important restraints on news production and therefore limited the range of news stories that audiences would learn about within a televised news bulletin. As well, time and space operated in similar ways since broadcast news bulletins generally ran anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour in length and these pressures inevitably contributed to an increased selection of predictable or ‘sure-fire’ news items: “The limitations of time, space and deadlines are often used by

reporters to justify their decision not to explore other avenues of enquiry or consult other than the most predictable of sources of information” (Williams and Miller 1998: 155). Not only did these constraints restrict the number of items in a bulletin but they also severely limited the number of seconds allotted to each item. Typical criticisms of lack of background, context and history in news coverage are arguably balanced by these limitations.

#### **4. The Information-Producing Strata**

There is much more to producing the news than determining how much space each item can devour within a bulletin. Sources were considered to be indispensable elements within the news production process for multiple reasons: they operate within the information supply mechanism; they are viewed as a means of achieving objectivity; and official sources that conform to the routines established within the news production process are rewarded for their efforts. The supply of information into the newsroom was deemed a highly significant factor in the production of news since popular notions of journalism as largely investigative with reporters ‘digging’ and uncovering important information (as opposed to being given stories to package<sup>12</sup>) were rare forms of broadcast journalism. This is why Golding and Elliott (1979: 169) considered broadcast news to be “a passive reflection of the information provided for it by the information-producing strata in society and by its own gathering mechanisms.” They considered both sources of information to be ‘severely restricted.’ Previous production studies focused on what was then a much narrower ‘information-producing strata’ of society. Information was made available to newsrooms via news agencies, newspapers, radio, invitations, press releases, advertising hand-outs, newsfilm agencies and through the occasional ‘tip-off’ from correspondents or members of the public. All of these bits of information were sorted and those deemed potentially newsworthy were entered into the diary.

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12 The term ‘package’ refers to a news story that is produced completely before being broadcast and typically includes an introduction, bridge, stand-up and conclusion. Therefore, during the broadcast, the package will simply be played on air without a ‘live’ element. A bridge refers to a transition between different segments of a news item and a stand-up involves the explanation of some element within the news item by the reporter (who appears on camera).

## 4.1 The Reign of News Agencies

News agencies dominated both the supply of information into newsrooms and the items that ended up in the final product. This dominance follows logically from the news agencies' "primary *raison d'être* [which] is, after all, to spread costs in the collection and distribution of foreign news" (Golding and Elliott 1979: 99) since the cost of sending foreign correspondents easily surpassed the cost of agency subscriptions. This dependence on news agencies was (and remains) very great. An ABC national editor told Epstein, "Without the wire services, we'd be dead" (1973: 141). Similarly, "[n]oting the lack of in-house research facilities at NBC, Robert MacNeil termed 'the dependence on the wires ... almost total'" (Epstein 1973: 142). Considering that Epstein calculated that 70% of NBC's news output was from the wires, it is understandable why "assignment editors readily acknowledge that they rely heavily on the wire services for information about possible stories" (1973: 141). Such dominance and dependence translated into an agenda-setting function for news agencies, highlighting themes of importance and stories that merit automatic coverage. Both the selection of stories and their treatment was "influenced by the sheer authority of the agencies" (Harris 1976, cited in Golding and Elliott 1979: 105).<sup>13</sup> Golding and Elliott (1979: 105) further developed this function:

Agency coverage alerts the newsrooms to world news events, and it is around this knowledge that newsrooms build their own coverage. So even those newsrooms able to send out teams to foreign stories will depend on agency selection for notice of which stories to consider. The agencies are thus an early warning service for newsrooms whose actions are determined by the observations in agency wires.

However, a gatekeeper – as described in the initial phase of news production research – was needed to sift through the stream of agency tape to make it more manageable before any items were added to the diary. Describing his job, a 'copy taster' said, "All the news in the world comes into this tray. I read it and discard 90 per cent. 10 per cent isn't an arbitrary figure, you know: what's worthy of consideration I offer" (Schlesinger 1987: 60). Success to a 'copy taster' was the ability to 'keep the flow down' so as not to

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13 Recall also Geiber's (1956) gatekeeping study that had already shed light on the dominance of news agencies within the communication process.

overburden the editors who would act as the next gatekeepers. Clearly the focus here was the reduction of news, not ‘digging’ or ‘investigating.’ Even more, the information-producing strata – particularly the wire agencies as they are dominant – acted in conjunction with the economic logic of news production to further restrict that which was captured by journalists’ mythical mirror. This is because the supply of information offered ready-made stories that fit the stereotypical news values of news organisations. For instance, a reporter from Ireland’s Radio Telefis Eireann (RTE) provided an example:

It’s easier to cover the world, give a precis [sic] of world events, but a housing scandal in a large town 70 miles from Dublin doesn’t get covered. We might give some coverage to the death of a Japanese Prime Minister whom the people don’t know about. It’s easier and cheaper because we’re linked into the infrastructure of world communication. (Golding and Elliott 1979: 125)

Homogeneity of news coverage between news organisations became inevitable since only a handful of news agencies provided the foundation for foreign coverage. “The tyranny of supply is nowhere clearer than in this dependence” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 105). Boyd-Barrett and Thussu examined the system of international news flow from the inception of these agencies, concluding that there was still only a few powerful agencies supplying news, “sitting at the top of or in the centre of a complex nexus of exchange-plus-cash arrangements” (1992: 1). Media organisations were even reliant upon news agencies for “news of their own geopolitical regions” (Boyd-Barrett and Thussu 1992: 1). The situation was seen as much more serious for developing nations that attempted to project their image abroad in the midst of this highly structured and organized ‘system of international newsgathering and supply.’

## **4.2 The Emergence of VNRs**

A somewhat more recent development also pertains to both the availability of ‘ready-made’ stories offered to news organisations and to yet another practice that is favourable to the economic logic of news production: video news releases (VNRs). This pre-packaged news item looks just like any other story seen on television news, but the crucial difference is that it originates through the relationship between an organised group that wants to promote its interests and a public relations firm. Major corporations easily make use of VNRs; they simply hire a public relations firm, identify the image or message they

wish to portray, wait for the public relations firm to manufacture the VNR and submit the pre-packaged, ready-to-use story to any media organisation. This procedure benefits the media organisation since they save costs otherwise spent on producing a story, while public relations firms benefit from the payment they receive and corporations benefit from getting their message across in a very sophisticated manner. Media organisations frequently do not mention who commissioned the VNR nor the fact that a public relations firm manufactured it.<sup>14</sup> Governments have also made use of this means of influence and it was shown that the Bush administration had recently been relying quite heavily on the use of VNRs in an effort to ‘generate positive news coverage’:

‘Thank you, Bush. Thank you, U.S.A.,’ a jubilant Iraqi-American told a camera crew in Kansas City for a segment about reaction to the fall of Baghdad. A second report told of ‘another success’ in the Bush administration’s ‘drive to strengthen aviation security’; the reporter called it ‘one of the most remarkable campaigns in aviation history.’ A third segment, broadcast in January, described the administration’s determination to open markets for American farmers.

To a viewer, each report looked like any other 90-second segment on the local news. In fact, the federal government produced all three. (Barstow and Stein 2005)

Even the supposed ‘reporters’ in VNRs occasionally use false names since they are actually public relations professionals, which was the case in the second report above. While Cameron and Blount (1996) argue that VNRs are ‘heavily edited or truncated’ when used in news bulletins, Barstow and Stein (2005) argue more recently that media organisations are so willing to accept VNRs that news staff even make use of the public relation firm’s ‘suggested lead-in’ while introducing the story that is carefully manufactured to appear similar to the rest of the stories on their programme. Certainly the use of pre-packaged information like VNRs is not in the interests of objectivity and does not represent reporting that considers all sides of the story without offering evaluative criteria to any. A brief glance at the quotes from VNRs listed above will demonstrate that they have the potential to be value-laden, thereby tending to promote

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14 Examples of VNRs can be viewed here: <http://www.prwatch.org/fakenews/findings/vnrs>.

the interests of only those groups in society that have the financial ability to hire public relations firms to manage and disseminate messages that are in their interests.

### **4.3 The Requirements of Objectivity and Impartiality**

Despite the more recent investigations of public relations<sup>15</sup> and VNRs in particular, the conception of news production offered from the second phase of research permitted the argument that deliberate manipulation of news output by journalists is “largely irrelevant” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 17). This argument is generally derived from professionalized values, norms and practices that are routinized into journalism practice and illustrated within social organisation approaches to the sociology of news production. Broadcast journalists in particular<sup>16</sup> were said to subscribe to the demands of objectivity and impartiality and the routines of production encourage practices that are meant to achieve them. In this way, we are asked to “distinguish bias as the deliberate aim of journalism, which is rare, from bias as the inevitable but unintended consequence of organisation” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 207). In some countries regulatory bodies fulfil a watchdog function in an effort to ensure objectivity and impartiality expectations are met. For instance, in the United States the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) attempted to ensure that broadcasters subscribe to the ‘Fairness Doctrine’ (abolished since 1987) which demanded the presentation of “contrasting viewpoints on every controversial issue of public importance” (Epstein 1973: 63). While Epstein explained that the Fairness Doctrine did not apply to foreign news, it did interfere with decision-making in the production process more generally when a reporter appeared to become an advocate for a particular position. For instance, an American reporter was in such a situation when producing a documentary on firearm ownership but inevitably also exposing the power of the National Rifle Association lobby in pressuring Congress as a means of preventing the passing of bills restricting ownership (Epstein 1973: 68).

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15 For more information regarding the activities of public relations and especially the great increase in PR professionals see Miller (2000).

16 In opposition to the generally accepted practice of partisanship by most newspapers, television news is expected to appear impartial and objective; although the same values are found within ‘instrumental myths’ of some newspapers that have been studied (Sigelman 1973: 133).

Notwithstanding the watchdog capacity of domestic regulatory bodies, objectivity and impartiality were emphasized as values held dear by broadcast news organisations.<sup>17</sup> These two expectations are not synonymous and thus in practice are ‘achieved’ in differing ways. Schlesinger explained that the BBC’s commitment to impartiality became equated with independence from ‘all interests’: “The news is therefore held to represent all interests and points of view without an evaluative commitment to *any*” (1987: 163-64). However, even the BBC’s *Principles and Practices* guidelines illustrate that despite their general claims of impartiality, they still “cannot be neutral in the struggle between truth and untruth, justice and injustice, freedom and slavery, compassion and cruelty, tolerance and intolerance” (Principles and Practice 1972:8, cited in Schlesinger 1987: 165). Some critics have viewed broadcast coverage as a complete failure when considering its commitment to the requisites of impartiality. For instance, in the 1960s veteran BBC producer Norman Swallow colourfully highlighted the extent to which broadcasting in both the UK and the US has no claim to impartiality since the coverage is:

... anti-Fascist, anti-Communist, opposed to racial intolerance and violent crime, highly critical of the governments of the USSR, Communist China, Cuba, Spain, Portugal, South Africa, and Eastern Europe, Christian (especially in Britain) but tolerant of agnostics, friendly towards surviving monarchies, hostile to most social and political cranks, suspicious of professional politicians (but nevertheless enticing them into their studios as often as possible), and supporters of ‘the wind of change’ so long as it never reaches gale force. (Swallow 1966:19-20, cited in Schlesinger 1987: 166)

One might conclude similar remarks in the 21st Century albeit within frameworks more pertinent to today’s social, political and economic climate. Nevertheless, Schlesinger (1987: 12) claimed that broadcast journalists believe in their organisation’s commitment to impartiality since in their minds its rejection delegitimizes their activity. Journalists have been known to consider the reception of complaints from ‘both sides’ of the audience as signifying empirical ‘proof’ that impartiality has been attained. An example of this comes from the public information department at CNN:

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17 In fact, these values are said to derive from the origins of news agencies (Schlesinger 1987: 46).

If you ring up, for instance, and say, '[You] had a piece which was so pro-Zionist, I don't know why you and all your offices don't just go and live in Israel,' I can almost guarantee you that the next caller will be somebody saying, 'You are so pro-Arab, are [you] the paymasters for some Arab nation?' [But] we always feel that if we get complaints from both sides then we must be doing something right. (Flournoy and Stewart 1997: 188)

Objectivity, on the other hand, is a much broader demand than that which impartiality's 'disinterested approach' imposes on news production. Golding and Elliott (1979: 207) defined it as "a complete and unrefracted capture of the world" while correspondents have sometimes equated the practice to "telling both sides of a story" (Epstein 1973: 67). Inevitably, though, most researchers claim that objectivity is impossible since merely considering the role of selection in news production is enough to realise that subjective judgements are involved. Harrison (2000: 144) decisively rejects any claims to objectivity since "news by its nature is value-laden" and, drawing on Gans' (1980) research, she cites the 'omissions' resulting from editing and selecting processes as practices that may imply particular judgments, while also pointing out how pressures – both internal and external – further complicate attempts at objectivity, as do 'powerful and efficient sources.' All of these factors are considered important constraints within the news production process and are repetitively identified and stressed by researchers in this area.

#### **4.4 The Relationship between Objectivity and Sources**

Retaining the emphasis on routines as the most significant determinant of news output, research tended to highlight the journalistic practices that became structured within the organisation via either policies or professionalized norms that aimed to achieve a semblance of objectivity. In this way, journalists felt compelled to make use of sources within their construction of news stories as opposed to any attempts to ascertain facts on their own (Ericson 1998). Even if they wanted to, it has been argued that journalists "rarely have the resources or access to penetrate their sources' informational worlds to establish facts independently" (Ericson 1998: 1). Furthermore, an important link between journalistic conceptions of objectivity and their use of sources can be found in the value placed on obtaining quotations or sound bites: "By interjecting someone else's opinion, [journalists] believe they are removing themselves from participation in the story, and they are letting the 'facts' speak" (Tuchman 1972: 668).

While the criteria that journalists draw on when selecting particular sources has not received much academic attention, Steele (1997: 83-84) argued that journalists seek out and make use of 'unofficial' sources (as opposed to government officials or institutional spokesmen) on the basis of "a complex interplay among journalists' understanding of newsworthiness, their narrowly operational definition of expertise, and the values they choose to structure or 'frame' individual stories." On the other hand, much more attention is devoted to the strong dependency on official sources within news production. A study of news bias in the United States found that journalists were highly dependent upon government and institutional sources in their news coverage (accounting for two-fifths of all sources); also, federal sources were used four times more frequently than state and local sources, and the President or his spokesperson was the "single most frequently appearing news source" (Whitney et al. 1989: 170). Even within a more recent context where technological developments have improved access for journalists covering international events, official sources remain dominant within the sources selected (Livingston and Bennett 2003). This frequent use of official sources is yet another practice that was used to demonstrate how far news production is from a mere reflection of reality. Golding and Elliott highlighted this view of journalism by arguing that broadcasting is "highly dependent on the news-producing groups in society, whose values and cultural definitions it inevitably reproduces and relays" (1979: 18). More recently, Harrison (2000: 145) reinforced their argument, equating 'reliable sources' with official spokesmen who tend to "reinforce, not challenge, the status quo." She reiterated the observation that journalists meet objectivity obligations by relying upon 'official' sources – and their 'official' explanations or story-telling formulas – to form the basis of their coverage, and suggested that "[i]nstead of reporting the approved version of events and issues journalists should try to find out if the source is actually telling the truth, otherwise what is passed off for objectivity is a mindless acceptance of other people's views and not the truth" (Harrison 2000: 146).

Credibility, reliability and trust all factor into decisions regarding the use of particular sources. However, official sources largely acquired all of these characteristics simply by being official. As Golding and Elliott explained, "[l]eaders and elites were not only available, they expected to be used and to make news. They had no doubt that their views and actions were important" (1979: 200). Epstein (1973) claimed that journalists

ask 'Who is involved?' much more regularly than 'What is going to happen?' This tendency leads to the development of 'mental lists' of the rankings of individual 'news makers,' said to be inferred "from producer and executive preferences" (Epstein 1973: 144). Even in the context of conflict reporting official sources are dominant. After much debate over the role of the US media in the influence of public opinion during the last stages of the Vietnam War, Hallin (1986) pointed out that journalists were merely following practices that had been routinized within their organisations – namely that they relied primarily on two kinds of official sources (government officials and American soldiers in the field). However, they were doing so at a time when government sources were deeply divided. Therefore, in times of political consensus, journalists were considered likely to act 'responsibly' towards the political establishment and refrain from questioning dominant political perspectives. Alternatively, journalists "become more detached or even adversarial" in times of political conflict, although they still "normally will stay well within the bounds of the debate" (Hallin 1986: 10).

Source-media relationships are even more complex and interactive when considering the advantages that sources can achieve through 'good working relationships.' Miller and Williams (1998) explained how consultative relationships can develop, with journalists inadvertently helping sources negotiate their best media strategy, particularly with respect to the timely release of material. Alternatively, the media can set agendas, campaign for policy changes and highlight issues otherwise unfamiliar to the source. Journalists also tended to develop relationships with both official and unofficial sources in order to establish trust, obtain information quickly when a story breaks and be kept informed of new developments. "The relationship is an exchange, the source providing candour, perhaps exclusively to just one reporter, as well as privy information, in return for reliable coverage and discretion" (Golding and Elliott 1979: 100-01). Note that both parties benefit from this relationship and the journalist may lose a source if the resulting coverage is not favourable. This pressure has the potential to influence the way a reporter might frame coverage or which quotes are chosen to describe an event.

Such relationships leave objectivity on unstable ground and the extreme form of these relationships was exemplified in Britain's 'lobby system.' The 'lobby system' is specific to Britain and has been criticized by many yet continues to survive: "[i]t is a system in which

favoured correspondents are given private and confidential briefings, mainly by the Prime Minister's press secretary and by other ministers" (Glasgow University Media Group 1985: 1). These favoured correspondents are given privileged access to white papers and government documents but are always under threat of losing their lobby privileges if they break any rules. The Glasgow Media Group (1985: 1) argued that the lobby system is detrimental to news coverage since "instead of encouraging investigation it produces a reliance on the government to provide pre-packaged information." The continued use of the lobby system and heavy reliance on official sources may slant news coverage in favour of the interests of the state. The practice of permitting these sources to 'speak for themselves' while neglecting other perspectives and/or sources in the coverage of a news item does not live up to the ideals of impartiality nor objectivity.

#### **4.5 Official Sources and Production Routines**

Beyond discussions of impartiality and objectivity, official sources are said to sustain their privileged position simply by organising their activities in ways that match the routines of news production. For instance, news conferences are announced in advance – which is to be expected since without the media to document them they would cease to exist. Fishman put it best when he said, "the world is bureaucratically organized for journalists" (1980: 51). While he was referring more specifically to 'beats,' this could easily be extended to include official sources more generally as their means of accommodating newsroom routines have certainly enabled greater coverage. As detailed in the above section concerning the planning activities of news organisations and the existence of the diary, many of the conditions attached to selection criteria are a result of economic logic. Therefore, the ability of official sources to offer potential items in advance, provide facilities for newsgathering equipment at the venue, ensure good lighting for cameras and so on have all acted to ensure that the 'bureaucratically organized' world of journalists is full of news makers that likely require some level of media exposure to fulfil their own interests. In these ways, news production "tends to favor organizations and news makers who are more aware of the needs of network news and schedule their news conferences, speeches and hearings accordingly, over those whose proceedings are not primarily set to accommodate the media" (Epstein 1973: 148). The same is true for professionals working within the public relations industry who not only produce material for inclusion in news

coverage but also produce flak in response to it. Unfortunately, this 'world' has not been easily accessible to the average person or group with less economic resources. This limits the range of diverse voices that public service definitions of the role of the media consider essential for a working democracy.

## **5. Internal and External Pressures**

Another category of constraints highlighted by researchers that operate in the management of news relate to pressures that either originate internally, in the sense of ideological 'directions' on story treatments and top-down policy directives, or externally, in the sense of government pressure and direct intervention. Policy directives from the senior-most elements of a news organisation represented the most explicit forms of internal pressure while much more subtle means were accomplished via editorial meetings, 'directions' given to reporters regarding story treatment and the editing process itself. Maintaining the framework of constraints, research stressed the means through which journalists conform to such pressures. The process through which external pressures became infused into the practice of internal pressure was also a key point. As such, the actions of lobby groups, governments and any other well-organised flak-producing group were discussed in relation to attempts to compel organisations to comply with their suggestions for coverage or otherwise accommodate demands. Apart from this, governments were also said to play a role in the system of constraints either very directly or more subtly, depending on the topic of dispute and the nature of the broadcaster-state relationship. Descriptions and examples of the operation of internal constraints offered within previous research are considered first, followed by related means through which external pressures become part of routinized practices. Reasons offered for journalistic conformity to these pressures are detailed next before turning to analysis of the media-state relationship.

### **5.1 Policy, Routinized Meetings and Editorial Control**

Direct, internal influence over the production of news by top-level newswriters, including owners, occurred through actions such as sending 'memos' questioning coverage and framing of particular events. For example, Robert Kintner, the President of

the NBC network in the United States, “wrote up to ‘35 memos ... in a two-day period’ to the head of his news division,” asking why specific news stories were carried and making other comments on the news (Epstein 1973: 74). Kintner’s actions could have been the result of his personal values, his perceived sense of the audience’s preferences, external pressure, or the supervision of the implementation of policy. Epstein (1973: 255) provided a further example of this process at work, highlighting NBC’s policy for coverage of student protests:

As a rule, assignment editors would not assign a camera crew to a student protest unless the police had already been called in or a violent riot was already in progress. They explained that this was not only because network crews are a scarce resource and usually assigned to scheduled events, but also because network policy prevented them from dispatching a crew to a situation in which it might either precipitate a riot – as a camera crew on campus conceivably might do – or where it would advertise a planned protest.

It was clear from this example that the context of news events had an impact on policy-making. In other contexts, policies have had the reverse effect, urging camera crews to capture the event. For instance, the victory parade organised for the homecoming of British troops after the end of the 1982 Falklands War involved a high level of media coverage (Glasgow University Media Group 1985).

Beyond the more explicit form of internal pressures, one particular avenue existed as a means of more subtly “transmitting editorial judgements” (Schlesinger 1987: 50): the editorial meeting (also known as ‘editorial conference’ or ‘morning meeting’). Golding and Elliott emphasized how the routine of meeting each morning promoted the manufacture of news in predictable ways. They described these meetings as

... gatherings of variable formality which ritually celebrate the limited discretion involved in news selection [and] signify ... the degree to which news is arranged and selected *a priori* [while] their repetitiveness from day to day and limited outcome point up the unchanging nature of these *a priori* choices. (Golding and Elliott 1979: 93)

These daily meetings were chaired by those with access to the highest level of policy decisions, namely the executive and managerial heads of news departments. The newsroom’s senior editorial staff attended, along with ‘planners of news coverage’ and

occasionally 'specialist correspondents' (Schlesinger 1987). Those in charge commanded what was considered largely predetermined control over the production process while their superiors maintained ultimate authority over policy decisions. In this way, the conferences provided "an opportunity for the editors to push the handling of news in particular directions" (Schlesinger 1987: 50). Decisions made during editorial meetings restricted "whole categories of events," "coverage of specific news makers or subjects," or, conversely, made mandatory "the advancement of [particular news items] to the stage of the final rundown" (Epstein 1973: 191-92). Through the routine of morning meetings, 'shopping lists' were created by producers and it was the job of assignment editors to fill them. Since news values were deemed to be so critical to this selection and assignment process, they are considered separately in the next section of this chapter.

Beyond the selection of news stories, discussions at editorial meetings also focused on the specific treatment of events. In treating an event, meaning was attributed to its portrayal. Goffman (1974: 10) evaluated the attribution of meaning in the context of a frame: "definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principals of organization which govern events [...] and our subjective involvement in them." Thus, reality becomes perceived and represented through the application of cognitive structures, rendering "what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful," and hence easily digestible by the audience (Goffman 1974: 21). In practice, this meant that frames were applied via directions metered out within editorial meetings. As such, journalists were not only assigned to stories but the preferred story treatment or 'news angle' was also advised. Epstein (1973) stressed that intervention such as this by producers and editors was very much the rule rather than the exception. Schlesinger explored how a theme could be applied in order to direct coverage. For example, in preparations for coverage of the release of an official report on 'Privacy,'

The editor of the day and the home affairs correspondent ... agreed that the theme ... should be 'the public interest.' The story was seen as both attractive and significant, having 'James Bond aspects' concerning electronic bugging and snooping, and dealt with such practices as members of the public being given covert credit ratings. (Schlesinger 1987: 51)

The package developed for a news story such as this would require a verbal narrative in order to convey the 'correct' message intended to be inspired from any visual images used. The process of editing could thus also play a role since "[d]epending on what fragments are selected, and how they are ordered, any number of different stories can usually be edited from the same material" (Epstein 1973: 19). Still, the most important means of control over the processes of production identified by researchers was the daily routine of editorial meetings. Repeated treatment advice for particular topics ensured that journalists became accustomed to their organisation's editorial attitudes and this was much more effective for the operation of the organisation as a whole than last minute editorial changes by editors as a means of securing a preferred news angle.

## **5.2 Incorporating External Pressure into Daily Practice**

Golding and Elliott expanded the function of editorial meetings by acknowledging that to some extent they also represented a means of "consolidat[ing] external pressures into professional practice, to mediate the inevitable into the desirable" (1979: 88). While examining the minutes of top editorial meetings at the BBC, Schlesinger described the emerging picture as "primarily one of pressures feeding in to the top of the BBC's hierarchy" (1987: 143). He illustrated the practice of 'guidance' when recounting an instance when the BBC did not report a speech by former UK Prime Minister Thatcher, which led to the editor questioning why the event was neglected. In response, the editor of the day – in charge of the newsroom at the time – "said that he thought it had been 'platitudinous,' that he was 'amazed the papers ran it,' and that it had said nothing new, being 'well-acknowledged Tory philosophy'" (Schlesinger 1987: 50). Unimpressed by the explanation, it was made clear that Thatcher "ought to be watched" and thereafter her speeches were reported. It was difficult to determine whether external pressure was involved in this particular case or whether the editor (and/or his superiors) had reasons for 'watching' Mrs. Thatcher outside of any desire to ensure that she, her party, or other politicians were pleased with the coverage. It could also have been the case that the editor was acting in accordance with previous 'guidance' repeatedly given over coverage of politicians – and especially top politicians in this case – or even responding to internalized knowledge of displeased reactions of politicians to past coverage. It is in these ways that policy and editorial ideologies were said to become gradually

internalized. Much of this 'guidance' simply became habitual practice, to the point at which it was no longer necessary for editors to verbalize their management of content: "[e]ditorial attitudes emerge during the course of running through 'diary stories'; where they do not, it is because they are taken for granted" (Schlesinger 1987: 52-53).

### 5.3 Ensuring Conformity within News Organisations

Accounts offered by the major production studies tended to focus on the means through which conformity was achieved in the face of such pressures constraining the work of journalists. This focus is particularly revealing of how the constraining framework guided research since any potential autonomy on the part of the journalist was viewed as a by-product of the normal situation of conformity, not as the subject of research. Instead, many explanations for conformity are revealed, ranging from initial job choice to black-lists and punishment.

Journalists must first choose which particular organisation they wish to work for and this choice in and of itself was said to influence their willingness to conform to policy 'guidance.' Explaining to Schlesinger why 'no basic ideological problems' existed, a sub-editor said, "Because people self-select themselves for work in the BBC. You know the things the BBC does by having listened to it" (1987: 198). However, today it may be more probable that the main attraction to media jobs relates to factors beyond the particular ideology espoused.<sup>18</sup> Once journalists have been hired and integrated into the news organisation, the most common form of censorship identified by research was self-censorship. As an NBC producer explained to Epstein (1973: 57), "I have never been turned down for a program I wanted to do for censorship reasons. On the other hand, I am not sure I have ever asked to do one I knew management would not approve for those reasons." Golding and Elliott (1979: 132) considered self-censorship the most obvious form of accommodation to pressure, a practice which "focuses the normal journalistic regard for audience response on those elite groups whose response may be swift, direct and vital." In this way, journalists could anticipate particular responses

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18 That is, it may no longer be very easy to 'self-select' oneself into a particular news organisation as competition over jobs increase.

through “a diffuse awareness of a special audience” which was “occasionally sharpened by a phone call from Dodan Barracks or the military governor’s office” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 132). This awareness was articulated as a ‘presence’ and journalists incorporated this knowledge into their daily routines: “we all understand the rules of the game” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 132). Awareness was deemed to be similarly important in relation to policy. Overall, the role of policy in news production tended to be much more discreet and often difficult to pinpoint since explicit directives were rare. Instead, newswriters were said to learn policy ‘by osmosis’ (Breed 1955: 328). “Gradually, reporters just ‘begin to know’ what policy is” (Sigelman 1973: 137). As such, policy and internal pressures more generally were largely perceived by journalists as an “invisible framework of guidance” (Schlesinger 1987: 137). Breed (1955) likened the norms of policy to norms found in everyday life that operated in a less formal fashion. In this way, researchers argued that constraining policy decisions tended to trickle-down through the news organisation’s hierarchy.

Other factors influencing conformity related to job security and forms of punishment. Schlesinger (1987: 199) regarded economic security as “the foundation-stone of loyalty” to be a factor. Perhaps even more important, the existence of a ‘blacklist’ or other means of labelling those who repeatedly mishandled stories had an impact on journalists’ daily practices. Similarly, while Epstein (1973: 76) noted that reporters and correspondents sometimes disregard “‘limits’ imposed by the political ground rules,” straying from the editorial attitudes of their organisation, if they do so frequently or over an extended period of time they are likely to find themselves on their producer’s ‘blacklist’ and “may not be assigned to politically sensitive stories.” Even more seriously, since the continued tenure of reporters and correspondents “depends to a large degree on the frequency of their appearances – not to mention the additional income they receive as a ‘commercial fee’ each time they appear on a sponsored newscast,” their very job could be at risk for refusing to comply with editorial control (Epstein 1973: 189). Those who seek foreign postings had an even greater desire to please superiors since “[s]ystematic exclusion from such prestige projects, or from promotions, is a potent sanction” (Schlesinger 1987: 152). Breed’s (1955: 330) study of policy and conformity within the newspaper industry suggested that “staffers still fear punishment,” with reference to the myth of “the errant star reporter taken off murders and put on obituaries – ‘the Chinese torture chamber’ of

the newsroom.” Schlesinger (1987) conjured up similar notions, referring to the archives or ‘filing’ in place of obituaries. More recently, Harrison (2000) suggested that any such punishment would no longer involve the journalist leaving the news production process altogether since some more menial tasks have been replaced by computer systems. Therefore, “[e]xile in a television newsroom today might be to the forward planning desk, newsgathering or an early morning programme” (Harrison 2000: 132).

Referring to Durkheimian notions, Schlesinger noted that “the boundaries of the permissible are made clearer by the transgressions of the deviant” (Schlesinger 1987: 181). Yet most research implied that these boundaries are very rarely breeched – at least not by those who remain employees. The crucial point is that the potential rare instances when journalists do traverse outside of the permissible were not the subject of the research framework. Nevertheless, it is not these instances of clear transgressions that could lead to dismissals or other forms of punishment that are advocated as the focus of a new research category. Instead, the autonomy that journalists maintain in their daily routines that can enhance the production of news and empower the journalist is the focus that has largely been neglected by previous production studies.

#### **5.4 Complexities of the Broadcaster-State Relationship**

Contemplating and conceding to external pressure interferes in the ability of a media organisation to present information to the public in a free and unrestrained fashion. As McNair rightly says, “subvert[ing] the free flow of information in the public sphere, thwart[s] the citizen’s exercise of rational choice” (2004: 325). This subversion is in direct conflict with the much heralded freedom of the press and the ability of the public to make informed decisions and thereby effectively participate in their nation’s political process. Some academics, such as those involved in the Frankfurt School, have pessimistically described the function of the media as “controlling the public in the interests of capital” (Curran and Seaton 2003: 328). There are various interpretations of the role of the media in society as well as statements that declare how the media ought to operate, be it as a watchdog, informing the public of the activities of the state, a ‘neutral observer’ or the ‘mouthpiece’ of the state (Golding and Elliott 1979: 46). According to Hachten (1983: 61), the potential for external pressure and direct

intervention by the state is a factor for media organisations in every country and therefore “[a]bsolute freedom of expression is a myth.” However, the complex and varied nature of governmental control problematizes the issue, leaving comparisons between countries difficult to assess. “In one country, newspapers may be under harsh, arbitrary political restraints; in another, they may be under more subtle yet real economic and corporate restrictions” (Hachten 1983: 61-62). Yet regardless of the particularities of the specific relationship between each state and its media, what is relevant here is that the government, along with any other special interest group in society, has the ability to apply external pressure to a media organisation. Whether or not that media organisation subsequently conforms by altering their coverage is likely dependent upon the particular situation and subject matter as well as the media organisation itself.

Whether the news organisation is public or private can also be important, as public institutions tend to maintain a different relationship to the state. An example of this can be seen in the Hutton Inquiry that was set up in response to the death of Dr. David Kelly in July 2003. Kelly was named as a source by BBC journalist Andrew Gilligan after intense pressure and media speculation over Gilligan’s reports that the UK government had ‘knowingly embellished’ a dossier containing information regarding Iraq’s alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction that was released during the run-up to the 2003 Iraq War. Deemed a ‘whitewash’ by many observers, the inquiry cleared the government of wrongdoing while strongly criticizing the BBC. While this example is extreme and therefore rare that such an explicit procedure would occur and act in a condemnatory way towards a broadcaster, it does demonstrate how the particular relationship between a news organisation and the state can effectively cause the news organisation to take into consideration reactions that might arise when producing news items within the context of deeply contested and politicized information. More examples of this relationship are offered within the next section.

## **5.5 Instances of Direct Government Intervention**

An understanding of the ‘rules of the game’ alluded to in the descriptions of conformity indicated the subtlety involved in the application of external pressure. Epstein (1973: 73) reported how the US media “necessarily adapts itself to the political tone in Washington”

and quoted former President of CBS Frank Stanton as he criticized government intervention:

Reprisals no less damaging to the media and no less dangerous to our fundamental freedoms than censorship are readily available to the government – economic, legal, and psychological. ... Nor is their actual employment necessary to achieve their ends; to have them dangling like swords over the media can do harm even more irreparable than overt action. (1973: 72)

Nevertheless, examples of the actual employment of government pressure and intervention were also found within previous production studies. Golding and Elliott described examples from Ireland and Nigeria, including the impact of the Irish public broadcaster's relationship with the government. Section 31 of the 1960 Broadcasting Act provided the Irish government with the power to appoint and remove members of the Authority that run RTE as well as approve the removal or appointment of the Director-General (Golding and Elliott 1979: 60). This relationship is very similar to that of the UK's public broadcaster: the Board of Governors (the BBC Trust since January 2007) regulates the BBC and appoints the Director-General while in practice the Board's own members are selected by the government (although nominally this is done by the monarch). For the Irish case, the following provisions outlined in Section 31 represent evidence of potential constraints on news production rooted in this broadcaster-state relationship:

1. The Minister may direct the Authority in writing to refrain from broadcasting any particular matter or matter of any particular class, and the Authority shall comply with the direction.
2. The Minister may direct the Authority in writing to allocate broadcasting time for any announcements by or on behalf of any Minister of State in connection with the functions of that Minister of State, and the Authority shall comply with the direction. (Golding and Elliott 1979: 60)

Once again, making use of this control is not always necessary since the mere fact that the ability of the government to intervene has been established in writing applies informal pressure to the Irish media. Direct intervention was necessary, however, when critical comments from the National Farmers' Association in response to statements from the Minister of Agriculture were broadcast, but subsequently dropped after receipt of an

angry telephone call from the Minister; on another occasion the Prime Minister told the Chairman of RTE that sending a team to Vietnam would not be in the nation's best interests, which subsequently resulted in the cancellation of the planned visit (Golding and Elliott 1979: 60).

In Nigeria, Golding and Elliott also found external pressure to be operating on a few occasions. The following two examples demonstrate how government intervention led to swift changes in news content:

The printing workers at the mint went on strike: they [i.e. government PR] telephoned us to say we musn't use it. (Local News editor, NBC r)

The other day teachers were demonstrating because they had not had their bonuses for two years. We covered it, but then we got a 'phone call from the ministry; we were told not to cover it and we dropped it. (Chief Sub-editor, RTK) (Golding and Elliott 1979: 131)

While a mere telephone call intervened and altered coverage in the above instances, constant urging was the method of choice when the Nigerian government did not want to dispel the fiction that Nigerian roads were in good condition and safe to use. In this instance, the media was asked to either not report accidents altogether or ensure that figures on victims were kept low or unreported (Golding and Elliott 1979: 131). Additionally, governments will sometimes alter their preferred language use in reference to a particular event, after which media organisations may follow suit. For example, after the Bush administration discontinued the use of the term 'suicide' in reference to suicide bombings and replaced it with 'homicide,' staff at FOX News were instructed by their superiors to imitate the change (Akenhead 2005).

Organisations like SpinWatch<sup>19</sup> are committed to digging up and exposing these means of maintaining control over the media. In this vein, David Miller has written articles about news reports commissioned by the Ministry of Defence and subsequently presented by the BBC as genuine news, as well as situations in the US where journalists have

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19 See [www.spinwatch.org](http://www.spinwatch.org): 'Countering corporate spin and government propaganda.'

manipulated photographs of British soldiers in Iraq and artificially inflated American crowds listening to President Bush's speeches (Miller 14 March 2005; Miller 15 March 2005). While SpinWatch and other resources on the public relations industry can provide many more examples of government propaganda and spin,<sup>20</sup> one further example identifies a tactic involving the issue of D Notices that in practice explicitly prevents the media from covering particular issues. According to Millar and Miller, "D Notices are a well known and peculiarly British device which are said to be 'voluntary' and 'advisory' with no legal force. But in practice few media outlets defy them" (22 September 2004). The authors discussed D Notices in the case of Rose Gentle, mother of late British soldier Gordon Gentle, who found herself 'silenced' by the Ministry of Defence through their issue of a D Notice to the British media after she highlighted the topic of 'standard issue countermeasures' that, if used, would have saved Gordon's life.

[The D Notice] states that 'following the recent press conference given by the family of the late Fusilier Gordon Gentle' certain counter-measures employed by the British Army in Iraq (electronic jamming devices that are designed to prevent the remote detonation of bombs) should not be discussed in news coverage in any more than 'general' terms. Despite admitting that 'the existence of such electronic measures in general is widely in the public domain,' news editors are instructed to 'remind your staff of the real and serious danger to life of publishing any such details.' (Millar and Miller 22 September 2004)

This example demonstrates that arms of the state, like the Ministry of Defence in the UK, are capable of muzzling the media and therefore play a role in the production of news. However, a further example demonstrates how government intervention which is in effect 'political' censorship can be defended instead as 'operational' security. In 1985, a BBC series called *Real Lives* produced a documentary that included an extensive interview with leading member of Sinn Féin Martin McGuinness. Under Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative Government was desperate to ensure that 'terrorists' would not receive any extra publicity. A letter from the Home Secretary to the BBC Board of Governors caused deep anxiety, which led to a decision to ban the programme from airing. Following strikes by BBC and ITN employees, the Board of Governors eventually allowed it to air (O'Carroll

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20 For examples, see Miller (2003; 2004a; 2004b), McNair (2004), Rampton and Stauber (2003), and Stauber and Rampton (1995).

2005; Philo 1995). Nevertheless, this episode revealed the power of government pressure despite the perceived independence of the BBC. Similar cases of 'operational' security arguably being employed as justification for the 'management' of news occurred during UK coverage of the 1982 Falklands War. Both the MoD officials on the Falklands and public relations staff in London censored written copy and were allegedly responsible for considerable delays in transmission of images back to the UK. These general practices of news 'management' ultimately seeped into the production routines of the news organisations themselves with material cut on the grounds of 'taste' and moderate use of emotive language (Glasgow University Media Group 1995).

Beyond these pressures and direct intervention faced by news organisations, daily decisions must be made in order for news production to proceed, much of which is not impacted by governments. Researchers continued to highlight the internal organisational and editorial control factors influencing this production. While notions of ideological story treatments played a role within the later stages of news production, news items deemed favourable for coverage first undergo selection processes. It is within this phase of production that researchers focused on the significant role of shared news values.

## **6. Shared News Values**

Collectively, news values were highlighted by news production researchers as yet another means of efficiently managing information input and production practices while constraining news output. Shared news values were considered to be necessary elements in the production process. As Golding and Elliott described, news values are "terse shorthand references to shared understandings about the nature and purpose of news which can be used to ease the rapid and difficult manufacture of bulletins and news programmes" (1979: 114). Therefore, the selection of news items for broadcast journalism was ultimately seen to be constrained by practical and organisational considerations. A BBC senior news executive expressed this point to Schlesinger (1987: 99): "What we leave out is what in our judgement doesn't rank as news in the context of limited time and space." In effect, news values became heightened due to these conditions and therefore "there is only room for stories with the greatest aggregate of news values" (Golding and Elliott 1979: 124). While newsworthiness is a very abstract and

ill-defined concept, widespread agreement typically existed when journalists discussed and selected which items should be included in their news output. As an Irish reporter for RTE explained, “There’s almost daily discussion about news, but I feel that all newsmen are the converted talking to the converted ... There’s a broad agreement among reporters as to what should be done” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 95). Therefore, academics tended to point to a ‘news sense’ that journalists claim to have developed over time – which is essentially an “awareness of what constitutes newsworthiness, even if a journalist cannot articulate it in any other way than a ‘gut feeling,’ or as ‘having a nose for a good story’” (Harrison 2000: 114). Tuchman (1973) argued that these broadly accepted news judgments were absorbed by journalists and became common-sense knowledge. In this way, newsworthiness evaluations were linked to broader news values that tended to trickle-down the news organisation’s hierarchy akin to policy directives, guiding selection criteria and influencing story treatment. “News values are thus working rules, comprising a corpus of occupational lore which implicitly and often expressly explains and guides newsroom practice” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 114).

## 6.1 Images

In opposition to newspaper or radio, the selection and treatment of broadcast news was also predetermined by the restraining nature of its output; that is, the availability and quality of images was a fundamental factor in the medium of television. Schlesinger (1987: 128) described the importance of good pictures as “a highly salient factor” in television news discussions. As a BBC editor of the day explained, “We do put some things in simply because there are pictures. If there was a three- or four-minute speech, you’d want a good picture story to revive flagging interest” (Schlesinger 1987: 127). As this indicates, the majority of news values appeared to be a reflection of journalists’ – and more likely their superiors’ – notions of audience interest and needs, an issue which is covered in the next section of this chapter. Even during the course of the day the final rundown could be altered depending upon the availability of ‘good film.’ For example, “An Irish story on an escapee who had been seen in Clonmel met little enthusiasm until a message came through that film of the chase would be coming. It was then acclaimed as ‘the best story of the day’” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 116). Visual imagery – especially that which involves action or is ‘considered exciting’ – was deemed to have ‘holding

power' for all members of the audience, despite age or other characteristics (Epstein 1973: 195). As Epstein (1973: 195-6) explained, "if the producer characterized a film story as showing a great deal of action, it was usually advanced to the final rundown. On the other hand, if a story was depicted as lacking action, it was usually dropped."

These opinions were largely formed by the prevailing belief that the 'actuality' of footage – "the notion that the TV camera or the microphone can act as vehicles which convey the reality of the event they are transmitting" (Schlesinger 1987: 128) – reveals the 'truth.' However, as the following example from Epstein (1973) demonstrates, moving images did not necessarily translate into 'truth.' After purchasing a film 'blind' from a freelance cameraman that was supposed to show Czechoslovakian resistance to the 1969 Soviet invasion, editors at NBC found "only a half-hour long procession of Soviet military trucks through the Czech town of Košice, and a few separate, and possibly unrelated, shots of crowds milling about" (Epstein 1973: 21). While only a few seconds of footage appeared to potentially corroborate the cameraman's notes, the producer insisted that the piece be edited to confirm the alleged story anyway:

Whether or not this narrative and edited film reflected what actually happened in Košice depends primarily on the veracity of the cameraman's notes, and the accuracy with which the producer, editors and news writer followed them in editing the film, not on the 'objectivity' of the film itself. If the cameraman, who was unknown to NBC News, had exaggerated his description of the violence that had occurred in Košice to enhance his chances of selling the film to NBC, the edited film would simply 'mirror' this hyperbole, not reality. The half-hour of film itself, the editor who worked on it pointed out to me at the time, would lend itself to any number of stories, including one that showed the peaceful and unresisted transit of a Soviet motor convoy through the town of Košice. (Epstein 1973: 21)

In this way, the subjective brush can paint even that which is sometimes assumed to be the best medium for conveying truth: moving images.

## **6.2 Importance, Interest and Entertainment**

Apart from a 'news sense,' time, space and image requirements, other theorists pointed to another set of news values: importance, interest and entertainment. Schlesinger (1987: 116) found 'importance' or what is 'interesting' to be the most regular reply when delving

into specific news values. Golding and Elliott (1979: 117) also found ‘importance’ to be the most frequently cited value, generally defined as “considerable significance for large numbers of people in the audience.” Even though journalists may find such items more interesting than audiences, the story represented “something the audience needs to know” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 118). Harrison’s (2000: 181) study of a variety of different news genres – from breakfast, afternoon and evening news to specific news programmes for children and regional audiences – caused her to emphasize differences in news values, ranging from “‘importance,’ ‘importance plus some interest,’ ‘interest plus some importance’ or ‘interest and entertainment.’”<sup>21</sup> Golding and Elliott (1979) also mentioned entertainment, explaining how the ‘human interest story’ was designed as a means of drawing in audiences. However, news organisations tended to try to find a happy medium between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news, with the latter “providing captivating, humorous, titillating, amusing or generally diverting material” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 117). Drama as a news value was also used in an attempt at maintaining audience attention, particularly when narrated properly: “The good news story tells its tale with a beginning, a middle and an end, in that order” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 115).

### **6.3 Size, Proximity and Skin Colour**

Golding and Elliott identified a number of other news values, including the ‘size’ of a story: “The bigger the story the greater the likelihood of its inclusion, and the greater the prominence with which it will be presented” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 119). This value also tended to tie into proximity: “Either, the further away an event the bigger it has to be, or, nearby events take precedence over similar events at a distance” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 119). Schlesinger also found proximity to be a news value when a reporter repeated “the old news editor’s maxim: one home story is worth five foreign” (Schlesinger 1987: 118). However, when casualties and deaths were involved, McLurg’s Law<sup>22</sup> prevailed. Coverage of disasters is therefore meant to adhere to the following:

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21 These categories were based on Halberstam’s (1992) three theories of newsworthiness.

22 McLurg’s Law largely refers to the importance of size and proximity when determining newsworthiness and is named after a “legendary woman duty editor” (Schlesinger 1987: 117).

... if crashes occur far away, say in Asia, they are not as newsworthy as if they occur in Europe; and they achieve paramount value if they occur at home, preferably in the Greater London area. It is not only crashes, but also natural disasters of any conceivable kind which are subsumed under the 'law.'  
(Schlesinger 1987: 117)

This issue becomes more complex when skin colour is also considered. Schlesinger (1987) describes a subsidiary clause within McLurg's Law wherein independent events can gain equal news value, not because they have equal numbers of death tolls but because skin colour and cultural proximity coalesce to bestow equal newsworthiness. Explaining the rationale embodied in McLurg's Law, an editor of the day told Schlesinger that what is important is how people are impacted by the story; however, the example he provides appears to highlight the news value of entertainment: "It's a question of the impact on people. A coach overturned in India the other day and sixty or seventy people were drowned, but I ignored it. An Indian airliner crash would rate it – it's more exciting" (1987: 117).

#### **6.4 Immediacy**

Despite researchers arguing that other news values were more important, immediacy was cited most frequently in the literature. Speed and recency were very closely linked with immediacy as were notions of being 'first' and 'live.' News organisations do not exist in a vacuum and are intensely aware of their competition. Therefore it is natural that they became self-congratulatory when these news values combined to 'beat' the competition. For instance, "it was once pointed out with a great deal of pride, that a story about the death of a miner, who had been knocked down by a lorry while picketing, had been sent in by Radio Leeds and beat PA by ten minutes" (Schlesinger 1987: 82). Nevertheless, 'scoops' of this sort were not very common for broadcast news since the routines of production simply did not provide for this task – consider, for instance, the dominance of news agencies, editorial meetings and time restraints. Logistical demands tempered the prominence of immediacy as a news value in most research since news "is 'cold,' and old, when it can no longer be used during the newsworld in question" (Schlesinger 1987: 87). For this reason, more recent studies (Flournoy and Stewart 1997; Harrison 2000) suggested that increasing value was being placed on immediacy since technological developments have greatly improved the means of achievement and 24 hour news

programmes provide ample space for ‘breaking news’ and ‘lives’ that can get on air as soon as it is feasible. In this way, “‘immediate’ can now often mean instantaneous coverage, instead of coverage which gets the news to the audience as soon as possible” (Harrison 2000: 128).

Studies undertaken during the second phase of news production research – particularly those studies from the 70s and 80s – inevitably demonstrated the illusory nature of any apparent ‘immediacy’ since this news value was “undercut by the organizational need to shoot and narrate filmed stories that can be used, as [former NBC President] Frank suggests, up to ‘two weeks’ later” (Epstein 1973: 31). At times, this led to the surprising practice of eliminating that which was unexpected in an attempt to preserve immediacy. In order to ensure that the story did not become dated, news organisations were wary of any potential unusual development or aberration that might be reported by other media:

A case in point is the NBC News story about the commencement of a high-speed train service between Montreal and Toronto. While the NBC crew was filming the turbo-train on December 12, 1968, on its inaugural run to Toronto, the train unexpectedly collided with and ‘sliced in half’ a meat trailer-truck and then suffered a complete mechanical breakdown on the return trip. ... These accidents and aberrations were not included in the film story broadcast two weeks later on the NBC evening news. ... The announcement of the suspension of the service, less than a week later, was not carried on the program. (Epstein 1973: 32-3)

Still, regardless of whether immediacy was in effect illusory at that time, it was still emphasized by Schlesinger that some basic news values are inevitably more imperative: “It is agony to a newsman to miss a bulletin, *but reliability and accuracy are more important than speed*. ... It is not enough to interest the public. You have to be trusted” (Edwards, 1964, p. 6-7, emphasis added, quoted in Schlesinger 1987: 89). In addition to reliability and accuracy, Golding and Elliott (1979: 120-23) mentioned other news values that could potentially be drawn from their observations: brevity (‘hard’ news, packed with facts), negativity (‘bad news is good news’), recency, elites and personalities (i.e. the desire to seek personal angles). Recent trends towards ‘celebrity culture’ have perhaps heightened the latter value even further.

## 7. Considering the Audience

Researchers argued that journalists tended to have some notion of audience interest and needs, however faulty, which was built into the news judgment acquired via their experience of being immersed in the 'world of news' (Schlesinger 1987: 116). Therefore evaluations of newsworthiness and hence, ultimately, selection decisions were tempered to some degree by consideration of the audience. Not only was story selection influenced in this way but story treatment was also in part determined by perceived notions of 'the audience' (Golding and Elliott 1979: 111). However, these notions of the audience developed almost entirely without the aid of audience research commissioned by news organisations nor any active engagement with members of the audience on the part of the journalists themselves. Even within relatively more recent research journalists claim they have seen no opinion or attitude data: "Almost universally, it was assumed that a good journalist simply 'knows' what the public wants without any formal means of finding out" (Williams and Miller 1998: 162).

Overall, audience feedback mechanisms were deemed unsatisfactory, with "widespread scepticism about the intrinsic accuracy and merits" (Golding and Elliott 1979: 112) of research, which in any case was considered "sporadic and ambiguous" (Schlesinger 1987: 133). Much of it was only concerned with "the size of viewing or listening publics, or their class composition" and, for instance, "has tried to pinpoint why BBC News has been 'in decline,' rather than how well people understand what it tells them about the world" (Schlesinger 1987: 133). Yet it was not the quality of available research that prevented journalists from transforming their notions and assumptions into more reliable knowledge of audience interest and needs. Instead it was suggested that journalists "are presenting the news, not trying to satisfy an audience, and the less they know of the audience, the more attention they can pay to the news" (Gans 1970: 9). Schlesinger (1987: 107) suggested a similar yet slightly more nuanced perspective:

To over-simplify a little, the argument is that journalists write for other journalists, their bosses, their sources, or highly interested audiences. The 'total' audience, however, remains an abstraction, made real on occasion by letters or telephone calls, encounters of a random kind in public places, or perhaps more structured ones such as conversations with liftmen, barmen and taxi-drivers.

Absent from these random encounters was any systematic analysis of audiences. Perhaps this was in part due to notions of the role of the media in society more generally. In this sense, it may not be very important to ensure the interests and needs of the audience as a whole are met since it may be more important for the news to continue to inform the public of the day's most newsworthy events, as opposed to, for instance, deciding to incorporate a five minute section about pictures of people's pet dogs into each broadcast.<sup>23</sup> As such, "professional integrity and autonomy prohibit pandering to these needs and interests" (Golding and Elliott 1979: 112), leaving audiences fundamentally separated from news production. At the same time this perspective was said to be in eternal conflict with the presumed journalistic responsibility to have detailed knowledge of those needs and interests. This ambiguous and conflicted image was not made any clearer by some journalists who tended to rely on the development of stereotypical characters whose assumed reactions thus informed their subsequent decisions. Harrison (2000: 116) provided some quotes from journalists to this effect:

'It's like my mother, you know, just got in from work, wants a cup of tea and her feet up, she doesn't want to watch anything too boring' (ITN correspondent, *5.40 p.m. News*); 'I always think of someone a bit like me, been to university, and doesn't want to be patronised, wants a bit more information' (ITN correspondent, *Channel 4 News*): 'Well, I always think of my wife really, if I can find a story which will make her say "Oh really!" then I think it will be an interesting programme' (ITN editor, *5.40 p.m. News*).

One thing is clear, however: previous research consistently demonstrated a lack of genuine interaction and feedback with audiences. In this vein, Schlesinger (1987: 106) concluded that there is "no sense in which one can talk of a communication taking place which is truly alive to the needs of the news audience." Some researchers responded to this by advocating that journalists should and must establish relationships with audiences (McQuail 1969).

Nevertheless, the lack of engagement with audiences did not deter producers and executives from making assumptions and acting upon these. For instance, they tended to

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23 This example is mentioned because of an online post by a BBC editor describing how he was inundated with images of pet dogs sent in by audiences following a radio programme (Thomas 2006).

believe that audience interest was “most likely to be maintained through easily recognizable and palpable images, and conversely, most likely to be distracted by unfamiliar or confusing images” (Epstein 1973: 262). Even more, conflict, drama and action tended to be deemed more favourable to audiences than scenes of calm or peace. This led news organisations to seek out stories with “a high potential for violence, but a low potential for audience confusion” (Epstein 1973: 262-63). The attention span of audiences was also thought to be very limited and this knowledge became a very important factor in news production. As BBC presenter George Alagiah explains,

... we’re constantly being told that the attention span of our average viewer is about 20 seconds and if we don’t grab people – and we’ve looked at the figures – the number of people who shift channels around in my programme now at six o’clock, there’s a movement of about 3 million people in that first minute, coming in and out. (Philo and Berry 2004: 211)

This target of 20 seconds has placed a lot of pressure on journalists to attract audiences as quickly as possible and perhaps also to do so by using mechanisms thought to hold their attention – dramatic, easily recognizable, in narrative form,<sup>24</sup> and so on – even though these beliefs were not derived from any evidence as such. Instead, journalists tended to invoke ratings when discussing audience issues, which typically emphasized the inherently competitive nature of the business of news (Epstein 1973: 91-100; Golding and Elliott 1979: 113; Schlesinger 1987: 111-15). However, research has found that audiences themselves were more likely to be interested in news when their level of understanding increased (Philo and Berry 2004: 243), which suggested that attention spans could be maximized by incorporating more context and history into reports. Inevitably, if audience interest is heightened, ratings follow.

When past research has reflected on the role of audiences within news production, some level of agency is arguably implied. In this sense, researchers identified the fact that journalists conceivably *could*, of their own free will, actively seek out opinions of audience members in order to better inform their notions of audience interest and needs. However, this was largely a passing thought that once again was not highlighted within

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24 Epstein (1973: 263) noted that news stories were deemed “more likely to hold viewers’ attention if they are cast in the form of the fictive story, with narrative closure.”

the constraining research framework. Instead, researchers were more focused on the way in which journalists' notions of the audience influenced and constrained their evaluations of newsworthiness, and hence also story selection and treatment.

## 8. Summary

The predominant research framework employed in studies of news production has involved a search for the ways in which news organisations, their sources and governments have acted to influence news output in a negative, constraining fashion. Much of this research has sought to unravel the complex processes required to produce news, fixating first on issues of selection and then routines of production. The overarching focus on constraining factors could be a result of an active pursuit of constraints by researchers, an inactive discovery of these forces, or some variant of these strategies. However, once the framework became a fundamental component of the approach to the sociology of news production, it is probable that subsequent researchers were influenced by this agenda. This is particularly the case for production studies that focus on television news since the rush of research in the 70s and 80s appears to have set the course for those that followed in their wake.

It is also likely that the changing media environment that shapes the world in which journalists produce news – and is dependent upon political, social, technological and economic circumstances – has in and of itself permitted greater consideration of journalistic autonomy. The tools available to journalists within any past, present, or future media environment enable the potential for the media as a whole to fulfil the varying predefined societal roles to different degrees (i.e. as watchdog, neutral observer, mouthpiece of the state, educator, etc.). Perhaps it is merely the case that today's media environment facilitates greater opportunities for the media than that which were available when the reigning research framework of constraints became instituted into the sociology of news production. This does not necessarily mean that there is more potential today for the media to fulfil any *particular* societal role more than any other; however, any changes to the nature of news content are partly dependent upon what is permissible within the media environment in question. From a technological perspective, today's media environment certainly contains an expanded array of new media tools that are

dramatically altering the information-producing strata and greatly increasing potential access for journalists.

Collectively, journalists are the social actors whose individualized production choices amalgamate to become 'the news.' Clearly, they play a pivotal role in the media-power-society relationship. For this reason, this thesis focuses on the activities and opinions of journalists – the social actors within the overarching system of constraints – and does so within a media environment that is dramatically different from the era in which the predominant research framework of constraints finds its roots. In this way, the aim of this thesis is first to shed light on the range of autonomy potentially accessible by journalists within their daily routines and secondly to explore the power of the traditional constraining factors highlighted by previous research. Both of these aims were also undertaken with a concerted effort to investigate the means through which technological developments – in the newsroom, out in the field and in the hands of the public – had impacted the production of news. The intention of this research project was thus to remedy the temporal and theoretical limitations of previous production studies.

The next chapter specifies the methodology employed within this research project. The sample of journalists and news organisations included in this study are presented along with details of the procedures used in the analysis of the data collected.



## **Chapter 3: Methods and Sample**

This chapter begins with a description of the conceptual development of this research project and the influence that the literature review and initial fieldwork had for the impending focus on technology. The next section details the methodological strategy employed, which is a combination of interviews and observations, and the means of acquiring the sample through opportunity and snowball sampling. As well, a comprehensive summary of the different types of fieldwork that comprise the data set and the range of job positions held by journalists within the sample is provided. Following these summary statistics a section on methodological detail describes the specifics of the interviewing procedure, including the key set of questions used. Consideration of issues that arose during the course of research is also undertaken before the final section that explains the method of analysis employed both during the research and particularly the steps taken after fieldwork was complete.

### **1. Conceptual Development**

From its inception, this research project has focused on the production of broadcast news within the UK and Canada. Shortly after composing the first version of the literature review, the researcher took part in the first day of fieldwork which involved spending the day with an Executive Producer to observe news production in action. This exercise significantly transformed the direction of this research project since it became very apparent that the existing literature base was largely out of date. Thereafter, the consequences of technological development for mainstream news production became the more specific research focus. Therefore, fieldwork became guided by the following research question: What are the implications of technological development for the production of broadcast news?

Through this research focus, theoretical issues raised in the existing literature base were considered in relation to contemporary news production as it unfolded during fieldwork. The intention was initially exploratory in that the researcher cast a wide net in an effort to collect as much information as possible within the scope of the research. Both 'technological development' and 'broadcast news production' were initially left relatively undefined so as to capture as many transformations as possible. Thus, technological development within the newsroom, out in the field and within the public realm was considered while broadcast news production was broadened to include online output where relevant due to the increasing overlap between the two media. In this way, the methodological strategy involved inductive reasoning and grounded theory whereby observations and interviews were conducted as a means of approaching generalized findings through assessment of the data collected. As Arksey and Knight (1999: 162) describe, "In grounded theory, analysis is interwoven with data collection, a process of finding, analysing and theorizing." Qualitative research approaches commonly integrate data analysis into the research project as an ongoing process that effectively occurs simultaneously with data collection. Therefore, "the discovery of theory from data" (Arksey and Knight 1999: 162) was a crucial process within this research, particularly because this strategy fit the aims of this research project so well. The initial intention was to explore the relationship between technological development and broadcast news production. The research developed into an increasingly purposeful framework that focused on the role of journalistic routines within the traditional constraints demonstrated by previous research while highlighting the new role presented by the general public's relationship to technology as well as the shifting and adaptive relationship between news organisations and technological advancement and the general consequences of these developments for journalistic autonomy.

The development of this research project was thus enhanced by and very much dependent upon the researcher's reflective process. At many stages throughout the project presentations of research findings at conferences<sup>25</sup> became a vital means through which the researcher's own understanding of the data was advanced and theoretical

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25 Six conference presentations and one departmental seminar were used as a means of reformulating results and theories at varying stages during the course of the three year project.

implications became more apparent – both via discussions with fellow researchers and colleagues and simply through the process of amalgamating findings and preparing papers and presentations.

## **2. Methods and Sample**

Since the previous literature base demonstrated that mainstream news organisations, whether public or private, function in very similar ways and maintain near-identical production cycles, the key unit of analysis for this research project is located at the level of journalists, not the news organisations in which they operate. This is compatible with the research aim to investigate the impact of technological developments on the daily routines of journalists as they operate within the traditional set of organisational structures and the wider media environment. News organisations within Canada and the United Kingdom were selected due to similarities among the variety of news media available and the general cultural settings within which news is produced. Both of these countries are representatives of the Western world although clearly the UK is a much more significant player within the world's political stage. As a result, there is a possibility of differences in terms of news values but on the whole this is not a crucial issue since the primary focus of research is the impacts of new technologies. Further significant details related to the differences between each national research context are explored in the next chapter. These countries were also ideal choices for the researcher who was already very familiar with news output from both countries and could more reasonably obtain access since she resided in the UK but is also originally from Canada.

Face-to-face interviews were selected as the main methodological strategy since the general research question was most effectively investigated by asking journalists themselves how they saw technological developments impacting their daily routines. However, since “interviews get at what people say, however sincerely, rather than at what they do” (Arksey and Knight 1999: 15), observation was also adopted as an important element of the methodological strategy. Therefore, actions were observed while beliefs were gathered within the context of interviews. By involving more than one method within this research project, multiple aspects of the empirical reality could be gathered and a form of triangulation achieved. The intention of this methodological

strategy was to provide a larger scope for analysis, enhance interpretation of findings and offset the weaknesses inherent within each method with the differing strengths they possess.

Since access is an ever-present issue to be overcome in qualitative research, the means of securing both interviews and observations depended in part on previously acquired personal contacts, but to a large extent they were the result of online searches of news organisation websites and email communication.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, opportunity sampling was the general method of choice which involved seeking out informants that would provide the research sample with journalists from a range of different media organisations in both Canada and the UK that worked within a variety of positions in their organisation's hierarchy. Snowball sampling was also used as a means of increasing sample size as journalists interviewed or emailed were asked if any other journalists they knew could be helpful to this study. The aim of this sampling strategy was to continue adding new journalists to the sample until many different perspectives were gathered and repetition became common place with little new information arising. Therefore, interviews and observations continued until a saturation point was reached wherein "no new or relevant data seem[ed] to emerge" (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 212)

## 2.1 The Sample

The final sample involves eight mainstream news organisations, with fieldwork taking place in thirteen different locations. In Canada this includes: CBC Toronto, in the field on assignment with a CBC reporter in Toronto, CTV Toronto, CTV Toronto W5, CTV Ottawa Bureau, Global Toronto and Global Queen's Park. In the UK this includes: BBC Television Centre, BBC Scotland, Channel 4 London, ITV London, Sky London and APTN London.

Overall, 124 unique<sup>27</sup> journalists were involved in this study either through interviews, observations or a combination of both. Interviews are divided into two categories: formal

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26 Email addresses were either found online or discovered by working out the username system for the particular news organisation in question.

27 Although the total number of journalists involved in the study was 161 when considered by incidence (i.e. each occasion that a journalist was either interviewed or observed), 37 journalists appeared in more than one particular incidence, which is why the total figure is higher than the actual number of unique

and semi-formal. Interviews that were pre-arranged at set times fall under the formal category whereas semi-formal interviews involve more spontaneous arrangements that occurred either during observations or came about as a result of a formal interview. Observations are also divided into two categories: without questions and with questions. The former involve observations where no interruptions to workflow could occur and the latter involve occasions where questions were asked while journalists continued with their work. The following figure (Table 1) summarises the fieldwork<sup>28</sup> by dividing the table into the four different categories and further subdividing each category into more specific groupings. Figures for both the incidence and number of journalists involved in each specific grouping are shown, as well as overall totals for both interviews and observations.

Due to a unique opportunity offered by CBC wherein the researcher was invited to spend two full days at the organisation, largely following a pre-arranged itinerary<sup>29</sup> of interviews and observations, the CBC naturally comprises the largest percentage of fieldwork conducted.<sup>30</sup>

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journalists. Therefore, only 124 journalists were unique to this study. These figures represent the minimum number of journalists involved in the study since it is likely that a few reporters or correspondents were involved in gallery observations or interactions with other staff during newsroom observations but were not counted due to their limited presence or lack of striking contribution, which subsequently would have resulted in their elimination from the recording process within field notes.

28 Not included in the figure are the 18 tours of news organisations (4 of which were very brief) that were typically given before or after interviews.

29 The itinerary was compiled by the Chief of Staff of CBC's News Department, Juli Lyons, following the researcher's requests for interviews with specific individuals and key job positions, as well as observations of particular facets of news production. The majority of requests were filled, with substitutions only present when requested journalists were unavailable; this meant that access to the CBC was very open for this research project.

30 Interviews and observations at the CBC make up 48.2% of fieldwork when considered by incidence; the three organisations that comprise the next largest percentages of fieldwork are CTV with 14.3%, the BBC with 12.5% and Sky with another 12.5%.

Interviews			Observations		
	<i>Incidence</i>	<i># Journalists</i>		<i>Incidence</i>	<i># Journalists</i>
<i>Formal</i>			<i>Without Questions</i>		
1-to-1	22	22	Editorial Meetings	6	58
1-to-2	1	2	Desktop Meeting <sup>31</sup>	1	6
1-to-many	1	6			
<i>Semi-Formal</i>			<i>With Questions</i>		
1-to-1	11	11	Newsroom	3	9
1-to-2	2	4	In the Field	1	1
1-to-many	1	3	Gallery	4	35
			Post-Production <sup>32</sup>	1	3
			Desktop Presentation <sup>33</sup>	1	1
<i>Total</i>	38	48	<i>Total</i>	17	113

Table 1: Sample Composition

The next figure (Table 2) divides journalists into three hierarchical categories based on their job title. This structure represents journalists from all organisations in the sample but *only* includes those who were involved in formal or semi-formal interviews.<sup>34</sup> The aim of this figure is to demonstrate the range of job positions held by respondents who were interviewed within this study. The three hierarchical categories were formed as a means of broadly<sup>35</sup> representing traditional structural constraints operating within news organisations and are a result of observations and analysis of responses within interviews. Within the results chapters, references are made to those occupying the base-level as gaining most of their autonomy during post-assignment production processes while mid-

31 Refers to a meeting called by the Deputy Director and attended by the staff of one particular investigative news programme. The subject matter involved implementation of HDTV and Desktop TV software, the latter of which would effectively transfer many production tasks, including the function of editing suites and libraries, to all personal computers. Important here was the discussions regarding implementation of such technological changes and difficulties faced by journalists, as well as imbalances within hierarchical structures.

32 Refers to the post-production of an interview with Canadian Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion that had been observed in the gallery moments before, and involved the use of a non-linear editing suite.

33 Refers to the delivery of a presentation on Desktop TV by the Deputy Director to the researcher, which involved information that was not covered within the Desktop Meeting above.

34 Only those who were interviewed are included since it was more difficult to determine the specific job titles and names of every journalist involved in observations without disrupting the overall workflow of the news day.

35 The hierarchical categories are meant to be theoretical as opposed to factual, which is why the term 'broadly' is used here. The main reason for this is that journalists are also likely to have varying levels of seniority which can contribute to their relative position with respect to the degree of autonomy they can access and the degree of constraints they face. The point here, however, is to consider how these hierarchical categories generally restrict or enable sets of journalists working within particular job positions.

level journalists are largely responsible for their assignments. Top-level journalists are responsible for policy decisions and other forms of constraints that trickle-down through this hierarchical system.

Top-Level	9
<i>Executive Vice President</i>	1
<i>Executive Director/Senior Director/Deputy Director</i>	4
<i>Editor in Chief/Controller/Bureau Chief</i>	3
<i>Ombudsman</i>	1
Mid-Level	20
<i>Executive Producer</i>	2
<i>Online Executive Producer/Manager</i>	2
<i>Director/Producer</i>	1
<i>Editor/Deputy Editor/Assignment Editor</i>	12
<i>Online Editor/Assistant Editor/Copy Chief</i>	3
Base-Level	15
<i>Correspondent</i>	5
<i>General Assignment Reporter/Investigative Reporter/VJ<sup>36</sup></i>	7
<i>Presenter</i>	2
<i>Supervising Technician</i>	1
Total	44

Table 2: Range of Hierarchical Job Positions

The job titles listed above reflect the shared hierarchical structures of news organisations, despite a few variations over the specific title used.<sup>37</sup> Within the top-level, three tiers are

36 A 'VJ' is a Video Journalist who typically acts as a one-person unit by filming, reporting, and producing news items.

37 Where multiple titles are listed on the same line, the intention is either to (a) represent the range of job titles that fall under the same category within the hierarchy or (b) take into consideration the name variations that existed between the news organisations studied. There are four occasions where job titles fall under the latter scenario. Executive, Senior and Deputy Directors were roughly equivalent to one another among news organisations, despite the difference in names. Similarly, Editor in Chief and Controller were rough equivalents that again simply involved different titles depending on the particular news organisation. The Bureau Chief, on the other hand, was an equivalent only in the sense of maintaining similar responsibilities within the confines of a news organisation's many bureaus. Within the online sphere of news organisations, Executive Producers and Managers were effectively equivalent despite the name variations, although Managers were sometimes located slightly beneath Executive Producers on the hierarchical ladder. The same was also true of online Editors, Assistant Editors and Copy Chiefs – the names differed slightly between news organisations but the responsibilities and position within the overall hierarchy was very similar.

represented since varying degrees of authority are maintained by each position and the Bureau Chief in particular could be seen to operate within this level in terms of the particular bureau but remains responsive to the more senior journalists within the top-level, as does the Editor in Chief and Controller. As well, the Ombudsman is separated from the other tiers as this position is regarded as relatively independent from others within this level but also represents a figure with some measure of authority over journalists within the mid-level and base-level. As described by CBC's Ombudsman, Vince Carlin, "I don't work for the news department, I'm independent of them, I report to the President who I am happy to say puts his head in the door maybe once a month and says, 'Hi how're you doing and [pause] goodbye' [laughter]." Within the mid-level, another separation occurs since there is typically a meaningful division in tasks between each group, with the 'Producer' group having greater command over the 'Editor' group. Finally, the base-level also contains two tiers since the Supervising Technician works with the rest of the journalists at this level but tends to provide technical support and is oriented towards transmission more so than newsgathering and other production processes. As well, Correspondents, Reporters and Presenters can maintain varying degrees of influence over the production process, which largely depends on their seniority and stature within the organisation.

Journalists involved in observations (both with and without questions) also occupied a wide range of job positions but these were clustered within the mid- and base-level, except for the Desktop Meeting and Desktop Presentation wherein interactions between a top-level Deputy Director and a range of mid- and base-level staff were observed.

## **2.2 Methodology: the Questions**

All interviews were guided by the news production categories established through the initial review of the existing literature base and the general research question. Formal interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions to allow for discussion of a list of broad topics or themes, along with a set of key questions that related to these themes. Since interviews were loosely structured, the question order was frequently varied to fit the flow of the interview, ensure normality of the conversation and enable space for probing questions, clarification and follow-up questions (Arksey and Knight

1999: 39). Interviewees were free to highlight what they felt was important and determine how much time was spent on each answer, which was only modified if the researcher felt the need to probe further, ask the question from a different angle or return to the issue at a later point. Semi-formal interviews were typically quite similar in approach but since they were not pre-arranged, formalities were adapted to the situation. Also, questions regarding the specific task journalists were engaged in or the specific nature of their position within the organisation occasionally overshadowed the key set of questions asked within formal interviews since these more spontaneous interviews were often initiated out of an introduction by a journalist recently involved in a formal interview. Still, some semi-formal interviews moved towards quite lengthy discussions of issues despite the conditions of their inception.

Within formal interviews, journalists were asked to describe their daily routines and consider which (if any) transformations within news production over the past 10 to 15 years that coincided with technological developments they would consider to be most significant. Apart from these general questions, journalists were asked a set of key questions that arose out of the literature review and related to issues that necessitated further investigation in light of today's media environment. These questions will now be considered in detail.

In order to explore the means through which news organisations select news items to be developed into stories and the related relationship between story assignment and journalistic autonomy, the following question was asked:

1. Do journalists and correspondents typically self-select and pitch stories or do they tend to receive story assignments?

The selection of news items is also dependent upon the information that news organisations receive each day. As identified within the literature review, news agencies have typically dominated this part of the production process. However, the first observation of a newsroom as part of this project revealed that information sent by news agencies was now received and processed in an entirely different way due to technological developments. Therefore, it was important to explore the impact of this development within daily routines and whether the substitution of the former role of a

solitary 'copy taster' with collective monitoring by many journalists had resulted in any transformations to the constraints and autonomy inherent within this stage of production. As such, the following questions were asked:

2. What is the impact of the shift to electronic delivery by news agencies?
  - a. Has power over selection been diffused?

The range of news items that are considered for selection within editorial meetings are not limited to news agencies, despite their potential dominance over this phase of production. While previous production studies mentioned a few other sources of information for story ideas, the advent of the internet and the explosion of information published on websites and blogs made it necessary to explore whether these developments had altered daily routines. Thus, journalists were asked:

3. Within your daily routines, where do you look for story ideas?
  - a. Does the internet aid your search?
  - b. Do you or do you know of anyone in your organisation that regularly checks blogs?

This line of questioning relates to the transformation of the information producing strata more generally in light of technological developments. It was important to investigate whether this significant shift in the volume of potential sources was influencing the production process. As well, another relevant issue concerned the impact of this expansion of sources on the long-established criticism of mainstream news output – i.e. the dependency on official sources to the detriment of a wider range of diverse voices. The following questions addressed these issues:

4. How has the expansion of potential sources impacted your daily routines?
  - a. Do you use the internet to find more sources and alternative perspectives?
  - b. Is there a greater number of 'less traditional' sources included in today's news output?
  - c. Is news less reliant on official sources? On news agencies?

A related issue that came up in the literature review is the proportion of news that originates within institutions, driven by official sources. Since these sources have tended to bureaucratically organise themselves in a way that suits the needs of news

organisations, predictable news has dominated news agendas. However, event-driven news has also always been an essential element of news broadcasts. Therefore, considering technological developments that may lead to an increased ability to cover such events, the following question was asked:

5. Is news largely event-driven or institution-driven? Has this shifted over time?

As such, it was also important to consider a very new development within the media environment: the rise of UGC (user generated content) as a result of the ubiquitous nature of mobile camera phones and other such imaging devices. Therefore, journalists were asked:

6. Has UGC become an important issue for your news organisation?

The technological developments combined with shifting public behaviours that led to a rise of UGC and citizen journalism more generally were important and very timely for this research project. Since the previous literature base had pointed to images as a fundamental news value for television broadcasts, journalists were asked about this development as well as related technological innovations such as graphics software:

7. Since television news relies heavily on pictures, what is the impact of the rise in UGC and increased documentation of events by the public more generally?
  - a. Have developments in graphics software packages aided coverage of news items that lack images?

Since previous research pointed out that the dependency on official sources was related to trust and credibility, the reception of new material from unofficial sources would likely also require consideration of these issues. Therefore, despite the explosion of potential sources within the information producing strata, they may not be of much use to journalists if credibility is difficult to ascertain. As such, journalists were asked about these issues:

8. Have determinations of credibility changed alongside the growth of UGC and citizen journalism?

Along with the rise of UGC, citizen journalism and the related technological developments that have led to changes in the way news organisations cover breaking news items, it was important to explore how news values may have shifted over time. Journalists were asked which news values they felt were most important for their news organisation and also whether the increased ease at which ‘live’ coverage could be achieved had influenced news production, as seen in the following questions:

9. Is there any hierarchy within news values that your news organisation employs when determining the newsworthiness of stories?
  - a. Has the ideology of ‘liveness’ become a more important factor in your decision-making processes than it was 10 or 15 years ago since it is easier to produce ‘live’ news today?

Apart from news values, there was also value in considering how journalists deal with issues of balance within the newsgathering and storywriting phases of production:

10. How do you achieve balance?

Within these phases of production it was important to consider the influence of constraining factors, particularly issues of internal pressure as highlighted within previous research. The following questions were asked as a means of exploring the extent to which such control mechanisms may operate:

11. Have you experienced any internal pressure from your superiors?
  - a. For instance over language issues or framing of stories?

A further issue relating to technological developments concerned the use of new technologies out in the field. Journalists were asked how any progress within this area of news production had altered daily routines or news coverage more generally:

12. What is the impact of smaller, cheaper and more mobile technologies for both collection and transmission of material out in the field?
  - a. Are remote areas in the world more likely to be covered?
  - b. With respect to conflict areas, has access changed as a result of these technological developments?

Finally, since the BBC Governor's report had recently been published regarding the BBC's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an opportunity was provided to consider how the difficulties of covering this particular conflict were impacted by technological developments. Since the report had recommended that television audiences be referred to online resources in order to further their understanding of the conflict, asking the following questions was also a means of considering the relationship between the growing online environment and the traditional broadcasting environment for news organisations:

13. Considering coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, how do you feel about the suggested solution to refer audiences to online resources during television coverage as a means of resolving the problem of finding room for historical and contextual information?
  - a. How do journalists evaluate the public relations efforts of either side?
  - b. Have technological developments altered public relations efforts?

The specific wording of questions and the order in which they were asked depended upon the flow of the conversation within interviews. Also, questions were personalized, depending on the hierarchical level of the journalist, whether they worked for the 24 hour branch of their organisation or the online medium and their knowledge and experience of foreign conflict coverage, particularly in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

On average, formal one-to-one<sup>38</sup> interviews lasted 54 minutes with a maximum of 90 and a minimum of 20 minutes. On average, all types<sup>39</sup> of semi-formal interviews lasted 28 minutes with a maximum of 90 and a minimum of 10 minutes. All interviews took place at the journalist's place of employment except on three occasions: in two instances journalists requested that the interview be conducted at a nearby coffee shop and in the third instance it was more convenient to find time to meet the journalist over dinner at a location she selected. Interviews were electronically recorded, as were observations (where practical), and field notes were always taken in addition to recordings.

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38 The formal one-to-two interview lasted 35 minutes and the formal one-to-many lasted 32 minutes.

39 Semi-formal one-to-one interviews lasted an average of 25 minutes; both semi-formal one-to-two interviews were 15 minutes long; and the semi-formal one-to-many interview was 90 minutes long.

Since the sample is divided between two countries and the researcher resided in the UK during the course of this project, trips to Canada involved heavy prior planning to ensure that expected outcomes would be achieved. Planning was also vital to secure interviews with journalists working within UK organisations since the majority of interviews took place in London while the researcher lived in Glasgow, Scotland. As always is the case, time and money had to be balanced against the degree to which the researcher expected to generalize from the data set.

Building trust and rapport was an important part of the interview process since the intention was not to encourage journalists to regurgitate words of their superiors or their organisation's policies but instead to reflect on their own work as part of the wider structure of their organisation. As well, the researcher always dressed smartly, wearing a suit in black or neutral colours, in an attempt to approach journalists from a neutral ground since journalists are accustomed to being surrounded by fellow colleagues or at least sources and guests who dress in such attire.

Securing a good level of rapport with interviewees was largely dependent on three factors: situational, motivational and political factors. Situational factors had minimal influence and involved the context of the interview, in particular how much time was available and whether the journalist was anxious to return to their work. In only one case was this factor a potential issue, yet this particular journalist was very candid and direct which countered the limits of time and anxiety. Motivational factors involved personal issues internal to the journalist. On the one hand, some journalists were openly disappointed by what they saw as the deteriorating quality of journalism while others were somewhat aggressive in the sense that they assumed that research involving technology might showcase the diminishing role of mainstream journalists in light of citizen journalists and bloggers and therefore became protective of their profession. In both cases some level of empathy had to be revealed by the researcher while the assumptions made by interviewees of the ultimate conclusions of the research had to be gently (or in one instance explicitly) overturned. In other words, these journalists had to be reassured that the researcher was not out to prove that mainstream journalism is dead or dying. Finally, political factors tended to revolve around questions relating to conflict coverage and the specific example of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Caution was

absolutely essential as a means of wording questions regarding public relations from either side of the conflict. Interviewees tended to reveal political leanings through conversations and it was important that the researcher abstained from revealing any potential biases during any discussions. In practice a high level of rapport was achieved with nearly every interviewee and very candid discussions frequently took place, along with sentences that began with “I shouldn’t be telling you this but ...” Different journalists responded in different ways but the researcher aimed to be as flexible as possible to accommodate the variety of personalities encountered.

Informed consent was gained from all journalists and only on two occasions was the researcher asked to preserve anonymity (and the recording was also paused at one point) while on another occasion the researcher was told to make anonymous anything that appeared to be very controversial. However, besides these instances journalists were not at all hesitant to speak about any issue brought up in discussions. In fact, on the whole journalists were eager to discuss their jobs and the impact of technologies, as well as future implications.

Within the results chapters journalists are identified by their name, job title and news organisation. Editorial meetings do not identify names of individual speakers, nor does the group interview involving CBC’s Morning Show Unit. Where anonymity was requested, the name is absent but the job position and organisation remain.

### **3. Method of Analysis**

All interviews and observations were fully transcribed, which was a very time-consuming process. However, this process enabled the use of the qualitative software package *QSR NVivo*.<sup>40</sup> Indexing began by categorizing the different stages of the production process: intake, selection, newsgathering, storywriting and transmission. Internal and external pressure, news values, audiences and technology were also indexing categories. Sections of text assigned to these categories represented daily routines or practices, behaviours, attitudes and anecdotes.

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40 Version 2.0 was used as it was available to postgraduate researchers at The University of Glasgow.

Many categories were created on the basis of ongoing interpretations of the data set over the course of this research project, as part of the grounded approach. In this way, transcriptions and field notes were already familiar on the basis of continual reading and extraction of quotes for various conference papers, presentations and a journal article. However, the process of indexing and coding forced yet further readings of the transcriptions and field notes which on this occasion involved a deeper analysis that involved searching for as many potential codes as possible. New subcategories were created to account for each particular topic that fell under the larger categories, including subcategories for editorial meetings and a separate category for daily routines which included the subcategory of journalistic autonomy.

Following the initial coding of all documents inserted into the *NVivo* project, an assessment was made of the categories and subcategories to determine if any should be collapsed into one another. Following preliminary decisions regarding organisation of the results into four chapters, a written list of all categories and sub categories (otherwise known as 'nodes,' 'children' and 'siblings') was made at which point the process of copying and pasting text in the form of quotes or field notes began. Each individual subcategory was crossed off the list after reviews of associated text were completed and the majority of text transferred to a working document. Headings were implemented to begin organisation of the huge volume of data. During this process every transcript and field note was re-read often multiple times since pieces of text were regularly coded with more than one category or subcategory. As well, the overarching categories themselves had text associated with them that had to be reviewed. In the end, 145 categories and subcategories were re-evaluated through this process, with numerous allowances for further coding to take place (into the pre-set categories and sub-categories).

The next phase of analysis involved the organisation of all of the text that had been inputted into the documents, delineated as chapters with vague headings. Herein began the inevitable reduction of text and the organisation into logically-successive and ideologically-relevant categories that incorporated descriptions and explanations. All quotes and text from field notes that was removed during this process remained as comments within the working documents to be scanned yet again during edits and revisions of chapters. The aim of this method of analysis was to ensure that no

information in the data set was excluded on the basis of its detracting of an argument or point being made in the analysis, but instead it would be excluded due to repetition, lack of space, or irrelevancy to the final topics selected for inclusion.

Concurrently, drawings of potential explanatory models were created, dismantled and reformulated (as they had also been throughout the research process). Only after all of the results chapters were essentially complete did the model presented in the Discussion chapter arise in its final state.

#### **4. Summary**

This chapter offered a detailed explanation of the conceptual development, methodological strategy and method of analysis employed within this research project. The sample of journalists and news organisations that were included in both observations and interviews was unpacked and illustrated through the use of two tables. Key questions asked within formal interviews were described and further information was presented regarding the setting, time period and rapport developed between researcher and interviewee. Finally, the steps taken within the analysis phase of this research project were explained in detail.

The next chapter provides a short introduction to the following four results chapters. The hierarchical structures encountered within the news organisations studied are described, along with a general account of the path of a news item within the production process and overall constraining structure. Also, discrepancies between the Canadian and UK context are explored and differences between discrete news bulletins and the 24 hour rolling news platform are included.



## **Chapter 4:**

### **Introduction to the Results – Setting the Context**

To put the following results chapters in context, it is necessary to (a) consider the practical operation of hierarchical structures within news organisations and (b) provide an overall sense of how the news production process is conducted. At this stage only a brief account of the structures and processes is offered since it is further unpacked throughout the following chapters. Differences between the Canadian and UK context are considered as well as relevant distinctions between discrete news bulletins and 24 hour rolling news. The topic of convergence is also broached as a means of identifying the wide variety of platforms used by news organisations within this study.

#### **1. Hierarchical Structure**

The general hierarchical structure of news organisations was introduced in the previous chapter, which included divisions between top-level, mid-level, and base-level journalists. These three levels are significant to the analysis of results since they represent the differing levels of autonomy and constraints through which each group operates. Each level is also separated into two tiers in order to capture the varying degrees of authority that are present (with three for the top-level due to the independent position of the Ombudsman). At the top-level, constraints over news output are formulated and ‘trickle-down’ the hierarchy, absorbed and passed on by mid-level journalists to the base-level of the structure. Such constraints might involve direct control via policy decisions over issues such as language use or more subtle control via responses to news output that convey preferential news angles or news values. Final decisions that determine substantial technological purchases and upgrades to current production systems are also made at this level, although informed to some degree by the upper tier of the mid-level hierarchical position. Within the mid-level, journalists engage much more directly with news output as they are generally responsible for the selection of news items and recommend story treatments, as well as specific components that should be included in

news stories. The lower tier within the mid-level, which consists of an assortment of editors, represents the group of journalists who supervise the work of base-level journalists and ensure that the content of stories is adequate and in line with the news organisation's mandates. Finally, at the base-level of the organisational hierarchy are the journalists whose time is occupied by newsgathering, storywriting and transmission after mid-level journalists assign stories to them.

This general hierarchical structure can be applied to all of the organisations within this study. When comparing the different news organisations, there is not a wealth of differences to be found in terms of the organisational structure. News organisations tend to employ different job titles (for instance ITV uses the term Programme Editor as opposed to Executive Producer) but their hierarchical structures remain effectively alike, which was a finding also documented within previous cross-national production research (Golding and Elliott 1979). The largest differences occur within the top-level, depending on the specific nature of the news organisation's relationship with the government and the market. The BBC and CBC are both public news organisations that maintain an economic relationship with the government and the public that was instituted as part of their initial establishment. Both of these organisations therefore operate under a Board of Directors (the BBC Trust in the case of the BBC) and their general management is directed by the President in the case of the CBC (appointed by the Prime Minister) and the Director-General for the BBC (appointed by the BBC Trust). The BBC receives its funding from television license fees collected from the public whereas the CBC receives much of its funding directly from the government and supplements this in part through advertising. The rest of the news organisations involved in this study are private, which means they rely heavily on the advertising industry for economic stability and do not maintain a similar relationship with the government. Beyond these differences, there were also some minor issues that relate to the specific nature of particular job positions. For instance, at the CBC the Executive Producer was largely focused on selection of news items whereas at Sky the Executive Producer was also directly involved with the final broadcast and sat in the gallery, speaking to journalists and guests before they went on air.

## 1.1 Canada versus the UK

News organisations also differed with respect to the specific domestic conditions under which they operate. The main discrepancies relate to resources, technology and geography. In relation to resources and budgets, it was clear that UK news organisations were likely to have access to more resources and bigger budgets than their Canadian counterparts. For instance, Brien Christie (Foreign Assignment Editor, CBC) made the following comparison between CBC and organisations in the UK: “And we’re not the BBC, we’re not Sky, we don’t have the resources or the money that these people have ... We don’t have 56 bureaus<sup>41</sup> or whatever the BBC has.” While other Canadian journalists discussed the extravagance they had witnessed while working outside of Canada, CBC’s Vice-President, Richard Stursberg, boasted about the available resources of CBC in relation to a US news organisation: “We have more extensive international news bureaus than CBS in the US.” As well, Stursberg insisted that CBC’s resources surpassed those of other Canadian news organisations: “we have the most extensive newsgathering resources in Canada.”

Also, on a number of occasions it was clear that there was a technological lag between the two countries studied. Not only had Canadian news organisations adopted new technologies in the newsroom and in the field later than their UK counterparts, but the technologies available to the public were also released later (e.g. 3G mobile phones). Nevertheless, this was not the case for every new technology and certainly organisations within the two countries did not move at the same pace (e.g. differing adoption rates of non-linear editing and transmission technologies). Yet the difference was still evident; for instance, UK news organisations were dealing with a much higher volume of mobile phone images and videos sent in by the public as well as online responses to website material. While technological developments play some role here, audience behaviours could also be implicated.

Finally, geographic concerns were also an issue. Canada obviously has a much larger territory to cover when compared to the UK. This was reflected within editorial meetings

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41 The BBC has approximately 58 foreign bureaus whereas CBC has 10.

where journalists across the country were at different stages of production depending on the time zone in which they were operating. Paul Hambleton (Executive Producer, CBC) provided an example from CBC regarding nationwide editorial meetings held via teleconferencing:

Canada's huge, you know. But a lot of people on the phone call, it's early in the morning – 7 o'clock in the morning, 7.30 in the morning, it's really early so they actually don't really know what they're up to. Whereas on the east coast it's 11 o'clock in Newfoundland so they know what they're doing.

Also, centralized nightly newscasts move across the country with the changing time zones and foreign correspondents might also be asked to provide 'live' coverage from conflict zones for multiple bulletins at different times over the course of the evening.

## **2. General Path and Control Structure of a News Item**

The following description conveys the control structure inherent within news production processes. It is meant as an introductory overview since the subsequent results chapters go into further detail and describe instances where production diverges from this description.

The general path of a news item begins during the intake phase wherein mid-level (to a small degree) and base-level journalists (to a larger degree) gather information that is considered for selection by the upper tier of mid-level journalists. More specifically, the key decisions regarding selection are made by the Executive Producer and typically occur within the editorial meeting. However, since news is more fluid than routines can accommodate, selection also occurs throughout the news day as breaking news transpires. Along with selection, the Executive Producer assigns stories to base-level journalists, although assignment editors (foreign and domestic) may also take on this task. Base-level journalists then employ the 'guidance' supplied by the assigning mid-level journalist to begin their newsgathering. This phase typically takes place before storywriting but can also occur simultaneously, depending on the situation. Editors (lower tier mid-level journalists) check up on base-level journalists during this phase and are again involved near the end of production in the form of editing. It is the upper tier of

mid-level journalists (typically producers) that make key decisions regarding inclusion of the stories produced by base-level journalists in the final broadcast and determine the running order. Not every story is produced in such a rigid fashion, of course, since some news items are covered ‘live on location.’ In these instances upper tier mid-level journalists (Producers or Executive Producers) speak to base-level journalists in their ear piece before the item is to go on air, making decisions and suggestions regarding content and conveying information about the running order and time limits for each story.

However, base-level journalists should not be considered as a single unit since there is diversity within their routines and the level of autonomy they can potentially access. More specific details of these differences are unpacked within the following results chapters; however, a few points will be noted here. The routines of general news reporters tend to differ from those of beat reporters, such as Parliamentary Correspondents, who are typically tied to a few specific locations. Journalists covering domestic news are also very different from those working as foreign correspondents, largely with respect to their interaction with the selection and assignment process. As well, Video Journalists (also known as VJs or videographers) represent ‘one-person bands’ who take on more responsibility since they lack the traditional units that rely on larger crews: “One reporter goes with his own or her own little camera. And with their own, you know, radio equipment, a laptop and they cover it for everybody. And then they write it all up for online” (Sophia Hadzipetros, Managing Editor, CBC Toronto). Video Journalist Trina Maus (CTV Southwestern Ontario) explained that at least within local stations financial incentives have driven this increase: “Our station is all run by videographers and the only reason we have reporters is because of the older guys that haven’t retired yet.” The typical labour intensive unit for TV involves a reporter, camera man and sac engineer with a satellite van. On top of this, a sound producer might also be involved. However, the five person unit Nicolas Spicer (Foreign Correspondent, CBC) described as operating in the 1950s within foreign news coverage included five people in total: “a lighting director, sound man, cameraman, producer, reporter.” In this way, being a ‘VJ’ is “less intrusive” and enables greater freedom for the journalist: “I make sure I have the pictures that I want. I write as I should” (John Northcott, Video Journalist, CBC). Such changes reflected what Paul Hambleton (Executive Producer, CBC) called “a natural progression” due to the increasing ease with which journalists can employ technologies:

It's about as streamlined – it's about as kind of efficient as you can get. You can't go to less than one person. And we've had a lot of battles internally here about that kind of staffing and you know – five years ago we wouldn't have been in there without a producer, we wouldn't be there without certain kinds of support but bit by bit people are, we're asking people to do more and more but it's a natural progression. It's a natural progression because at the same time the technology is easier.

Even within the realm of editing, changes are occurring with some base-level journalists still relying on others to edit their final piece, but many more are beginning to learn how to edit their own material.

## **2.1 Bulletins, 24 Hour News and Convergence**

This study encompasses both discrete news bulletins and 24 hour rolling news. The major difference between these types of news broadcasts relates to targeted time slots and allocation of resources. For discrete news bulletins, all activities are geared towards one particular broadcast that occurs at a set time. On the other hand, 24 hour rolling news similarly tend to devote most of their resources to set time slots while also setting aside some resources for extra material that is aired in-between these set times. For instance, the two most important times of the day at Sky were the afternoon 12 to 1pm and 1 to 2pm time slot and the evening 5 to 6pm and 6 to 7pm time slot. The content of these programmes can be somewhat repetitive throughout the day, depending on whether breaking news has occurred in-between these set times or if a particular news story that had been assigned becomes ready for broadcast. As such, audiences who watch the channel continuously would see headlines, quarterheads and teasers<sup>42</sup> repetitively. 'Live' news items are also effectively repeated with either slightly different questions asked, a new interviewee replacing a previous one, or different shot sequences included. The major difference for 24 hour rolling news is that particular packages are also assigned and produced to fill the space between the targeted time slots. These news items are then repeated throughout the news day. Where news organisations maintain both discrete

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42 A teaser is a short clip that is produced to advertise an upcoming news bulletin or news items that have yet to air during the bulletin.

news bulletins and 24 hour rolling news, work by journalists at all hierarchical levels tends to overlap, supplying news output for both stations.

Additionally, today's news organisations rarely limit their output to one platform since converged newsrooms have become the norm. All of the news organisations included in this research maintained an online presence while also providing broadcast news (as a 24 hour news channel, regular bulletins, or specialty and investigative news programming) and four included radio as well. This means that many journalists are now required to report for more than one platform. As Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) explains, "Nobody in the BBC works just for one programme, correspondents tend to work across a range of outlets." Much of the material that is produced is repurposed for other media. The BBC calls this process 'Multi-Platform Authoring': "if [a journalist] write[s] 4 paragraphs and a headline, those 4 paragraphs and headline will appear, can appear and most cases will appear on the website and CEEFAX – which is our old teletext service – on your PDA, on your WAP enabled phone" (Mick McGlinchey, Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online). However, such repurposing is not always an easy feat, as John McQuacker (Manager, CBC Online) explains: "how do you get them [radio and TV reporters] reporting for the web in a way that makes sense for the organisation? Nobody's quite solved that yet. You don't expect people who write for radio and TV to write for the web."

News organisations are also increasingly combining more alternative platforms into their delivery systems, including television screens placed in airports or busy intersections, on trains and planes, on news aggregating websites hosted by other companies (e.g. Yahoo), or via mobile phones. Competition over these platforms has inevitably increased: "what we're getting into are these bidding wars. We're all competing now – for airports, malls, subway stations" (John Bainbridge, Deputy Director, CBC). Key decisions regarding which platforms are sought after are in the hands of top-level journalists.

### **3. Summary**

The above descriptions offer the context and background necessary for the next four results chapters. These chapters are organised according to the different phases of news

production: (1) intake; (2) selection and assignment; and (3) newsgathering, storywriting and transmission. The final chapter is reserved for external pressures that originate outwith the daily routines of production. The first of these chapters, intake phase, explores the rise of contemporary elements within the flow of news that are a result of the combination of technological developments and shifting public behaviours and the way in which traditional elements of news flow continue to operate within news production. The next chapter, selection and assignment, examines how the information that enters the news organisation within the intake phase is selected for coverage and assigned to journalists. The traditional constraining factors are considered (e.g. story 'guidance') in tandem with the new technological developments that influence various aspects of this phase of production (e.g. electronic agency feeds). As well, there is a focus on the range of news values that currently dominate this phase. The third chapter concentrates on the final stages of news production – newsgathering, storywriting and transmission – through an exploration of the relationship between the selection and integration of new technologies by news organisations and the daily routines of journalists. Again, the role of traditional constraining factors (e.g. editorial control) in relation to the autonomy of base-level journalists is considered, particularly when new technologies (e.g. BlackBerrys and blogs) are independently incorporated into their daily routines. Finally, the last chapter deals with external pressures that impact the news production process. The role of the audience is investigated, along with the way in which news organisations are adapting to shifting public behaviours and technological developments that question their credibility. As well, the pressure applied by governments and the public relations industry, particularly in relation to the specific case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is considered. The significance of online news is also explored as a means of resolving the perennial lack of context and history within broadcast news coverage.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **Intake Phase – The Information Producing Strata and News Flow**

The first phase of daily news production involves a survey of news items and information produced by sources that exist within the information producing strata of society. Production by news agencies and other news media has long been routinized into the structures of journalism practice and continues to dominate this phase of the production process. Information from official sources and public relations professionals typically translates into institution-driven events with some items pre-recorded within planning documents. Mainstream news organisations extract items from this traditional set of sources and rely upon this information within the selection and assignment processes that follow.

Despite these rather static routines, journalists acting within this intake phase are also progressively accessing a more contemporary set of sources. As a result of technological developments, these sources can now join the traditional set in publishing, broadcasting and transmitting information in a way that is readily accessible to the news production process. Any individual with access to a computer and internet connection<sup>43</sup> can join the information producing strata of society as well as any individual who carries a mobile camera phone or similarly compact digital imaging device. Therefore, as opposed to the 'severely restricted' information producing strata described within previous research, a much wider variety of sources now compose the strata. This contemporary set of sources is unique in that public behaviours of documentation and dissemination that have always produced news-related information have intensified and become more accessible in conjunction with the ease through which the public can employ new media tools. That is, these public behaviours previously existed on a much smaller scale in the form of 'phone-

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43 In some cases government censorship of the internet has had a detrimental impact on the rise of potential news-producers.

in tips,' feedback via post or telephone and 'freelancing' for news organisations; however, their role in the production process was limited prior to the ubiquity of new media.

News items can also be initiated independently through internal production by journalists operating within different elements of their organisation – television, radio, online and through the bureaus.<sup>44</sup> As well, a journalist's list of contacts can occasionally yield newsworthy items; however this routine is most relevant for beat reporters who are discussed in the next chapter and the use of contacts as a means of newsgathering, which is discussed in Chapter 7. This chapter is split into two sections: (1) traditional elements of news flow, which includes news agencies, other news media, official sources and the public relations industry, as well as an organisation's own news bureaus; and (2) contemporary elements of news flow and the transition from tips, feedback and freelancing to 'user generated content' and 'citizen journalism.'

## **1. Traditional Elements of News Flow**

This section represents the traditional elements of news flow that have remained critical to the news production process, in line with conclusions from previous research. Past studies that aimed to expose the social construction of news argued that advanced planning was an important indicator and it was also found in the present study that planning information passed along by news agencies tended to drive some aspects of news coverage. The influence of news agencies and other media on an organisation's own coverage was also discussed within interviews, leading to an assessment of the cyclical nature of news coverage. Beyond these points, new issues arising within interviews and observations revolved around the electronic transmission of news agency feeds and collective monitoring practices, online access to news output by other media and the increasing use of stringers by news bureaus.

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44 And any other holdings owned by the organisation – for example, newspapers, etc.

## 1.1 News Agencies

News agencies continue to represent the most widely used source within mainstream news organisations due to their compatible organisation, credibility and wealth of information from so many locations around the world. Newsrooms now access these feeds electronically, which has resulted in collective monitoring and the diffusion of power over which items might be offered for consideration.

In response to interview questions regarding the reliance on news agencies, journalists agreed that they represent a dominant source. As Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) says, “probably the majority of the stuff we don’t get ourselves we just get agencies to do it.” Lindsey Hilsum (International Editor and China Correspondent, Channel 4) explains: “Yeah because it’s the news and nobody gets the news out as quickly as the agencies. ... for the daily ‘breaking news,’ the agencies are still the major source and the rest is extra.” According to Nigel Baker (Executive Director, APTN), “Reuters and AP harvest most of the key images of breaking news in the world.” As such, this dependency may even be increasing, as Alan Fryer (Investigative Reporter, CTV) points out: “You can sit in Toronto or London or New York and do a story about a bombing strike in Somalia or, you know, Darfur or anywhere else in the world without being there because we’re relying completely more and more on services – APTN, Reuters – and more just sort of freelance people.” Some journalists view this dominance partly as a reflection of the daily routines they were trained to perform: “fundamentally the way I was trained was very much, ‘Oh let’s see what’s on the wires’ and ok there’s the element of original journalism but, ‘What’s on the wires?’” (Mick McGlinchey, Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online). It is no surprise then that Ben Rayner (Editor, ITV) listed the Press Association, Reuters, AP and Reuters and AP’s picture agencies as sources he would examine before the daily editorial meeting. Even content for the online element of news organisations is heavily directed by news agencies:

Obviously a big part of our news is the content that we’re paying for from recognised news agencies, whether it’s the Press Association or Reuters. And that content is obviously a major part of what we do, or what we provide. And also alongside that, you know picture agencies etcetera providing us with a huge amount of content. (McGlinchey)

Picture agencies such as Enx Consortium (European News Exchange) were used within newsrooms, for instance by Sky's Foreign Desk. News organisations were also in receipt of video feeds with, for example, approximately 200 tapes produced and labelled at Sky each day.

The dominance of news agencies in the production process is largely a result of the close fit between production and dissemination practices of news agencies with production practices of news organisations (i.e. the bureaucratically organised fit). Yet it also relates to the perceived fit in terms of values, and hence credibility: "the agencies Reuters and AP are getting information and pictures – this is television, pictures is what you need – they are getting that across the world, in a very rapid and efficient manner and they have the same, similar news standard to us" (Lindsey Hilsum, International Editor and China Correspondent, Channel 4). The flow of information from news agencies forms a large part of the news agenda largely "because there are certain wire services you would trust implicitly as a single source. Other ones you would always have to double check" (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). Particular news agencies have reputations; for instance, AFP is regularly 'unreliable' and 'AP inflate figures often' (Foreign Desk, Sky). Hilsum's comments indicate her perspective of Reuters' reputation:

So I know when I get pictures from Reuters, like these pictures I'm going to use today from East Timor, I have an idea of how they were filmed and the information which goes into them is likely to be correct. So that's what I'm going to use.

When ascertaining credibility, journalists want to "get nearer and nearer to the people actually there" (Executive Producer, Sky). Thus, during observations a Reuters report contained information considered more likely to be credible since it was based on an estimate from a police officer who was an eye witness at the scene. Journalists stress that single-source journalism is not acceptable as stories should be double-sourced or even checked with "at least three sources so you can depend on it" (Foreign Desk, Sky). Nevertheless, Nigel Baker, an Executive Producer at APTN, claimed that his organisation "can validate information." Therefore, "when people are searching for news, what they get from us has an overwhelming chance of being correct" (Nigel Baker, Executive Director, APTN). In this way, it is very helpful that "the wires print schedules like PA will

print schedules saying this is what's happening next week this is what's happening tomorrow and then in the morning they would put something out as a wire saying this is what's happening today" (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). These comments capture the planning that remains entrenched within news production.

However, the intake of news agency feeds has changed significantly over the past decade. The position of the 'copy taster' – described in Chapter 2 as the focus of the initial phase of news production research – previously operated as an essential gatekeeper who 'sifted through reams of copy tape.' This role has been displaced as a result of technological development, shifting from teleprinters to software packages like iNews and ENPS.<sup>45</sup> News from wire agencies arrives via satellite transmission instead of telephone lines (fibre optic cable). These software packages provide many other services for news organisations, including provisions for multiple users to simultaneously prepare the running order for the news broadcast, write headlines and input text read by presenters. In addition to all of these functions, these programmes act as the new medium through which journalists receive news agency feeds. As opposed to one 'copy taster,' the wires are now watched collectively as news items arrive via colour-coded ranking systems (or alternatively identified with a lightning bolt). For instance, in iNews users can view incoming news items in one section of the screen while a small box on the bottom right hand corner of the program's screen flashes information like 'Iraq-unrest-blast' or 'Iraq-cabinet-decided',<sup>46</sup> blinking red to signify that the news item is urgent. This enables journalists to be instantly informed of breaking news – particularly if the box is red, indicating the highest importance level. In ENPS, information appears at the top of the screen in the form of a news ticker. For example, 'Race discrimination for BNP' was observed during a visit to BBC Scotland. Therefore, one consequence of electronic delivery of feeds is that news agencies now maintain greater control over notions of importance attached to each item.

With all journalists receiving news agency feeds at their desktop, collective monitoring of the wires has become the norm, routinized into production practices. According to Nigel

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45 ENPS was introduced in 1997 and is manufactured by AP while iNews is a product acquired by Avid Technology, Inc. in 2001.

46 Examples come from observations at Sky.

Baker (Executive Director, APTN), this is also a result of the growth of news flow as a whole: “News moves too fast and the volume is too much for one person to sit there and sift through.” Therefore in today’s newsrooms, “Everyone is a copy taster” (Ben Rayner, Editor, ITV). The more traditional role of the ‘copy taster’ has therefore disappeared. Some ‘copy tasters’ found new positions within their organisation, for instance “the copy taster from [ITV’s] News at 10 now writes onscreen breaking news straps” (Ben Rayner, Editor, ITV). Still, Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) pointed out that some remnants of the previous system of ‘copy tasters’ still exists: “I think there is still one at Bush Helm at the World Service. ... I used to work there, I started there. And literally sheets of paper and all the rest of it, good old-fashioned stuff. Yeah, we are all now copy tasters.” More significant than the loss of the specific role of ‘copy taster’ is the change in the nature of monitoring news agency feeds. As Sean O’Shea (Investigative Reporter, Global) remarked, “There’s usually desk people who are always watching the wires, always.” As such, “you don’t really have to have bells ringing or any special attention to it [like in the past] because people are staring at their computers virtually all the time” (O’Shea). Breaking news items are easily visible in this way, as opposed to the days of “machines spitting out triple copy and if you didn’t get to the wire machine quickly you wouldn’t see it. You might not see breaking news for a few minutes or something like that” (O’Shea).

A second consequence of electronic access to incoming items is the diffusion of power over subjective notions of newsworthiness due to collective monitoring. O’Shea highlights this point: “I guess it’s kind of democratized it in the newsroom because everybody from the news director through to producers through reporters through editorial assistants can – if they are logged into the computer – get all the information at the same time.” The effect of this change to daily routines is most relevant within the selection and assignment process, discussed in the next chapter. However, even with collective monitoring, the volume of information necessitates that journalists choose keywords and subscribe to particular services:

When you set up your ENPS settings at the beginning you choose keywords so there would be certain obvious ones anyway like, you know, breaking news type of stories. If there was a big explosion they would pop-up automatically but you couldn’t have every single wire dropping in ... ‘cause it would be

clicking through every half a second ... in Scotland you would subscribe to the Dundee Press Agency – there would be a big contract at some level of the BBC where you'd have the Dundee Press Agency, half a dozen other press agencies, the court agencies and you'd subscribe to their copy so you would know when their stories come through. (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland)

ENPS also limits the number of items stored so if a journalist is not checking incoming items frequently, they will only be able to access the previous 50 items.

## **1.2 Other News Organisations**

News information produced by other news organisations has also typically been a regular source of potential news items. News organisations provide a steady stream of material that alert journalists to news items, impact notions of newsworthiness and offer images, information, and even entire packages that can be incorporated into output. Monitoring of other media has now also extended to the online environment wherein many sources can be quickly accessed and preliminary research can occur. However, the integrity of news may be challenged when such activities are combined with a displaced role of the former 'fact-checker.'

News flow becomes cyclical in nature when news organisations actively ingest incoming information produced by other news agencies and news media and effectively reproduce many of these items, which other news organisations then pursue within their own production processes. Media thus feed off other media, impacting which items are considered during selection processes and setting notions of newsworthiness for other media to follow. A prime example of this can be seen during a discussion with CBC's Morning Show Unit about the impact of BBC and CNN's coverage on their own decision-making over coverage of alleged terrorist arrests:

*Speaker 1:* It was about 4 in the morning [in Canada], the BBC started going 'live' wall to wall with it and, you know, really pumping it up as a big story and that impacted how we handled it here. Because initially we were, 'It's sort of a good story, good news story, they caught these people, there weren't explosions, these sorts of things' so you're kind of weighing it out on how big of a deal it is. Like it's a big story but do you go 'live' with it? But then BBC started going 'live' with it then suddenly CNN's going 'live' with it so then we go up and we go 'live' with it, right. There's sort of a cascading effect there.

*Speaker 2:* It's kind of intensified the whole pack journalism aspect I think.

Another example comes from an editorial meeting at the CBC where an item was selected for coverage simply because "it's on the wires and everyone else is reporting it and we're not, that's kind of counter-productive."

Due to technological developments journalists now also access media output online: "I think that journalists regularly check websites like I check 5 or 6 websites now everyday which are essentially, it's as if I'm reading *The New York Times*, *The Globe and Mail*, you know, *The Guardian*, I'm just really going through their websites" (Tony Burman, Editor in Chief, CBC). Beyond mainstream news websites and news aggregators, some journalists subscribe to websites that offer wider access to sources considered credible: "Well I have a whole [range that] I cruise around, there's a journalism.net thing ... There's a wonderful one called assignmenteditor.com which I pay a bit of money to but it gives me access to magazines, secure newspapers, I read the Christian Science Monitor a lot" (Brien Christie, Foreign Assignment Editor, CBC). While observing Sky's newsroom, the Executive Producer was intermittently checking the BBC website for their top stories. As well, he was frequently watching BBC News 24 and FOX News and when sitting in the gallery the he also checked the BBC website from time to time. Even after more traditional websites are accessed prior to the editorial meeting, some research takes place surrounding the news item(s) of interest and the internet is increasingly used for this practice:

I do a survey of all the news sites every morning and then, you know, that's the first step and often I'll get one or two ideas from that and then I'll do some background research on it also using the internet as well. That's a *huge* change [and] has had a huge, massive impact on newsrooms in terms of a research tool and a way of gathering news, coming up with ideas and refining them. (Morning Show Unit, CBC)

Yet traditional paper copies have hardly become obsolete within the newsroom: among others, *USA Today*, *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star* were laying around the CBC newsroom whereas every paper from the UK, including tabloids, and some from outside of the UK as well, like *USA Today* and *Newsweek*, were found on Sky's Foreign Desk. Paul Hambleton (Executive Producer, CBC) said members of his staff also "read a lot of the British newspapers and international newspapers." Tabloid newspapers are involved but

serve a different purpose: “The tabloids are more useful for a feature but not hard news” (Foreign Desk, Sky). However, the specific position that journalists hold within the organisation can impact the places they look for story ideas. Hambleton is an Executive Producer and therefore often takes a different approach than colleagues working at the base-level:

I don't even look at Canadian newspapers because I figure that everybody out there has – like there's nothing in there that, I'm not going to miss anything because somebody's going to see it ... I'll start with, like at the back end of *The New York Times* or something. I'll start in a weird place and try and find a trend, look for a trend story or something that I haven't seen before, that kind of thing.

Beyond the practice of browsing through popular newspapers, having TV sets within newsrooms tuned to competitor 24 hour news stations<sup>47</sup> and the general inclusion of news consumption into the daily routines of journalists, partnerships have also developed between news organisations as a means of sharing information, images and ‘live’ feeds. These relationships can be useful for breaking news items, as seen when CBC began covering a fire ‘live’ on their 24 hour station CBC Newsworld. The fire was taking place in Detroit but CBC did not have a means of getting images on their own so they used the feed from an American helicopter as a result of a relationship CBC has with the American networks: “fortunately it's close to Detroit because Detroit was interested enough to put their helicopter up to take pictures of it” (Hambleton). Since CBC has access to these satellite feeds, a journalist in a control room “probably saw that feed and thought, ‘Oh ok let's go get it.’ And we can use this stuff – like if it's CBS or NBC then we can use it without really even asking” (Hambleton). Other news organisations can also be directly commissioned to produce packages for air. For instance during observations at Sky a package on Michael Jackson was commissioned since his court case was ongoing at the time. As well, with the advent of satellite technology, a feed of a breaking news story can be ‘grabbed’ instantly as opposed to the days of terrestrial technology wherein the feed would have to first be recorded locally.

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47 In CBC's gallery BBC World and ET were on while CTV and CBC Newsworld were on two screens at various desks in the newsroom.

However, some fear that this cyclical process whereby the media feeds off one another threatens the integrity of news:

People are repurposing each other's, because it's so easy for us all to watch each other, things get repurposed without fact checking. Very few news organisations have fact checkers anymore. In the old days any magazine worth its salt and a great many newspapers and some of the larger TV news operations would have people on the desk who simply check the facts. They make phone calls, you know, 'Is this quote that is attributed to you, is that what you said?' That hardly happens anymore. (Peter Kent, Deputy Editor, Global)

Nevertheless, journalists do not automatically accept information from other news organisations as fact. For instance, Hambleton describes his distrust of one particular conservative newspaper: "I still don't trust the front page of the National Post. I look at the front page because I'm interested in – I'm in the business, but I know that probably every headline on that page has an agenda attached to it."

### **1.3 Official Sources and the Public Relations Industry**

Another major source of information indicated in the previous literature and arising again within the current research involves official sources and the public relations industry. Observations and interview questions regarding the reliance on official sources and institution-driven news indicated that they continue to remain important to the production process. Announcements of upcoming events and news conferences fall under the category of predictable institution-driven news. Government press offices are involved in this flow of information, for instance the Department of Health will send in material. News items also develop out of press releases – for instance when "a charity says it is National Skin Cancer Day" (Ben Rayner, Editor, ITV). Logistical information is normally a part of the package, including "how you get coverage – for example, download direct – it is a big operational jigsaw" (Executive Producer, Sky). As well, some areas of news coverage are more contentious than others and thereby provoke much more production on the part of public relations or governments who wish to influence reports. However, some journalists expressed their desire that selection processes retain some independence from these sources:

We like to imagine that we are, you know, a little bit autonomous in that we don't, we aren't driven by the agenda, we struggle to kind of – particularly politicians who call news conferences to make announcements. We resist being a vehicle for them but at the same time it's also our job to tell people what people are saying. So it's a fine line, you know, between those two. (Paul Hambleton, Executive Producer, CBC)

News organisations also receive potentially newsworthy items from public relations professionals who send information to planners. In this way, “PR companies still play an overly powerful role by pushing their stories” (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). They “keep pushing and pushing at that door” by sending emails to the planning desk saying, “we’ve got this happening, you know, are you interested?” (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). Sean O’Shea (Investigative Reporter, Global) explains how some of this information is intended to create favourable news stories regarding a particular product or service, or involves “people trying to get profiled for their organisations.” Regardless of the content, “It’s always a rocky relationship between PR and news organisations because their mandate is to, you know, make their company look good and our mandate is to expose something – good, bad or somewhere in-between” (O’Shea). Video News Releases discussed in Chapter 2 are also sent in but they mostly concern stunts like a “round the world yacht race” and were allegedly deemed to be “value neutral” (Executive Producer, Sky). As such, it was argued that news organisations are only interested in them from a “journalistic stance” and present such pieces within this light.

#### **1.4 News Bureaus**

A final source of potential news items regularly accessed within the intake phase is actually internal to the news organisation itself. News bureaus are offices maintained by news organisations that are geographically located away from the organisation’s main office. Therefore, bureaus can appear within the same country or exist externally as a foreign bureau. The function of bureaus is to gather and disseminate information and news items within their specific region. Most news organisations have news bureaus within major cities across the world, although this tendency is declining: “they’ve closed down foreign bureaus, they don’t have the kind of permanent presence that they used to have in foreign countries and they’re relying more and more on services and freelancers

for their video content and that's strewn with danger" (Alan Fryer, Investigative Reporter, CTV). Comparing CTV's Ottawa Bureau with CTV's head offices in Toronto, David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) highlighted the difference in sophistication: the Ottawa Bureau is "not as sophisticated as it would be at various head offices. So we're just taking stuff in and sending stuff out that we collect here."

Journalists working as editors, foreign assignment editors and anyone who operates the Foreign Desk speak to the bureaus as a means of generating a short list to bring to the editorial meeting. "The wires and my conversations with the bureaus are sort of my daily things" (Brien Christie, Foreign Assignment Editor, CBC). Ben Rayner (Editor, ITV) mentioned the South African and Jerusalem bureaus; and Sky's Foreign Desk consults with a correspondent at each of Sky's bureaus.<sup>48</sup>

Bureaus also make use of stringers who gather material within conflict zones which is then accepted or rejected by news organisations. Stringers offer the crucial element of pictures, which raise the status of a news item within selection processes. Speaking about CBC's Afghanistan coverage, Daniel Morin (Supervising Technician, CBC) explained how stringers will arrive at the scene of an event "much quicker than we would, getting out of the base because there's protocol, we have to do this and that, get a driver. By the time we get there it's over so he shoots the stuff and he brings it to us and then we pass it on to Toronto." Another reason why news organisations employ stringers is to protect their own foreign correspondents:

What happens now in Baghdad is the reporters never go out of their compounds 'cause the networks won't let them out, it's too dangerous. So they've got freelance Iraqi guys, camera men, a lot of Aussies and Irish people, you know, the freelancers are all crazy. And, you know, the reporter stays safe and sound in the compound without really venturing out. (Alan Fryer, Investigative Reporter, CTV)

However, credibility issues are always a concern since selling exclusive video is financially appealing with videos earning, for instance, "a fast 500 dollars" (Peter Kent, Deputy Editor, Global). Kent offers an example from the Afghan-Russian war where freelancers

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48 Sky has approximately 7 foreign bureaus.

“would come out [after a battle] and they would use the same tank [involved in the battle] and they’d put kerosene on it and shoot it just to make the money for selling a picture.” Credibility can also arise in more subtle ways: “if there was an event happening, a riot or a street protest they’d shoot one tape and sell it to us and then they’d go to ABC down the street and sell another piece to them so they were working us, it wasn’t, it wasn’t reliable news content” (Kent). Nevertheless, “in the television business you’ve got to illustrate your stories if you can” (Kent) which is why these sources can be necessary despite potential downfalls.

## **2. Contemporary Elements of News Flow**

The role of the public within mainstream news production practices has transformed in conjunction with technological developments, the most important of which are the advent of the internet, free and user-friendly online publishing tools and digital imaging technology – especially mobile phones with built-in cameras. This section focuses on the shift from the occasional phone-in ‘tip’ indicated within previous research to a significant expansion of the information producing strata of society. Despite previous research, this stratum is no longer as ‘severely restricted’ nor is the bureaucratically organised world of journalism so inaccessible to the average person. As a result, while the “values and cultural definitions” that news coverage “inevitably reproduces and relays” (Golding and Elliott 1979) may still be highly dependent on the traditional set of news-producing groups in society, the contemporary set of news-producing groups are now also poised to contribute.

Production by members of the public coincides with a culture of increased documentation through a tremendous surge in the volume of still images, videos and text. In response to the interview question regarding the use of ‘unofficial’ sources, it was clear that this production had become increasingly more important within news coverage. The terms currently associated with these public behaviours have not yet stabilized, but ‘user generated content’ (UGC) and ‘citizen journalism’ are used most regularly. UGC will refer here mainly to images and video captured by citizens and transmitted to news organisations. Another aspect of UGC refers to content created by online news consumers who comment, debate and otherwise interact via a news

organisation's online platform. The term citizen journalism, on the other hand, will be reserved for citizens who maintain online web-logs (more popularly known as 'blogs').<sup>49</sup> While many blogs that function as personal diaries or provide content that does not relate to topics journalists would tend to consider newsworthy exist within the blogosphere, there are also blogs that contain information, opinions, analysis and debates via comment sections that either discuss mainstream news coverage or, more importantly, provide original 'reporting' anywhere from conflict zones to non-tumultuous regions.

## **2.1 The Development of Public News-Producing Behaviours**

Traditionally, the public has contributed to mainstream news production by passing on 'tips.' For instance, the public will phone "the local TV and radio about fires, traffic jams, etcetera" (Ben Rayner, Editor, ITV) or news organisations (particularly the local counterparts) will "rely heavily on citizens sending in emails saying, 'Hey I've got this event going on, hey we're organising this protest'" (Trina Maus, Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario). However, when combining these public behaviours with the ubiquity of mobile camera phones, a new element became established within production practices. UGC is thus largely an extension of public behaviours that had existed without the enabling technology<sup>50</sup> but operated in a less visible and influential way. Sean Mallen (Parliamentary Correspondent, Global) offers an example: "So the classic case is a tornado. We're forever going back for years and years buying tape from people who took some vids of a tornado or something. So it's already there and it was just writ large in the [July 7th, 2005] London bombing there with camera phones, with cell phone cameras." Paul Hambleton (Executive Producer, CBC) offers another explanation: "All that is, is it's the updated version of the newshound. Be the CBC Newshound of the day, the news tip call in and send a video." News organisations tended to view this new element as a resource that was clearly useful:

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49 Anyone who considers themselves a citizen journalist but does not use a blog as their means of dissemination would also be included here.

50 This point is also made by Klein and Burstein (2005) in relation to blogging more generally.

now all mainstream organisations are tapping in because all you're doing is you're harnessing a resource out there that has millions and millions of people with a camera on the street. So as a news organisation are you going to ignore that or are you going to embrace it? No brainer, right? You're going to embrace it. (Mark Sikstrom, Executive Producer, CTV Online)

The widespread accessibility of digital imaging technologies can be seen as a facilitator for the explosion of UGC: "It facilitates something that was already always there but it is a lot more democratic. People can afford a couple hundred bucks for a camera, a video camera or a cell phone. ... So many more people have their own little cameras now, handcam cameras" (Sean Mallen, Parliamentary Correspondent, Global). Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) also points to the "proliferation of digital media": "People have got digital cameras now and they want to be able to send pictures in. It's an absolute steal. You know for us it's brilliant." Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) argues that the growth of UGC as an element within the production process was dependent on technological developments:

It's really difficult because technology is moving on so quickly. I mean the whole thing about UGC and journalists is none of that would have been possible probably 5 years ago even. Because mobiles didn't have the facilities to shoot video and zoom in pictures and, you know, take stills and no one actually knew how to send them in and we didn't know how to get them on air. That is a whole new kind of ball game.

In this way, pre-existing behaviours combined with readily accessible technological capabilities and an insatiable, immediate rolling news environment has translated into a culture of increased documentation. The public will now "take video and take stills and send them immediately" to a news organisation, which becomes "a huge resource" (Mark Sikstrom, Executive Producer, CTV Online). With past research highlighting the economic-logic of news production, it is logical that news organisations would be pleased to

incorporate this new resource since it nearly always<sup>51</sup> arrives free of cost and is therefore enormously advantageous.

This new playing field also incorporates a different type of production by the public: citizen journalists who produce blogs are “now adding to the news agenda” (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). Some bloggers discuss mainstream news output while others provide analysis and commentary of news items they find worthy of publication. Still others function as a new band of freelancers or stringers: “in the same way that people used to, you know, freelancers for newspapers went out with their own still camera and take pictures of fires for the newspaper. ... Now it’s just happening more and more and it’s with video and selling to us. If somebody comes up with something good, you know why not?” (Sean Mallen, Parliamentary Correspondent, Global). In a similar vein, although speaking about bloggers more generally, Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC) described the development of sources: “blogs are a reflection of what’s been going on for several years, which is an incredible increase of information sources, a kind of a multiplicity of choices that we all have in terms of not only finding out what’s happening but also trying to get a sense of what’s true and what isn’t true.” The information producing strata of society expands as a result: “Well bloggers are part of the stream. I mean I’m a big believer in, you know, multiple streams, some of them tiny and maybe they dry up periodically or are unreliable in that sense and some of them are big and they flow into the big river of information” (Vince Carlin, Ombudsman, CBC). The traditional set of sources that feed the news flow cycle remain but the contemporary set have joined the strata:

From the very top, from the national broadcasters such as ourselves [BBC] and ITV and Sky and to, you know, the news organisations, the newspapers, the news agencies. That’s all still there – that whole infrastructure is still there. But add to that this huge weight of content that’s now coming from people. You know the citizen journalists if you like who are out there providing, you know, emailing us: ‘Do you know about an incident that’s happened that I sent in today.’ We’re responding to that. You know it happens on a small

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51 Only on a few occasions did journalists mention any money being exchanged for the reception of such material. On the whole, the huge volume of UGC is electronically delivered to news organisations without any cost to the organisation itself.

scale, it happens on a grand scale. (Mick McGlinchey, Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online)

While Carlin considered the explosion of UGC and citizen journalism to be simply “just more stuff,” Alan Fryer (Investigative Reporter, CTV) highlighted the democratic yet also dangerous nature of contemporary sources:

Yeah, no question about it. I think it's fabulous. I mean the internet and blogs and, you know, citizen journalism, whatever you want to call it, it's great because it's that many more eyes and ears on the ground. The problem with it is that it's kind of, it's kind of a free for all and how do you know what's right? Who are these people? And, you know, anybody can post anything on the 'net and do. Sometimes it's invaluable because you do get people who aren't professional journalists or part-time journalists or whatever that, you know, happen to be in the right place at the right time and their perspective is valuable because they're right there witnessing something and you're not. And more and more often taking pictures of it as well. But you know the inherent danger is how can you be sure it is what it appears to be, you know, so it's great and it's hugely democratic and I think it's a wonderful thing but my rule is approach with caution.

The issue of credibility is very important and a considerable obstacle for this contemporary form of production. The final section in this chapter deals more thoroughly with these concerns.

Contributions from citizen journalists within conflict zones have the potential to be very valuable information sources – and have been used by news organisations.<sup>52</sup> Still, Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) argues that “there's not many people in Iraq or Congo with the will or the way of doing that kind of thing.” However, he also recognizes that this could change: “It could be, I mean if everyone started buying a video camera and they cost 50 quid each then things might change.” Nicolas Spicer (Foreign Correspondent, CBC) optimistically pointed out that such technological developments and public behaviours could potentially aid ongoing crises in the world:

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52 Popular examples include <http://aliveinbaghdad.org/category/blog>, <http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com> and <http://www.dahrjamailliraq.com>.

I spent a lot of time not in Rwanda but covering the trials and reading about it and I thought man if there was a guy there with a computer, a tape deck and a sat phone and he had just got the news out, like it could have happened, you know? But sometimes it just takes a couple of pictures of like the starving babies in Somalia and I thought that this, you know, technological change which makes people more mobile and autonomous and creates many more players in the game of making news available, would maybe make things a little better.

Regardless of any future role for UGC or citizen journalists, most agree that news organisations have to “move with the time” and must be “prepared to adapt and incorporate and embrace citizen journalists” (Paul Adams, Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24).

## **2.2 Breaking News Items and UGC**

The advent of UGC – in the strict sense of images and video sent to news organisations by citizens – has benefited breaking news items more so than any other type. This is largely due to the speed at which news organisations can now receive images from members of the public. While previous research labelled news agencies as an ‘early warning service’ for newsrooms, on some occasions UGC has certainly taken over this position within news flow. Ben Rayner (Editor, ITV) explains how this development aids news organisations within the context of breaking news: “If there was a train crash, those involved or at the scene can text pictures straight there [to the news organisation]. Otherwise it could take an hour to get there and you wouldn’t get that close [due to the presence of authorities] and things could already be cleaned up.” More so than speed, though, is the extent of UGC production: “And it really is people consciously now – I mean if you look at the [December 2005] Buncefield explosion we had 5,000 images in by 1 o’clock in the afternoon” (Nicola Green, UGC Hub Producer, BBC). The result is enhanced coverage of breaking news items for any news organisation in receipt of this material: “I mean essentially we’ve got stringers in every corner of the world. It’s a difference between getting the picture of the explosion as it happens and getting the picture of the firemen turning up afterwards and hosing it down, you know. We get the news *as it happens*.” Now “almost every story will have pictures” (Ben Rayner, Editor, ITV) which aids news production since “pictures do tell a thousand words and they are very powerful” (David Akin, Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV). However, Akin disagrees with the significance

of this development, arguing that UGC does not impact news production “besides 9/11, tsunami and the terror attacks in the subway.” Therefore, apart from coverage of breaking news items, UGC production and citizen journalism typically cannot provide context nor aid coverage of stories that are not particularly visual:

An ethanol announcement in Saskatoon that I’ve got to cover, debates about whether we ought to go to Afghanistan, they’re not the most visually compelling stories, they don’t lend themselves to cell phone camera coverage, they require somebody who’s been paying attention and has been paying attention over time to contextualize and understand. The terror attacks – all the photos in the world won’t help us to understand what led these disaffected British youth to do what they did and they won’t contextualize the event in the way that – well they might depending on, a bunch of photos might but the single blogger’s photos won’t. (Akin)

It certainly has been the case that UGC has been most relevant in the context of breaking news, with the landmark example of the July 7th, 2005 bombings in London:

It’s the first time we’ve done a television news package solely using pictures from people’s mobile phones. Because people sent in the photos underground and video footage. They were just filming as they were walking out the tunnel. And it was the first time ever we did a whole news package just based on user generated content. (Mariita Eager, Editor, BBC)

As Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) explains, the pictures “were immediate. They were actually, you know, on the underground. There were no TV pictures of that, ever. Those were the only pictures.” As previously suggested, there have been a few occasions where news organisations have paid<sup>53</sup> for UGC footage:

There is a willingness in principle for money to change hands and people know that there’s money to be made. If you remember the 7/7 thing [July 7th, 2005], the footage of a guy being taken out of a block of flats and they were naked. And there was amazing footage because it was filmed from across the way by someone with quite a good quality video camera. And that footage was offered. And there was a bidding war that broke out for that footage. Apparently the BBC ducked out of that bidding war at about £15,000. ... The video that came yesterday of one of the 7/7 bombers, somebody in America

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53 Scoopt ([www.scoop.com](http://www.scoop.com)) and other similar websites help facilitate this process.

filmed that footage and got £300,000. (Paul Adams, Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24)

By the end of the month London police were in pursuit of terrorist suspects and made arrests on July 29th, 2005. Sky's coverage included "a woman on the phone at the scene [who] held her phone out [so that viewers] could hear cops yelling, 'Get out, get out'" (Nigel Baker, Executive Director, APTN). The police had denied access to media personnel so such coverage would not have been possible without help from a citizen already on the scene. The police later requested that the media refrain from such reporting as it was endangering their investigation.

The December 2004 South Asian tsunami and the December 2005 Buncefield oil depot fire are also examples from the dawn of UGC due to the unprecedented volume of images and video from mobile phones, e-mails and text messages sent to news organisations.<sup>54</sup> Along with these incidents are examples where journalists were able to access 'complex networks' that are held together by technological links and increasingly make it possible for such footage to reach news organisations. Lindsey Hilsum (International Editor and China Correspondent, Channel 4) explains how she was able to access images from inside Eastern Burma as a result of these developments:

And the example, I mean just what I've been doing on the phone – talking about some material shot by two young Karenni men from Eastern Burma who'd been in shooting pictures of displaced people – their own people – because it's pretty much impossible for Western journalists to get into Burma and so these guys have taken pictures of them, through a complex network we're able to access those pictures, and that's what changes things.

Therefore, while the impact of UGC has largely been confined to breaking news stories, the increasing accessibility of technology also has the potential to improve coverage of areas of the world where journalists traditionally have difficulty gaining access. As a result, the inevitable homogeneity of news coverage suggested within previous research

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54 The London bombings brought about 22,000 e-mails and text messages, 300 photos (50 within an hour) and several videos to the BBC; within 13 minutes of the Buncefield explosion, the BBC began receiving UGC – 5,000 images by lunchtime and 10,000 by the end of the day (Douglas 2006).

may lessen if the foundation for foreign coverage ceases to be so limited by the traditional handful of news agencies.

### **2.3 UGC as Online Comments**

Beyond still images and video, UGC can also refer to any material produced by the public via the internet, ranging from online comments to forum discussions on news websites. Some journalists are eager to incorporate this production, even “becom[ing] fanatic over it”: “They are very keen to bring the people element to news. We actively solicit content from viewers. And this can add to a story. ... And we are gathering more and more user content. We’re signing people up for deals – want to make sure the BBC does get it, over Sky, etcetera” (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). Some people are eager to send in personal images, like, “Here’s a picture of my dog in the garden,” which Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) claims is “not particularly useful” to news organisations. However, the solicitation of UGC has also transformed traditional development patterns of news items, which has on occasion led to the reversal of traditional news flow cycles. Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) offers an example in relation to solicitation of UGC online:

Derailment we had in Inverness at the start of the year and we put a post form saying, ‘Do you know anyone who was on the train?’ You know, ‘Were you on it yourself,’ ‘Have you got any photographs?’ Within an hour we had emails back from people saying, ‘I know my friend was on it, they’ve given me their number, here you can give them a ring.’ So we were ringing them up, we were interviewing them for the website, for the radio, for television. And then it was the agencies that were paying money to – you know, the national agencies – who were taking that content and using that and terms of their news reports that their putting out. So you see how things can go full circle.

In this case the news agencies were requesting images and information from news organisations as opposed to the traditional position of news agencies acting as ‘early warning services.’ This is largely due to the fact that members of the public are not as likely to submit material to news agencies since their branding strategies have always been directed towards their subscribers – news organisations – as opposed to any effort at building a public image. “That’s right they’re at the back end of it, the news agencies” (McGlinchey). Similarly, “People won’t think of CP [Canadian Press] here or Reuters but

they would think of the *Toronto Star* or Global Television” (Sean Mallen, Global Political Correspondent). Despite the fact that the public consumes a lot of information from news agencies, they may not recognise the source: “The public is not necessarily aware that we exist. News agency news coverage goes to just under 90% of world broadcasters. It is seen by billion plus people. But as far as they are concerned they think the image is by their television station” (Nigel Baker, Executive Director, APTN). This is compounded by the fact that nearly all news organisations now openly solicit UGC, although news agencies such as Reuters have also begun soliciting UGC through their online presence that in and of itself is altering their once negligible relationship with the public.

Since the online website within news organisations is the most likely to receive UGC material in situations like the derailment in Inverness and enables new interactive capabilities while relieving traditional space limitations, the online element can “start generating more stories,” after which “you will see television and radio picking up on their stuff so the situation will start reversing” (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). In this way, “Online news is increasingly driving broadcasting content” (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). In the past, the flow of news within an organisation was very different:

I mean initially it was all due to resources often it would be we would mirror what was on the broadcast output in terms of, you know, what was on television, the television running orders or radio. But very much now, you know, it's us – we're initiating, we're coming up with the story ideas, we're writing the stories and it might be that broadcast are following up on our ideas. (Mick McGlinchey, Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online)

Journalists who write blogs for their organisation's online platform are also able to develop news items in innovative ways that exploit feedback loops and involve the audience. David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) emphasizes the advantages of this interactive environment for any journalist as comments can initiate further news items, independent of traditional news sources:

Your value as a reporter is to go beyond [just being a stenographer] and have a discussion about this particular issue, let's say on a political issue, in a way the people on the left side of the spectrum may say, put up on the site say, 'Ah ha look! Here's what David Akin wrote' and people on the right side would

say, 'Ah ha look what David Akin wrote.' You sort of know you hit it when you've got people pulling little bits out of all your stories as they try and discuss the matter and form some sort of thing. And I'll take that feedback and then I've got another story then to say, 'Ok I see how the discussion is sort of forming up on this angle and some of the implications and now I can go out and run things by some other people again and again.'

This type of relationship with audiences is very different to the traditional one-way communication inherent within mainstream media. The use of professional journalist blogs in this way is elaborated in more detail within Chapter 7 regarding newsgathering.

## **2.4 Organisational Changes to Accommodate UGC**

Apart from altered news flow patterns, what is critical about this public behavioural shift towards an explosion of UGC is that mainstream media are making physical space for this production within newsrooms. In response to interview questions about the significance of UGC for organisations, journalists spoke about coping with the volume and in some cases the restructuring of newsrooms. For instance, the BBC created an entire UGC Hub:

It began in March for the elections last year but really talk of this whole experiment started after the tsunami when we got thousands and thousands of emails from people who had lost relatives, who were affected and their information really moved the story on for us. They provided information which of course we had to double-check but that wasn't available in any other way. And we realized that this stuff could be of use to all our outlets. And then obviously with the 7th of the 7th<sup>55</sup> in the UK was when it really became apparent. For example a bomb went off in Tavistock Square at 10:50 and 8 minutes later we've got the first picture and the first eyewitness from the scene. (Nicola Green, UGC Hub Producer, BBC)

This adaptation relates to arguments made within previous research that organisation and structure are necessary in the management of information. As well, patterned and repetitive work routines were highlighted as important to the production process and reappear in response to the advent of UGC:

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55 Referring to the London bombing on July 7th, 2005.

The story's not just about getting people on air and getting packages, it's about the whole kind of UGC picture as well. It's just kind of what we do now, we don't even think about it half the time. It's become like second nature. The producers in the newsroom that are already kind of overstretched and what-have-you, it's kind of another thing for them to think about. But actually you know it kind of becomes essential like with the July 7th, you know, all of that has kind of shown people the value and it's important. So editors are wanting to do more of this. (Mariita Eager, BBC News Editor)

Since space has been created within coverage to accommodate UGC, new responsibilities have also been created. The Producer of the User Generated Content Project for BBC News explains the new production tasks she is in charge of:

Our role is to sift through the *best* content that comes in to us via the BBC website or our interaction with audiences and farm that out to programs to create content. ... So it's just about basically sifting through the thousands and thousands of emails and images that we get every day, picking out the most newsworthy stuff and getting it to air as soon as possible. (Nicola Green)

However, 3G mobile phones capable of digital imaging and transmission to news organisations arrived much later in Canada than they did in the UK: "They're far more advanced than we are on that front with the third generation phones" (Daniel Morin, Supervising Technician, CBC). Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC) argued that the lack of UGC within Canadian news organisations<sup>56</sup> is largely a result of network size and the availability of resources:

I think the main reason it's not happening as thoroughly at the CBC as the BBC is because we're just a smaller network with fewer resources. I think we're no less committed to it. ... And you know I'm very aware of the way that the BBC is evolving and I think that, I think they're going in the right direction and I think that that's the direction that we want to go into too.

Still, regardless of the current shortage of UGC within Canadian organisations, the ability to fully embrace a UGC element within journalism practice also relies on a shift in

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56 However, Trina Maus, a Video Journalist for CTV Southwestern Ontario, described a 'heavy reliance' on UGC within her *local* news organisation: "We use footage probably once a week from user submitted video. ... If they can load a video into their computer we can access it via email and load it into our system." This may imply that local news organisations maintain a different relationship with audiences and were therefore in a position to receive UGC earlier than their more centralized counterparts.

traditional values wherein footage shot outside of the professional realm can still be deemed appropriate. Sean O'Shea (Investigative Reporter, Global) explains how these values have evolved over time:

There was a time here when I started when we would never use video that was provided to us by somebody who was not a professional newsgatherer. We would never air home video – part of that was just because home video cameras didn't really come into wide use until the mid to late 80s and then, you know, we didn't have the technology – play back machines for every format, and I think there was a general dislike for using video that was not provided, you know, by newsgatherers. Quality wasn't as good – it certainly is now, excellent, but there was a feeling that, you know, we had to get it ourselves. And that's really evolved, I think that's changed a lot in the last 10 years. Now in sourcing of information and sourcing of video, if you can get the shot I think maybe in some respects it's at our peril – you know, we'll use video I think from anywhere. Those boundaries have really come down. I think technology's driven that, in part – technology has made it possible for people to get stuff, get it back quickly, and so it's – you know for a producer, producer says, 'I've got this video, why not use it?' And I think that in many cases people don't question whether it should be used because it's available.

While the values preventing the adoption of UGC may have already changed, O'Shea points to a potential consequence of this shift which relates to the increasing complexity of editorial issues involved in news production.

## **2.5 New Concerns Brought on by UGC**

The rise of UGC is accompanied by various matters that have yet to be resolved by news organisations and will likely persist as public news-producing behaviours continue to develop. These matters relate to safety concerns, editorial issues and fears over credibility. Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) explains the rise of safety concerns: "[UGC] poses a lot of editorial questions for us. The veracity of the material and encouraging people to hang around too long maybe in dangerous positions to get material and all sorts of smaller editorial things that we've never had to face before." The Buncefield Oil Depot fire was mentioned as a specific example of these issues: "Camera crew wouldn't have gone so close because it might explode. So people are putting themselves in harm's way. It's just a job for a camera man. For citizens, these issues are not at the top of their mind" (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). Paul Adams

(Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) also commented on this issue in relation to the fire:

Yeah quite scary actually because apparently there was some guy showing up at our edit point or feed point or whatever saying, 'I've got this footage, can you use it?' And he wanted to go back into the disaster zone to get better stuff. Which raises whole issues of – if people send us pictures like that are there issues of liability? So it's interesting.

According to Ben Rayner (Editor, ITV), this development "is going to make a massive change to the speed of delivery and the judgment of editorial content. Some London bombing pictures were too horrific. You have to make those judgments quicker." Management of the volume of material also becomes an issue: "Nine months ago there wasn't a huge volume of material yet. You know, now there's a massive volume" (Kevin Backhurst, Controller, BBC News 24).

Furthermore, in response to interview questions about the nature of credibility assessments in the face of UGC and citizen journalism, it was clear that credibility concerns are increasingly becoming a convoluted issue since the volume of material produced by or sent in by the public has significantly expanded the information sources journalists have access to. The issue of UGC and citizen journalism is relatively new and the fact that immediacy has become heightened<sup>57</sup> within news values of mainstream organisations has multiplied the speed through which items are put on air. Public news-production also has the potential to maliciously target vulnerable news organisations under time pressures via hoaxes. While Mark Sikstrom (Executive Producer, CTV Online) argues that journalists "have various checks and balances and tools" to convince themselves the material is credible, Alan Fryer's (Investigative Reporter, CTV) description suggests that the process is not always straightforward, and potentially even less so with respect to blogging and citizen journalism:

Well, you know, you do what journalists do, you know, you've got your sources, you phone around, but sometimes there's just no way of knowing. Sometimes there's no way of knowing if a bit of video that comes your way or,

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57 This development is assessed further within the next chapter.

you know, an account that appears on a blog somewhere, how can you be sure it's real? You know sometimes you can. There's certain things you do to check it out, to check out the authenticity.

Moreover, Sean O'Shea (Investigative Reporter, Global) argues that there is not enough time to properly vet a lot of the incoming material "unless something changes where you really dedicate people to being able to screen all that stuff, check it for its authenticity, check whether it's, you know, proper in terms of public standards, that sort of thing." Credibility is an issue shared by both UGC and bloggers.

## **2.6 Bloggers and their Credibility**

Bloggers – acting as citizen journalists and therefore potential news-providers or simply offering opinions on particular topics – have initiated many debates regarding their usefulness to journalists, credibility and the potential harm they could cause to the institution of mainstream journalism as a whole. Of interest here is the varied use of blogs by journalists, concerns regarding credibility and the defensive position that some journalists occupy in relation to blogging which is associated with the overall reluctance to use them as a source of ideas within the intake phase.

In response to interview questions regarding the incorporation of blogs within daily routines for the purpose of discovering story ideas, it was clear that the use of blogs by journalists varies enormously. Editor in Chief Tony Burman (CBC) 'periodically' and 'casually' browses blogs written by professional journalists "just to see what's out there" but does not do so 'rigorously' compared to when he "formally checks 10 or 12 websites each day for sources of information or opinion." Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) considers "blogs about particular subject areas [to be] quite useful to, you know, just think about alternative viewpoints. But I don't think we should be using them at the moment as a primary source unless you know who wrote them [since] you've no idea what they are or what their agenda is, you know, they may be bonkers." Peter Kent (Deputy Editor, Global) pointed out the potential value inherent within some blogs for tapping into the 'public mood' but also warns against using the material as a primary source:

There are a few of the celebrity blogs that I might look in on although not all that often, you might look in on just to see what the mood is, the public mood is on topic X or issue Y. But I wouldn't ever use it as a primary source and I think I probably, more of the blog content that I consume I find written about by conventional journalists, you know, or a journalist references a blog comment or discussion rather than the blog itself as the entire piece of consumable.

Such blogs written by professional journalists are clearly more appealing to journalists. Backhurst explains: "there are some blogs that are written by, you know, Adam Boulton or Nick Robinson whatever and you think well yeah they are a journalist and you rely on that the same way you'd rely on other things they write." Still, Richard Stursberg (Executive Vice-President, CBC) claimed that it is important to be aware of production occurring within the blogosphere by citizen journalists, which is why blogs are monitored: "So people are looking at all that stuff. And that sort of vast kind of blogosphere, or vast kind of internet, this vast source of information and everyone pumping out their, you know, particular accounts of what's going on." Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC) even argued that the blogosphere could become akin to a wire service: "I think a lot of the blogs that Canadians and Canadian journalists would rely on, Canadian blogs, they're almost like internal – it's like an internal wire service for journalists." While Burman did not think that the Canadian population was "as connected as they perhaps are in the States," they have the potential to increase in importance. Similarly, it was suggested that "Eventually blogs will develop a reputation and will be treated as a source" (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland).

On the other hand, some journalists proclaim to have never viewed them: "Do I read them? Never" (Nicolas Spicer, Foreign Correspondent, CBC). Lindsey Hilsum (International Editor and China Correspondent, Channel 4) said, "Well blogs are not particularly relevant for television because you need pictures. And so no I don't use blogs." Many journalists considered blogs to be almost entirely opinion-based and therefore of no significant use within their daily routines. As well, Sean O'Shea (Investigative Reporter, Global) argued that he does not "have time to be sorting through blogs, I barely have time to watch television in a small amount." Trina Maus (Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario) also does not access blogs: "Not at all." However, in her case the credibility of blogs had already been clearly pre-determined by her superiors:

We don't believe them as credible. We don't use them at all. We stay away from blogs. Not to say that, I mean as a reporter I might be on one and somebody might come up with, 'Hey we're doing a fundraiser for Susie because she's dying of cancer.' I might think that might be a personal interest story but I'll figure out who they are. I won't trust the blog. It's in our handbook: do not trust blogs.

As such, the necessity of scrutinizing one's sources becomes heightened within the realm of blogs: "I wouldn't trust a blog in terms of its verifiable information unless I could confirm it somewhere else. But it's one more source of information. What credibility you give it is something else" (O'Shea). Similar to the way in which newspapers are more likely to maintain particular agendas, some journalists suggested that blogs would fall into the same category with respect to potential bias.

A couple of journalists considered the content of blogs to be significantly influenced by the role the internet plays in narrowcasting – enabling those with similar opinions to hear more of the same more often as opposed to being exposed to many different opinions.<sup>58</sup> As such, David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) argues that "Bloggers can go to blogging Tories, blogging Liberals, blogging NDPers. They don't go hang about generally speaking so they tend to just speak in an echo chamber about their own views and opinions. It's narrowcasting." In this way, "People read the blogs they agree with" (Vince Carlin, Ombudsman, CBC). These arguments relate to the underlying issue of whether bloggers have the potential to harm mainstream journalism. In this vein, Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC) argues that mainstream media remain the most important source for audiences, despite the increasing significance of blogs:

a lot of surveys do indicate that the most credible sources in the internet world are those sources that are associated in terms of news with established news brands – you know whether it's CNN or CBC or BBC so I think we're into a world where still the established, large brands are considered by a lot of people as the starting point for credibility and accuracy. But, you know, I think blogs are becoming more and more important I think in everybody's lives.

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58 The notion of narrowcasting was derived from Sunstein (2001).

However, many journalists view citizen journalists with some level of disdain since they are not likely to follow the same procedures that professional journalists have been trained to follow as a means of striving towards objectivity, impartiality, balance and accuracy. This is why Vince Carlin (Ombudsman, CBC) asserts that what is often simply “musings of a single person ... shouldn’t be called journalism.” Another journalist makes a related point and goes on to suggest that the unprofessional nature of many bloggers may have a rolling, detrimental impact on mainstream journalism:

But with blogs and things like that and citizen journalism it brings up the issue of, you know, are these people trained in how to source the stories? I mean that’s one of the varied standards that we’re taught to adhere to is, you know, at the very least two sources, preferably three before you’ll report something. And often what you will find on the internet or in blogs and so forth, opinion is being reported as fact, rumours, speculation, there’s a lot more rumour and speculation because of the pressure of ‘live’ and blogs and the internet that is seeping into our journalism. (Morning Show Unit, CBC)

While Sean Mallen (Parliamentary Correspondent, Global) agrees that any blogger “could be Joe Shmoe in the basement that knows nothing but has a big opinion,” he also acknowledges the possibility that a blogger may be able to offer new information to the mainstream production process. While bloggers may represent “the great democracy of the internet,” Mallen returns to the fact that “they’re less responsible.” Nevertheless, Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC) highlights the more common attitude among mainstream journalists towards blogs: “there’s a real reluctance to accept what is read or circulated in blogs as being fact.” Vince Carlin (Ombudsman, CBC) agrees: “except for the very vulnerable, most people I think see it as a fairly unregulated exchange of non-confirmable, very often opinion rather than hard facts, assemblies of facts, and it’s not always as temperate – as balanced – in its presentation.” Therefore, “with a few exceptions,” Carlin argues that “blogs are an entertainment, sort of a distraction, for those who have the time to immerse themselves in them.”

A number of journalists took a rather defensive standpoint towards any discussion of citizen journalists and therefore came across as having an unfavourable view of the material they provide. For example, Mark Sikstrom (Executive Producer, CTV Online) uses the metaphor of plumbing:

I can do some plumbing but I'm not a plumber. The fact that I fixed my toilet last week, does that mean that I should open my own plumbing business? Because probably I'll soon get out of my depth and I'll fuck it up and everything else. Same with bloggers. Anybody can be a blogger. There's not entrance requirements. All you gotta do is take some freeware [free software] and post a blog and purport to be an expert in some one thing or another and hope you get a lot of traffic but, you know, you're not necessarily, they're not professional journalists, they don't have the skills and the discipline so what does that mean? It means they're amateur plumbers.

As well, a couple of journalists felt that those bloggers who discuss coverage by the mainstream media are effectively reliant upon professional journalists. From this perspective, one can pigeonhole all citizen journalism as fundamentally weakened by this activity:

I'm not a big fan of blogs in the sense that I think it's vanity journalism: 'Oh look at me, I can express an opinion on something' and I'm too much of an old style journalist, you know, I still put value on fairness and balance and everything else. And I don't particularly care generally what most ill-informed people out there who appoint themselves pundits think. Because basically it's drinking bath water. Most of the people out there who think mainstream journalism is dying and citizen journalism is rising are full of shit because the only thing they're talking about is mainstream journalism. If we didn't exist, what would they talk about? Each other? No. It's drivel. (Sikstrom)

Similarly, David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) considers much of the blogosphere in the same way: "as you go through the blogosphere there's not a lot of new, there's a lot of 'I have an opinion about what I read in the mainstream media' who are the ones actually doing the new, new stuff."

### **3. Summary**

This chapter explored key sources within the information producing strata of society that provide material to news organisations, highlighting those sources that represent changes to the once limited stratum. The traditional set consists of those sources included within previous production studies: news agencies; other news organisations; official sources and the public relations industry; and news bureaus. News agency feeds remain the most widely used source within mainstream news production, but the electronic delivery of

these feeds has altered the former role of the 'copy taster' by shifting newsrooms towards collective monitoring while potentially diffusing the power over selection processes. News production still retains its cyclical nature due to the recycling of news within media more generally. Online availability of news output has further enabled this process while also creating opportunities for rapid preliminary background research. Official sources and production by the public relations industry also continues to provide news items for consideration while production within a news organisation's own news bureaus is also monitored and regularly accessed within the intake phase.

The contemporary set of sources involves elements that are new to the production process and are a result of the amalgamation of public news-producing behaviours and technological developments – particularly the ubiquity of mobile camera phones and online publishing tools. The increasingly accessible nature of these technological tools and the growing culture of documentation have facilitated the rise of UGC and citizen journalism. The traditional infrastructure of news production remains but UGC and citizen journalism represent new elements that have greatly expanded the information producing strata of society and are supplementing the news agenda. By far the largest area that has been affected by these developments is breaking news due to the speed at which images and footage are sent to news organisations and the volume of material produced. As Schudson (2005) suggests, perhaps event-driven news must be more closely considered as a result of the rising volume and significance of these contemporary news-producing groups. Still, there remains much potential here for advances within the realm of conflict reporting or other previously inaccessible regions of the world. News organisations are also soliciting UGC in the form of online comments which has on occasion led to the reversal of traditional news flow cycles with the online medium generating stories for other divisions within the news organisation and collecting material that is now also passed on to news agencies. The online environment also provides opportunities for the exploitation of feedback loops and the possibility for increased interaction with audiences. To accommodate these developments, news organisations are altering physical spaces in the newsroom, textual and visual space within news output and responsibilities among journalists as a means of managing the volume of material. These modifications are occurring much more rapidly in the UK than in Canada due in part to a technological lag. However, along with these developments new concerns arise

including issues revolving around safety, editorial matters and credibility. The latter concern also relates to blogging more specifically with some journalists applauding the explosion of sources but many others remaining reluctant and defensive towards the arrival of so many citizen journalists within the media environment.

The next chapter continues analysis of the results by exploring the next phase of news production: selection and assignment. It is here that all of the potential story ideas and news items collected during the intake phase are considered within editorial meetings. The upper tier of mid-level journalists make selection decisions and assign stories to base-level journalists to cover, along with possible directions regarding story treatment. Shifting news values are also assessed in relation to selection decisions and attempts to retain audience loyalty.



## **Chapter 6:**

### **Selection and Assignment Phase**

The second phase of news production begins with consideration of news items extracted from sources during the intake phase. This occurs during an editorial meeting and the Executive Producer has final authority for selection and assignment. Stories are assigned to base-level journalists who are supervised by producers and editors. While this description represents the general sequence of news production, there are also certain categories of base-level journalists who maintain varied relationships to the assignment process. General assignment reporters can be assigned to any item that falls under a 'general news' category whereas journalists who occupy a 'beat' like Political Correspondents maintain more specific daily routines and have slightly more control over the assignment process. Also, foreign correspondents have yet another relationship to the assignment process whereby they can make suggestions or offer specific stories but still inevitably follow directions from their foreign assignment editor who negotiates assignment with the Executive Producer.

It is also important to note that news production is rarely such a linear process whereby the selection and assignment that occurs during the editorial meeting on the morning of a news day definitively results in the final broadcast of all stories assigned. Disruptions to news production include unpredictable breaking news items that occur after morning assignment, a change in the assigned story's focus, logistical failures, as well as an assigned story proving inadequate due to a fruitless news conference or lack of sources willing to appear on camera, etc. Therefore, in theory the processes of selection and assignment are ongoing throughout the news day but in practice decisions made during editorial meetings determine the majority of the day's news output.

This chapter begins by exploring the relationship that particular base-level journalists have to the selection and assignment process, the lack of opportunity for investigative reporting and the impact of journalists' constant monitoring of electronic feeds from

news agencies to the selection process. The next section examines the selection and assignment process from inside the editorial meeting. After discussing how potential news items are pitched to Executive Producers, the inclusion of institution-driven news within daily routines is considered, followed by the influence of theme creation and demands for the insertion of a personal element. As well, the subjective nature of selection is highlighted in relation to individual preferences of Executive Producers. While discussion of the final line-up occurs within these editorial meetings, flexibility over decisions remains necessary. The final section of this chapter assesses whether there has been a shift within the traditional set of news values presented within previous research, particularly with respect to the influence that new technologies have had on the importance of images and the growing obsession with immediacy.

## **1. The Authority of Executive Producers and the Assignment Relationship**

A key position within the newsroom is the Executive Producer<sup>59</sup> whose main responsibilities are story selection and assignment as well as supervision and control over news production as a whole. Decisions over selection and assignment largely occur within editorial meetings but also extend throughout the news day due to the fluid nature of news production. For example, CBC Executive Producer Paul Hambleton explains how his role revolves around the ingestion of news items like a major fire that had erupted shortly before this interview had begun:

The easy way to think of me is I'm primarily in charge of input so everything that comes in like – I keep pointing at the TV – so the fire, 'Ok what are we going to do? How are we going to get there? Who have we got to cover it? How are we going to cover it? What do we need to make sure we cover it as well as we should cover it?' What the story looks like at the end of the day is not really my problem. I'm responsible – I have a stake in our programs and I sit in on program meetings as well, like the 12:30 and there's one later on this afternoon at 5 o'clock where we kind of reconvene again but my primary responsibility is to make sure we don't screw up at the beginning.

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59 As previously noted, ITV uses the title Programme Editor.

It is clear through the questions he poses that the treatment of stories also falls under the responsibilities of an Executive Producer. As well, the “stake” in news output that this upper tier of mid-level journalists maintain relates to their relationship with lower tier, top-level journalists. In Hambleton’s case this is the Editor in Chief who “is responsible for the selection and integrity of news” (Richard Stursberg, Executive Vice-President, CBC). When the news is finally broadcast, it is the directors or producers that are generally more responsible for the output – directing, supervising and rearranging according to time pressures within the gallery – although the Executive Producer can also maintain a function within the gallery.

However, the unambiguous occasion when Executive Producers exert control over news production occurs within editorial meetings. Described within the previous literature base as creating a ‘shopping list,’ journalists within this study described the process as akin to constructing a ‘wish list’ wherein “the desks [Home and Foreign] say what they can do and deliver [logistically, etc.] and the EPs say what they are interested in” (Executive Producer, Sky). The news items suggested for possible inclusion on the ‘wish list’ are derived from the intake process described in Chapter 5 and involve “the main stories of the day – some of them have been on the diary and some of them have not” (Kevin Backhurst, Controller, BBC News 24). Therefore, while any journalist can potentially generate ideas from the sources he or she perused prior to the meeting, it is understood, as the following journalist explains, that “ultimately the final decision’s [name of Executive Producer, who was also in the room during this group interview]” (Morning Show Unit, CBC). This comment was followed by laughter and the Executive Producer promptly asked her staff, “Do you feel like you have freedom in terms of do you feel like you have a top-down like this is what we’re going to cover, this is the angle we’re going to cover?” Responses, however, centred on the way in which stories evolve from an idea a journalist may have to “oh it’s something” when “you chat and let it germinate with your peers.” When interview questions were asked regarding whether reporters and correspondents typically self-select and pitch stories or are given assignments, it became apparent that the level of autonomy and control associated with processes of selection and assignment varies depending on the type of base-level journalist involved – that is, whether they are general assignment reporters, beat reporters, or foreign correspondents.

Within the range of base-level journalists, there is one exception that should be mentioned here: presenters. These journalists occupy a unique place within the selection and assignment process since they are generally responsible for the narrative of the final broadcast, but do not always participate in the production of news items. Nevertheless, presenters often do take part in discussions during editorial meetings and therefore have some degree of influence over selection and assignment but ultimately, of course, it is the Executive Producers who make final decisions. Beyond providing the narration for the news bulletin, presenters are also involved in interviews or the highlighting of particular elements within news items. It is also important to note that the seniority and experience of all base-level journalists contribute to their relative autonomy and the level of constraints they face. The next chapter offers further examination of their relationship to this aspect of the production process.

## 1.1 General Assignment Reporters

General assignment reporters cover a wide variety of news items without specializing in any particular topic or region of the world. These reporters can come up with story ideas independently of the general routinized structure that places a high premium on the wires, information from other news organisations and pre-planned items entered into the diary. Therefore in theory “Anyone can suggest a news item” (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland) and occasionally “Editors actually want people to suggest stories to them ‘cause the editors are usually so busy and they may have missed something.” Trina Maus (Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario) describes a hypothetical example: “I was driving by Tim Hortons<sup>60</sup> and there was a man standing outside with a sign saying, ‘My child choked on a roll up the rim.’ Well that might be worth looking into. And then ‘Ok, you’re on it.’” Nevertheless, the majority of news items suggested during editorial meetings originate in traditional sources that enter the news organisation independent of any investigation on the part of individual journalists.

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60 Tim Hortons is a very successful Canadian coffee company and ‘roll up the rim’ refers to a particular take-away cup that is used for a contest (and marketing campaign) that occurs each year.

Usually general assignment reporters are not in a position to debate the newsworthiness or value of covering a story after it has been assigned to them. However, an Executive Producer at Sky explains how journalists at different news organisations may approach assignment in different ways: “At CBS you have can-do kind of guys who will go and get the story if asked, while at Sky some here would say, ‘There isn’t a story there’ and that is ballsy [courageous].” Paul Hambleton (Executive Producer, CBC) recognizes that this level of control can also be dependent upon the particular medium, with radio allowing for more autonomy than television. In part Hambleton explains that this is due to the nature of news items that are produced for television with particular elements (images, sound bites, etc.) acting as constraints while at the same time television production is organised in a more centralized and top-down manner:

There’s a different perspective between the way the radio operates and the way that television operates – there are fundamental differences in how things go. The radio reporters generally have more autonomy. ...what their assignments are. Ok I’m working on this and that and this’ll be ready and the desk’ll go, ‘That’s great or try this.’ We are a little more top-down, which can be a good thing and a bad thing. We have this ebb and flow where we stifle creativity but at the same time television programmes are a lot more particular.

As well, the incorporation of ‘guidance’ on story treatment and advice as to which sources should ultimately be used within the assignment process can also restrict autonomy; but the subsequent newsgathering and storywriting stages of production offer more opportunities, as seen in the next chapter.

## **1.2 Beat Reporters: The Parliamentary Correspondent**

Many journalists who work for specific beats, such as Parliamentary Correspondents, have daily routines that differ significantly from general assignment reporters in that they are likely to be based (or spend most of their time) in locations outside of the newsroom. As such, negotiations over selection and assignment decisions largely occur outwith editorial meetings. Global’s Parliamentary Correspondent Sean Mallen works out of

Queen's Park<sup>61</sup> and explains how he maintains greater autonomy over these processes since he considers himself "more self-assigning": "I'm telling them what's going on here. It goes both ways to some extent, they'll tell me sometimes. But typically my job is to tell them what I think is going to be the best story here today and how I think I'm going to do it." Mallen's newsgathering revolves around set times and dates for pre-planned news conferences and political meetings. In this way, he is not so much assigned stories as he is following up those news items that are essentially dictated to him by his primary sources – government ministers and spokespeople. Here is an explanation of his daily routines:

Well when the house is sitting, as it is now, you always have the sitting in the afternoon that you always roll a tape on. Which includes question period, so that's Monday through Thursday that we do that. But in the mornings typically there may be press conferences happening here. Tuesdays which you make a decision on whether it's worthy or not – 60 to 80% of them are not going to make our show most days. On Tuesday and Wednesday, you get the ministers in the morning, including the Premier. Tuesday its caucus, you stand outside the room and stop and scrum<sup>62</sup> them on the way in. Tuesday its caucus, Wednesday it's cabinet. So sometimes you'll be questioning them on the news issues of the day on the way in, see if they say anything newsworthy. It might be for a story I'm doing, it might be for a story someone else is doing. You sort of decide by mid day what you think your story will be. Sometimes you know earlier, sometimes you know later. But usually by late morning you have a good idea of what it is.

Nevertheless, even within this seemingly more autonomous position held by the Parliamentary Correspondent, final decisions are inevitably made by mid-level journalists. This situation leads to tension between the two hierarchical levels:

Do I find anything really difficult? Well just the frustration of trying to get stories on the air that you think are important that aren't necessarily in the eyes of the employers, aren't necessarily viewed as important which you might think they are. It's not so different from, there's always that tension between a reporter in the field and his or her editor or producer. A difference of opinion about what constitutes important news. (Mallen)

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61 Queen's Park is the site of the Ontario Provincial Legislature.

62 A scrum is an impromptu press conference which typically involves a number of journalists who have waited for a meeting to come to a close.

From these comments it is clear that ultimate authority and therefore control remains in the hands of superiors.

### 1.3 Foreign Correspondents

The third type of base-level journalists represents another variant of the selection and assignment relationship. Foreign correspondents operate the furthest distance away from the newsroom and are managed and supervised by a foreign assignment editor. This editor, or similar member of an intake department or 'planning desk,' acts as a 'liaison person,' speaking to journalists in the field in order to either listen to their possible story ideas or request coverage of a particular story. Therefore the foreign correspondent does not attend editorial meetings – it is the assignment editor who sits in on behalf of the correspondents out in the field. As Brien Christie (Foreign Assignment Editor, CBC) explains, "I give them [those present at the meeting] a rough menu of the material, right. And they'll go, 'Ah we don't want that, we're too busy for that.'" In this sense the assignment editor functions "like a maitre d in a restaurant":

We throw out a very broad net and then we shrink it down so that by 10 o'clock at night we've got down to maybe, maybe we were only taking one story – I suggested five in the morning and two of them don't work out, one's a feature that they don't want that night and then you've got kind of the nub of what the show wants. (Christie)

In this way, Christie explains his role, noting the autonomy maintained by correspondents:

So my job is really to assign them stories and to coordinate with the shows on what they'd like to have and to pass on to the shows what the reporters think so it's a very, very collaborative effort, right? It's – really depending on the day and the story it's really, really a team effort and that's what I like about it.

Christie goes on to suggest that "it's a little bit more them to me than me to them" since approximately 60 percent of the time correspondents pitch stories while 40 percent of the time he assigns stories to them. Reasons for this are that correspondents are likely to know more simply by being there, and therefore may also have a more complete understanding of history and context. On the other hand, assignment editors have a

better understanding of programming needs and audience relevance. They are also willing to satisfy the needs of their organisation. An example where the foreign correspondent maintained less autonomy in terms of story assignment occurred during 2006 coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While a major news theme revolved around the impending decision by Western governments to end aid to the newly elected Palestinian government since it was led by Hamas, it occurred to Christie that a special segment within CBC's flagship news programme, *The National*, should be devoted to an explanatory piece, which he then assigned to the correspondent:

when the new government came in and they wanted to cut off money to Hamas, right. Like again it was one of these sort of black and white things and big headlines and I said to myself, 'Where does the money for Hamas go,' right? So Paul Hunter was over there at that time so I said Paul, that's simple but where's the money – so he beavered off there and came up with a really good story about money going to girls volleyball team and school books in the Gaza ... so those sorts of things I would be pushing on them a bit more than them pushing back, right.

Nevertheless, it is also important to remember that not all journalists view their job from the same perspective, which could impact their willingness to participate in the selection and assignment process. An Executive Producer at Sky pointed out that "some correspondents do not do their job very well since they see it as, 'I did my bit, sent in a piece,' and then they just go off and wait for a call." Still, such apathy could potentially be a result of the structure of news production wherein assignment editors tend to take "pride ... in being a good planner":

to be a good assignment editor you're trying to anticipate the news too, so when I've left the night before you hope that the stories are kind of assigned, right. You react to the breaking story, but you hope that the planning's in place so that when I come in the next morning that the story that we've talked about maybe the night before is underway. Or talking about content rather than just assigning it that day. (Brien Christie, Foreign Assignment Editor, CBC)

Therefore, predictable news appears to be more favourable, which is in line with conclusions of previous research. Christie points out how the nature of news production is more amenable to 'good planning,' particularly within the Canadian setting where 'live' reports must occur for multiple bulletins due to the varied time zones across the country:

“if you take the uncertainty and the questions about who wants what and when, if you take that out of their hands then their journalism is better, you know? They don’t have to worry about that crap.” As such, proactive assigning as opposed to reactive assigning is favoured and allegedly welcomed by foreign correspondents under stress and time pressures.

Observations from editorial meetings most often involved assignment editors informing Executive Producers about the progress made by correspondents, which highlighted the relative autonomy of foreign correspondents to determine their own coverage. For instance: “Six Canadian soldiers injured and released today in a mortar attack. Everybody’s fine. We talked to Carolyn Dunn about this, she didn’t think there was really worth sending anything of it” (Editorial Meeting, CBC). During another meeting an assignment editor explained that a foreign correspondent had “been stuck in traffic for I don’t know, the better part of 7 hours trying to get from Beirut to Tyre” (Editorial Meeting, CBC). Therefore, she would “not have a proper file for this evening” but would try to put a small piece together that would “likely be about the traffic” and “People trying to get back to their homes and see what is left of them” (Editorial Meeting, CBC). As such, the Executive Producer would be informed later regarding the particular story that would be fed into the newsroom.

Also, if it happens to be a particularly slow news day, the foreign correspondent may have even more scope for autonomy. While these examples suggest that correspondents do retain more potential autonomy over story selection and assignment, some of this autonomy is likely negotiated with their assignment editor. Still, there are occasions where correspondents are unhappy with story assignments and responses to inquiries suggest that refusal to cover a story once assigned is not much of an option. For example, Nicolas Spicer (Foreign Correspondent, CBC) replied to the question, “Can you say no?” with another question: “Do you want your job?”

A final issue is the use of correspondents from other news organisations as a result of ties formed between them. For instance, Sky “can steal FOX people” and “share correspondents.” Therefore, Sky can speak to a FOX correspondent who is located in an area where no Sky correspondents are and “tell her to give us a sit rep [situational

report]” (Executive Producer, Sky). However, some correspondents earn a bad reputation and are therefore avoided. An Executive Producer at Sky said he “doesn’t like FOX reporters,” particularly ones who say phrases like “smelling the sweet air of democracy in Iraq.” That reporter, incidentally, was not used again. The Executive Producer did admit that “we could use him for a breaking news event” since he would not be able to add his own “flowery language” in such an instance. However, news organisations will not hesitate to send correspondents to major breaking news events since “It makes all the difference in the world having our own correspondent there” (Foreign Desk, Sky).

#### **1.4 Investigative Journalism**

In line with previous research, investigative journalism was deemed to be rare. For all types of base-level journalists, the routines of journalism practice and the demanding deadlines that accompany daily news cycles severely restrict the time for ‘digging’ as a means of uncovering ‘original’ news items. Therefore, despite the aspirations of journalists, time constrains their daily routines:

You don’t have a lot of time on straight news programs if you’re working to a daily agenda, you know, you need to do a different story every day, you don’t have a lot of time to generate original – that’s the holy grail, that’s what we all aspire to but the original journalism often gets left to the wayside. (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland)

John Northcott (Video Journalist, CBC) agrees and argues that news organisations only tend to seek explosive, investigative-based news items; however, these are rare, which means that slow-moving investigative stories that may still be important are resisted. Northcott explains how long-term investigations with ‘incremental’ changes are difficult to successfully pitch due to the necessary time commitment and potential lack of an explosive climax:

I did a story a few years ago where we ended up, we did it over about a year, and I wasn’t able to do anything. There was this scandal around the mayor of Toronto, around this contract for computer leasing. And there was no hot moment. ... a document was revealed and some minor official resigned, you know it was a real small, it was incremental. Well most organisations, they want the big bang, right? So it’s really hard to even sell that story to a desk. ... And none of the other TV would do it. They wouldn’t touch it. The result was a

huge public inquiry and eventually when it got to the public inquiry stage, 2 years after, there was a story on it.

As such, Northcott argues that CBC is 'unique' as a public broadcaster: "you do get to do stories with a little more depth. I know the guys that run the private broadcaster newsrooms and there's no way you'd sell a story to them like that. An incremental change. A story that may or may not actually be a scandal."

Most news organisations do provide specific televised outlets for investigative journalism, but this is generally geared towards a special programme that runs separately from their news bulletins or rolling news channels. Alan Fryer (Investigative Reporter, CTV) describes working for such a programme – CTV's W5 – as "really nice because it gives us the luxury of doing that, I mean we sometimes work for months on investigations" despite the decline of value placed on breaking a news story. He suggests that tight budgets, 'minute by minute deadlines' and staff cuts are responsible, along with the 'insatiable' demands of cable news networks that have to be fed:

if I'm a reporter in a bureau somewhere and I phone my producer and I say look I've got a lead on what might be a really huge story but I need a week or two to work on it, they'll say, 'Are you crazy? Are you crazy?' It's like it's insatiable appetite, right, it's minute by minute so they can't spare people. They can't spare people to take the time, to investigate things, and to break stories.

As argued within the previous literature base, traditional mainstream news has never depended on investigative journalism as a means of filling news output quotas. Nevertheless, David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) argues that it still takes place: "they do it every day you just have to look for it." Other journalists saw this decline as part of a more general shift towards 'soft' news items:

Because we've gotten away from hard edged news, we've gotten away from investigations, breaking stories, and we're doing more and more stories on, you know, how much sugar is good for you, what about your prostate, how many times should you have a mammogram. (Alan Fryer, Investigative Reporter, CTV)

A potential increase in ‘soft’ news could suggest a change from previous research that described a ‘happy medium’ between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ news. Peter Kent (Deputy Editor, Global) argues this is a reflection of the lack of interest by consumers, which reduces advertising revenues and inevitably pushes news organisations to seek out “lowest common denominator programming.”

However, the online environment appears to have the potential to shift traditional production routines that devalue investigative journalism by enabling greater interactivity with audiences. As already initially indicated in Chapter 5, new story ideas can be generated out of information received from the public via a news organisation’s website. Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) highlights the creativity exploited by his online team and explained how the issue of the public smoking ban in Scotland was very newsworthy, which prompted the generation of more news items dealing with the topic:

So we’re still working on a few ideas on that ‘cause that hasn’t gone away although that’s been introduced these things develop and move on and we’ve got creative journalists and we want to tap into their original journalism and so we’ve got them working on various story ideas all the time. It’s good to move away from the grind-stone, if you like, to work on those ideas. It’s quite a challenge sometimes. ... A lot of the ideas on this site will have come from, you know, our own team. You know how can we do something different? Sometimes they haven’t been asked but they’ll go in and come back with something that’s great and creative.

Therefore, a news organisation’s website has become useful both in generating story ideas for the intake phase and encouraging journalists to investigate stories further.

## **1.5 Constant Monitoring of News Agency Feeds**

While it is clear that most base-level journalists do not maintain a very high degree of control over the selection and assignment process, the introduction of electronic news agency feeds has had a small impact. Interview questions relating to the impact of this shift in delivery revealed that collective and constant monitoring of electronic news agency feeds by journalists has led to a greater potential for suggestions by journalists to be incorporated into decision-making, particularly in relation to ‘explanatory’ or ‘review’

items. Since all journalists in the newsroom constantly monitor these feeds as opposed to the days of a single ‘copy taster,’ they become more aware of news items that are not selected. During the course of a day Executive Producers rarely click on an item if it is not marked ‘urgent’<sup>63</sup> but other journalists more readily see the constant barrage of items – for instance over a particular conflict as it becomes increasingly violent – regardless of whether each item is included in their organisation’s broadcast or not.

Collective monitoring therefore leads to occasions where journalists will advocate the inclusion of particular items, persuading their Executive Producer to, for instance, assign an item on the steady rise of violence in Iraq, including summary casualty statistics over a particular time period. During an editorial meeting at Sky, a script editor mentioned that there had been an awful lot of violence in Iraq lately and asked the Executive Producer, “Should we get someone to talk on it? At least 300 dead in the last week. 20 a day dead or more.” The Executive Producer was interested and suggested doing a “timeline on the week in Iraq.” Discussions centred on how there had recently been reports mentioning the slowing down of violence in Iraq but “then we got election obsessed.”

However, advocating for a particular story is not limited to the boundaries of the editorial meeting. Observation within newsrooms revealed a similar impact over the course of the news day. Any potential for the inclusion of news items that might offer greater ‘explanation’ or ‘review’ can only be advantageous to public understanding, but selection still ultimately rests in the hands of the Executive Producer.

## **2. Inside the Editorial Conference**

Descriptions of editorial meetings found within previous production literature remain relevant for today’s newsrooms as these routinized meetings have not altered their function or form within the production process. Selection and assignment decisions made within editorial meetings are critical to the foundation of the news day, directing

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63 In fact, most Executive Producers set the delivery of feeds to ‘urgent’ so that they will only see those news items, unless they actively seek out others.

subsequent actions by journalists. These decisions develop out of the range of news items proposed by journalists and the discussions that follow.

News items entered within planning documents therefore only make up part of what is on offer: “everyone has a chance to pitch story ideas for other things that we don’t know that aren’t on the calendar” (Heather Hiscox, Presenter, CBC). In essence, the general guiding principle of editorial meetings is: “I’ll pitch it ... and we’ll see if it gets on” (Paul Hambleton, Executive Producer, CBC). An example from an editorial meeting at the CBC reveals this principle whereby a journalist pitched three items: trampoline insurance, an archaeology professor’s findings and two confirmed cases of West Nile. After hearing about all three items the Executive Producer, Paul Hambleton, responded, “Ok. I’m interested in the trampoline waivers.” This story was pitched as “a really interesting little story that fits into the *‘family folder’*” concerning families trying to protect themselves from ‘backyard injuries.’ Hambleton commented on this item later on during a one-on-one interview: “And it’s amazing what you find out. ... I know he just threw that out there like, ‘Oh by the way’ and you never know when these things are going to turn out.”

Editorial conferences are held for different programmes and elements within news organisations. For instance, one meeting at the CBC was essentially “an information exchange” since they “have the 24 hour news network to feed and ... have a huge country with a lot of bureaus and a lot of different things going on. At some point we need to get a snapshot of the country” (Hambleton). Within one of CBC’s morning meetings, 14 bureaus are involved which means each receives approximately two minutes each. Hambleton says, “I want to know what their top story is, what their best story is. And sometimes the two of them are the same and sometimes it’s just quirky.” The amount of discussion over stories varies with radio enabling more time for discussion than TV since “radio doesn’t have a 24 hour service” while flagship programmes like The National offer “the most [space for] discussion” (Hambleton).

Furthermore, new technologies within newsrooms have altered the means through which journalists can access information about the stories that are being covered by other news bureaus within their organisation, or even via relationships that have developed with other news organisations. For instance, Peter Kent (Deputy Editor, Global) demonstrated

the ease at which he could pull up the line-up of various bureaus across the country on his computer while sitting in his office. Vancouver's noon news was still taking shape but decisions had been made to cover a big wind storm. If it was deemed a good story, just a few clicks would gain access: "it'll pull all of the video and all of the meta-data and all of the scripts so we don't have to phone them and say, 'What have you got' and we'll also be able to screen a low resolution version once the story is cut and loaded in" (Kent). As such, decisions can be made much faster with greater ease while spending less money since the piece can first be viewed before decisions are made.

Overall, selection decision-making involves the processing of information collected during the intake phase. However, as previous research indicated, to some extent news is a logistics business. Therefore, some selection decisions are made on the basis of availability of crews and transportation issues. As Sean O'Shea (Investigative Reporter, Global) explains, "Sometimes you just have the capability of doing a 'live' reporter, stand-up in the field depending on what trucks are available." Budgets of news organisations are also influential in this way. For instance, "There are a lot of stories I feel we miss a lot, but it costs us money to fly a cameraman to middle of nowhere Ontario where nobody's ever heard of to cover a story like that" (Morning Assignment Editor, CBC). Once selection decisions are made, assignment generally follows wherein particular base-level journalists are assigned directly, assignment editors pass on the information to foreign correspondents following the meeting, or "producers will be put on to individual stories to look after them. And then chase guests and develop packages" (Kevin Backhurst, Controller, BBC News 24).

## **2.1 Institution-Driven News**

Within editorial meetings, institution-driven events were frequently discussed. These events originate within information passed on by official sources and the public relations industry. Depending on their specific nature, Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC) argues that such events "can be quite contrived and artificial and they can be overblown."

The following example comes from an editorial meeting at the CBC: "And we'll watch Bill Clinton and Steve Lewis – they have a newser today" (Editorial Meeting, CBC). This 'event'

comes up again at another meeting: “Clinton and Lewis both have presentations around 12:45 under the heading ‘Global Leaders Speak Out’” (Editorial Meeting, CBC). Similarly, during an editorial meeting at Sky there was hope that “Blunkett would make a contribution to the pool occupying the doorstep at the Sheffield home” in order to “at least [offer] a sound bite.” Discussions include inquiries regarding logistics and also often reveal pre-determined notions of what information may be on offer. The following is an example from a CBC editorial meeting:

Eddie Greenspan, a lawyer for the family has called a media event, newser for 2 o'clock at his office over here at King and Huron. He's going to go sit and listen. Nobody has high expectations of anything. The thought is it's going to be another, 'Why haven't we heard anything' because two or three weeks ago the Mexicans said we'd have something to say in two or three weeks and they haven't. So that may be something, it more than likely will be nothing.

If the news day does not appear to be very fruitful reliance on the outcome of news conferences may become more important: “We're very quiet today. Sort of in a weird time in New Brunswick, waiting for official election call. Campaigning going on, Liberals holding a news conference. So that's our main story today” (Editorial Meeting, CBC). A news conference may also be covered just in case any programme within the organisation later develops an interest. Alternatively, a number of news items may be planned in advance based on information from an organisation. For instance, the following example involving a week-long meeting held by a Canadian religious organisation:

This is something you may be aware, United Church of Canada is holding its General Council Meeting in Thunder Bay all this week and Kelly Hudson is attending the sessions and there's a whole bunch of issues coming up so there'll be two or three stories during the week. (Editorial Meeting, CBC)

Apart from news conferences, government announcements can also instigate a story. For instance, David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) links the story he planned to follow to information from an official source: “Today I'm doing something on Ethanol, there's a big government announcement: ‘We're investing money in Ethanol so we'll haul out Ethanol in our field.’” Coverage may also be granted through an offer of special access. For instance, the opportunity for BBC News 24 to broadcast from a moving vessel – a British warship:

Just this afternoon I heard that they want me to go sometime in July and go onboard a British warship in the Caribbean. We've been offered to go and do some broadcasting from a British warship in the Caribbean. So we'll go there, we'll have one day of 'live' broadcasting. (Paul Adams, Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24)

In this case the 'opportunity' appears to be the result of the Navy's desire for greater news coverage:

I'm not quite sure what the genesis of this one was. The Navy have been sort of desperate to kind of raise their profile. They think that they don't get enough attention. And the air force thinks the same way. Basically all the British military thinks that. Both positive and negative. So the Navy ... every now and again they offer us footage of drug busts in the Caribbean. We've once or twice in the past tried to organize being on a ship while it was heavily engaged in making a big drug bust. So they've just offered again. Either we asked or they offered. And we simply come up with a date that worked for everybody. It is a bit of PR for them and it will give a slice of life [on a] British warship. (Adams)

However, as always, prior planning could turn out to be futile if other news items are deemed more newsworthy, even within a rolling news environment: "You hope and pray it's not a big news day. We go to great lengths to do something soft. And if there's a big breaking news story that day, like a bomb attack that day, you won't get on" (Adams). If the piece is used, it would be advantageous to News 24 in that it fulfils the desire to be 'on location' and 'live': "The idea is if you have gone through all that effort you want to have a whole series of hits through the day" (Adams).

## **2.2 Creating Themes and Adding the Personal Element**

Two issues that constrained selection and assignment decisions relate to the search for themes within bulletins and the desire for a personal, or 'human element' to appear within stories. Within the range of news items proposed in editorial meetings, Executive Producers tended to intentionally attempt to create or otherwise seek out common themes. An Executive Producer explains how he views his role in this way: "And my job is to listen, kind of like an overview of what the flow of the day is and sometimes I can see things or hear things that are being talked about" (Paul Hambleton, Executive Producer, CBC). Speaking about the TV News story meeting where all of the regional managing

editors across Canada are involved, Hambleton points out his intention to seek out common threads:

The other thing that comes out of that meeting – quite often, it didn't happen today but it happens quite often – is you'll find themes, you'll find PEI's talking about this, Regina's talking about that and then you go, 'Oh ok, oh.' Like we almost had something on gas prices there this morning right? But that – I test a lot of stuff out that way, to see how it's playing.

The following observations within Sky's editorial meeting illustrate how the Executive Producer clearly directed his news team towards the theme of VE Day celebrations. The Executive Producer said, "Let's get presenters' friends to do 'live' bits on war – Alistair Bruce style. There will be lots of foreign bits and pieces coming in." The end of WWII was said to be "key for the weekend." He suggested getting historians on to "tell us what happened" and that coverage should focus on remembering the war and justifications for it. A potential guest was mentioned, along with the comment that the guest is plugging a book – and therefore might be interested in coming on. The Executive Producer asked journalists to "try to get as many people as possible, Jewish group survivors, let's hear memories. It's a great opportunity. Veterans' groups, you name it." He was surprised that there was no coverage already planned by any correspondents: "Don't we want to be in Germany today? It's the 60th anniversary!" Responses were that "they are all on holiday. The Foreign Desk is closed 'till Monday."

Another component of selection that came up within editorial meetings was a desire for the inclusion of a personal element within news coverage, which related to previous research that suggested journalists most frequently ask *who* is involved in a story. As well, 'human interest' stories were deemed to be attractive to audiences. During a CBC editorial meeting, a journalist was "trying to profile a family where father and daughter, all have AIDS" (Editorial Meeting, CBC). Similarly, the following conversation shows how the Executive Producer directed coverage by asking for the human angle within an editorial meeting:

*Paul Hambleton:* A lot of those Lebanese-Canadians came back to Montreal. I don't know if you have a line on people who might be going back but that's something to keep an eye on.

*Montreal:* [phone] Yeah. Found a family. Establishing themselves in Montreal. Not a lot that actually came with the intention of going back.  
*Paul Hambleton:* Yeah ok anyway just keep that in your –  
*Montreal:* [phone] Ok, sure. (Editorial Meeting, CBC)

In fact, sometimes an item was not selected simply because the personal element was absent: “Families are hard to track down so that’s why the story never made it yesterday” (Editorial Meeting, CBC). The desire for characters within a story and even the creation of drama is considered further within the final results chapter in relation to top-down pressures that influence the lack of context and history included in reports.

### 2.3 Subjectivity

Previous research highlighted the potential for individuals to ‘influence minor elements’ of production since the decisions they make are likely to be value-laden. Therefore, since the Executive Producer has the final authority for making selection and assignment decisions, his or her personal preferences are also likely to enter the production process at this stage. When asking an Executive Producer at Sky whether his superiors hired him based on the fact that he held particular values or attitudes, he confirmed that at the very least Executive Producers have to “conform to Sky culture: fit in or fuck off.” While he suggested that “it’s the process that really drives it and changing Executive Producers doesn’t make that much of a difference,” other journalists had a different perspective: “When they [Executive Producers] change it affects style. They pick stories they like and the way of covering stories” (Ben Rayner, Editor, ITV). Another journalist agreed: “Oh yeah, it’s completely subjective. It’s *completely* subjective. News is *totally* subjective. ... people will have certain areas where they are more interested in stories or they’ll think we’ve done too many of those kind stories or we’ve had enough of that” (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland).

Observations within newsrooms also showed examples of personal preferences swaying selection decisions. While at his desk in the newsroom, Sky’s Executive Producer was approached by a journalist and asked about two news items offered at the morning editorial meeting by the Foreign Desk: a beauty pageant and a story about baby elephants. He responded that he is “not a huge fan of Thai trannies,” but “baby elephants

in wells is ok.” A further example illustrates the discussions that occur within editorial meetings regarding selection and how journalists attempt to persuade the Executive Producer’s decisions. In this example three news items were proposed, two of which advanced through the editorial meeting (to the Executive Producer’s dismay) and even remained as possibilities after the bulletin had begun broadcasting but were inevitably dropped in the end. During a Saturday morning editorial meeting at Sky, the Home Desk and one of the presenters said that Sky “could be at the guitar trade show ‘live.’” The Executive Producer immediately dismissed the idea, saying he was “not interested at all.” One of the presenters said, “I think it’s lovely. It’s a good weekend story.” The Executive Producer called it “cheesy” and said, “Inside I’m crying.” He concluded that they “park it and go back to it.” Two packages from CBS were also on offer during the meeting but the Executive Producer called the one about pets “ridiculous” while a presenter said the Japanese Book package was “rather nice.” Despite this the Executive Producer was clearly not interested in either and hoped they would not make the 12-2 broadcast. Shortly thereafter the presenters and some other journalists left the meeting, leaving just the six members of the news team and the Executive Producer. At this point the Executive Producer asked that a journalist “reach deep in [his] guest bag to save us” and asked those present to “please never run those two CBS packages.” He felt the meeting lacked enough newsworthy stories: “We have a proverbial sack of poo today.” Later on in the gallery, the Executive Producer was still itching to drop the Japanese book and the guitar trade show. The director, the time-keeper and one of the presenters all began to argue with the Executive Producer and complained that the Japanese book item was “a Saturday story,” “it’s a weekend story.” The Executive Producer clearly still did not like it and was not deterred from his hope that it would be dropped. Within the final broadcast both the Japanese book and the guitar trade show were bumped due to the receipt of “good bomb pics” from Iraq and President Bush “laying wreaths for VE Day.” This example demonstrated that the determination of an Executive Producer can be used to ensure that complete control over selection is maintained, despite persuasion attempts by other journalists, even though in this case he was ‘saved’ by the sudden availability of ‘good pictures.’

Regional affiliates, such as BBC Scotland, also confront preferences originating within the larger network. Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) explains how his London colleague's notions of newsworthiness do not always match his own:

I mean we have a bit of a running gag about some of our colleagues elsewhere ... there's some old guy on an island from the remote, furthest point away from Scotland, you know, they kinda like that, rustic Scottish story as they see Scotland, you know, through sort of tartan spectacles whereas we see it in a different way. But saying that there are certain stories that we just know we're going to get. Dare I say it, you know, the Loch Ness Monster and stuff like that. Here we go again.

Overall, these subjective preferences continue to interfere with selection decisions.

## 2.4 Line-up

All television bulletins require a line-up, which results in discussions over which story should be regarded as the top story during editorial meetings. While the Executive Producer tends to make these decisions – “What I say goes” (Executive Producer, Sky) – other journalists can also participate. At CBC, the following example from an editorial meeting illustrates how other journalists can have input into decisions regarding the lead story:

*Speaker 1:* I just wanted to ask about the lead – whether AIDS is the lead again.

*Speaker 2:* I don't see any other leads.

*Speaker 1:* See I do 'cause this is the key day – this is the theme, prevention.

*Speaker 3:* Solutions today. Maybe move off it tomorrow.

*Speaker 2:* I'm not sure there's anything here that would bump it anyway.

*Speaker 4:* Well the Hells' [Angels] return story is good but you're right.

*Speaker 2:* Not enough to say about him.

While the previous example regarding the guitar trade show and Japanese book indicated that Sky's Executive Producer was unhappy to receive input, he had argued on a different occasion that he appreciates the two-way nature that this process can entail: “it's good to have people talking back and arguing about things – you want to provoke those around you to get them to respond to you and be more creative.”

While these discussions offer preliminary decisions regarding the line-up, the producer and director typically engage in further discussions regarding the specifics of the entire line-up prior to the final broadcast. The next example is a conversation between the line-up producer and director prior to the 6 o'clock CBC news broadcast:

*Line-up Producer:* Do you think bike theft should be up that high or should I move it down? I could do Ionara, big fire, wise and then I could do bike theft at the end of the block.

*Director:* It's fine.

*Line-up Producer:* You think it's strong enough to go there? Alright.

*Director:* I think it's got enough interest.

## 2.5 Retaining Flexibility

Despite the seeming stability of these selection and assignment decisions, the situation is more fluid than these routines suggest. Between an editorial meeting and the final broadcast of assigned stories, breaking news events could occur, news conferences or other forms of newsgathering may not prove fruitful and logistical complications could intervene. For example, the death of a newsworthy figure may take precedence over prior planning: "the Pope dies – didn't expect it – gotta send people<sup>64</sup> and that took resources that could have gone to other places" (Executive Producer, Sky). Similarly, "when the London alleged bomb plot happened, we had to throw out everything from the day before. Because you've got a breaking news happening" (Morning Assignment Editor, CBC). Even the focus of a news item might develop over time: "It's very interesting to watch a story get shaped from the conception by one producer and then how it evolves as the day goes on. Sometimes the focus changes and so on and so forth" (Morning Show Unit, CBC). This can also be dictated by the availability of guests "and what comes out of your pre-interview" (Morning Show Unit, CBC). Therefore, decisions made within editorial meetings represent planning that must remain flexible.

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64 For domestic breaking news the Executive Producer normally decides whether journalists will be sent to a news event but in the case of breaking news occurring abroad, a more senior journalist may be involved. For instance, when the December 2004 Indonesian tsunami occurred, the head of the newsroom who was working over Christmas at CBC telephoned the head of newsgathering and ended up speaking with the Editor in Chief Tony Burman, who made the final decision to send journalists to the scene of the event.

News conferences that are assigned coverage may also lead to unpredictability. While there is generally some sense of what the news conference might reveal, the outcome may not be as predictable as journalists may hope. At Sky, an Executive Producer had been told when David Blunkett was due to “pop out and do a ‘live.’” However, approximately 10 minutes later the Home Desk informed the Executive Producer that there was “no ‘live’ on Blunkett. He did a brief statement and then left. There’ll be a grab<sup>65</sup> in a few minutes.” The Executive Producer used the ‘squawk box’<sup>66</sup> to tell the director in the gallery that the ‘live’ was not coming anymore but there would be a grab. He then said, “She is going to be freaking out trying to fill the slot when she thought she had a ‘live.’” On another occasion, an editor came into the gallery to tell the Executive Producer he “was going to package Iraq but went to Reading instead.” As such, the murder of a teenage girl in Reading would be covered instead. However, the editor also revealed logistical difficulties: “Can’t get the truck there in time.” They wondered how long it would take to get to the scene but in the end asked the police to delay their statement so the truck sent to Reading could do the piece ‘live.’

One final example demonstrates how decisions over the use of particular news items can change over the course of the news day. In this instance, a news item relating to the outcome of academic research about public security in Montreal was discussed within three editorial meetings observed throughout the course of one news day at CBC. During the 9:30am TV News story meeting with regional managing editors the study was first mentioned: “One in five boys carry a weapon of some sort to school, carry weapons to class. So we’re making some stories on that. Comparative with Toronto as well. Interesting.” Next, during the radio editorial meeting the study arose again but this time it was embedded within a larger theme regarding court costs. By the time the 5:00pm meeting occurred the story had been dropped by Toronto due to concerns over the

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65 ‘Grab’ is the terminology used at Sky (although other organisations use different terms, such as ‘sauce’) to describe a news item that has been pre-recorded and sent to an organisation to place in their running order as they see fit.

66 A ‘squawk box’ is a rectangular box with a microphone that is approximately a foot and a half long. It is used to speak to journalists that are located in different areas within the newsroom who would otherwise not hear the communication. Therefore, it is simply a means of providing instant communication. An Executive Producer at Sky used one at his desk to speak to other journalists by pressing a button on the box and also used it while in the gallery to talk to either the home, foreign, business, or graphics desks.

method used within the research. However, Montreal was still planning to run the item, despite the sudden unease by some of the Toronto journalists as well as the apparent disapproval by the mid-level, decision-making journalist.

All of the above examples illustrate how unanticipated shifts to the planning formulated within editorial meetings can occur at any time during the production process. Nonetheless, predictability remains a very important factor within the news production process.

### **3. News Values**

News values continue to involve the shared understandings and ‘news sense’ described within past production studies. They are seldom explicitly discussed by journalists and rarely questioned. As such, an Executive Producer at Sky declares that journalists do not “talk or think about values,” while Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) notes that: “some things become so natural and everyday it’s like you don’t question them anymore.” The news values highlighted within the previous literature also appeared within this study and no discernible differences were found between Canadian and UK news organisations, however technological developments have led to some shifts. In particular, the indispensable nature of images combined with the rise of UGC, developments in graphic software packages and archival techniques has resulted in a greater ability to cover what would likely have been ‘picture-less stories’ in the past. As well, the most significant transformation relates to the growing value placed on immediacy within news organisations. The conception of immediacy is now more often associated with being ‘on location,’ which is linked to an attempt to retain the loyalty of audiences. Technological developments have also facilitated this transformation by enabling news organisations to attain immediacy more readily, which is analysed in greater detail within the next chapter. As well, the advent of online news further complicates the issue of immediacy.

Within interviews, journalists were asked which news values were significant within their organisation. This led to a variety of responses with crucial values revolving around being first and ‘live’ (components of immediacy) as well as accurate, interesting and important.

Overall, the key news values described in this section relate to new developments that enhance the value of images, traditional values of importance and interest, as well as proximity and an updated version of immediacy (which includes a comparison of speed and accuracy and a focus on what it means to be ‘live’).

### **3.1 Images, UGC and Computer Graphics**

News items are rarely complete without accompanying images – and not just any but the best, most newsworthy pictures and videos. Previous research suggested that images inherently have ‘holding power’ over audiences. Most journalists conceded, arguing that, “If it ain’t got pictures you know it’s not going to sell” (Mick McGlinchey, Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online). Heather Hiscox (Presenter, CBC) describes the impact of this prerequisite: “So for example a court story might be a very, very important story out of the courts but if you have no pictures to illustrate it you can almost not even do it, or it’s really awful.” Therefore, news organisations must “cater to visuals” (Paul Hambleton, Executive Producer, CBC) since “pictures make the story” (Ben Rayner, Editor, ITV). In this way, “if you’ve got more pictures you can explain more because you’ve got more pictures to talk over” (Lindsey Hilsum, International Editor and China Correspondent, Channel 4). As such, some journalists in the newsroom operate solely around images: “The chief sub video is always looking for better pictures, or more recent ones” (Editor, Sky).

However, it is important to note that the lack of images does not automatically rule out the news item: “If there are no pictures, that is no reason not to do the story. You have to be creative with what you’ve got” (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). Mark Sikstrom (Executive Producer, CTV Online) offers examples of such creative strategies in reference to a story about delivery of sextuplets:

The sextuplet story was a perfect example. The day the story broke we had very little coverage because we had no pictures. We had no pictures of the kids, we had no interviews with the mom, you know. Nothing. So it locked it down. So all we did was interview other people on the topic of multiple births and, you know, ran file footage of other sextuplets and whatever, you make it up.

Nonetheless, it is apparent from newsroom observations that some selection decisions are made in consideration of available images. For example, within Sky's editorial meeting the Executive Producer considered news items on offer from the Home Desk's list of possible stories, one of which was the 'attic baby woman,' involving the discovery of a baby's body in an attic. The Executive Producer said he wanted pictures in case it turned into something newsworthy. He was told that "in picture terms – not a bad story" since flowers were being transported in wheelbarrows. In the production of teasers, images are also hugely important. For instance, in the gallery the Executive Producer used the 'squawk box' to tell those in charge of videos, "I want a little bit of Iraq gore for the teaser." Another example comes from CBC's editorial meeting: "A couple of fires this afternoon, good pics. ... At first [they were] trying to fight it but they let it burn so good pics" (Editorial Meeting, CBC). It was later jokingly suggested that the story "would have been way better if [the fire] had spread across the river to the nuclear plant that's on the other side" (Editorial Meeting, CBC).

While the importance of images has always been significant for television news, today's news organisations are at an advantage as a result of technological developments. Responding to interview questions regarding the ubiquity of mobile camera phones and the expansion of the information producing strata more generally, journalists acknowledged that these developments have helped supply news organisations with a much higher volume of images. Coverage of the failed bombings in London that followed the July 7th, 2005 attack came first from CCTV – "the key first point of coverage" – and also from the police: "Some of those images were filtered down through the cops and some were immediately available to the media because they use traffic cameras for traffic reports" (Nigel Baker, Executive Director, APTN). With mobile phone images and video of the subsequent arrests filmed with a Sony digicam, the month of July was considered "quite a revelation" (Baker). Mark Sikstrom (Executive Producer, CTV Online) provides a further example from Canada: "When we covered the [September 2006] Dawson College shooting we did photo galleries of the day. Quite a few of those pictures came from people who shot them on cellular phones and sent them to us."

The advent of UGC has also encouraged journalists to cover news items that they may not have otherwise simply because the images and videos provide them with more

information. Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) offers an example relating to a fire in Dundee:

Huge fire out in Dundee last week for example where, you know, it was in a scrap yard. But there was smoke all over the city. And there wasn't anybody hurt, you know, there wasn't – it was under control. But there was smoke all over the city. Everyone in the city is kinda looking up, going to be looking up, and going, 'What on earth is that.' We've got to report that kind of thing. In the old days it might have been, 'Well there's nobody hurt and we can't see it so we don't know.' But somebody sends you a picture in and you see for yourself and you think – 'Oh yeah they've got a point. We've got a duty here to report this. We should be telling people what exactly is going on. Informing them.'

Similarly, when journalists were asked interview questions about computer graphics software capabilities they felt these developments had also improved news coverage. For instance, the following journalist describes how coverage of health and science stories benefits from computer graphics as well as the greater range of resources available online:

I think there's a lot of health and science stories too that we're able to do now because of the use of graphics and animation and all that. We do a weekly segment on science with a science commentator, our Dr. Bob McDonald. And we're able to do a lot because we get imagery from NASA or off the internet, like satellite stuff or animated stuff. We'd never be able to do that stuff on television visually because we wouldn't have access to any of that. And same with health too, there's a lot of health stuff, doing graphics or animations of inside your body or your heart or this or that. 'Cause we're able to do that, we're able to flesh out – I think there's more breadth in the stories we can do because of that. (Morning Show Unit, CBC)

Heather Hiscox (Presenter, CBC) agrees: "just from the visual perspective certainly, you know, evolutions in graphics and 3 dimensional, everything is just making television a lot more interesting to watch and enabling us in some ways to illustrate and tell stories that we weren't able to do before." Similarly, the generation of maps has also proved useful.

### **3.2 Interest and Importance**

At the most basic level of news values, journalists refer to news items as interesting and important within selection decisions. Previous research indicated that these values

represented the most regular reply. Other values, particularly immediacy components, intervened within the current research, but interest and importance continued to be cited. Some items are “kind of interesting,” “kinda neat” or are predicted to generate “enough interest.” As such, Ben Rayner (Editor, ITV) explains that “You have to weigh out what is interesting versus significant and important.” While it is difficult to exemplify the key elements of these news values, journalists generally develop and maintain a similar ‘news sense.’ For instance, the trampoline story described earlier in this chapter was pitched as an “interesting little story that fits into the *‘family folder’*” (Editorial Meeting, CBC). The Executive Producer liked the item: “Ok, I’ll get Ken to follow up. Sounds kind of fun.” The journalist on the phone pitching the story agreed: “It’s a great summer-time story.”

These news values also reflect underlying perceptions of audience interest. However, akin to comments made by journalists within previous research, news items that are deemed important must be covered despite a potential lack of interest:

So it’s a very complicated thing and it just means that we have to ask ourselves all the time, you know, ‘Is it interesting? Is it informative?’ A lot of journalists – we have a mandate, we’re a public broadcaster, we have a responsibility to kind of report things that, you know, and it’s up to the viewer to decide whether they’re interested or not but we still have to do it. (Paul Hambleton, Executive Producer, CBC)

Highlighting the fact that the CBC is a public organisation appears to suggest that private organisations do not necessarily maintain such a responsibility. Perhaps to some degree this is accurate since the Executive Producer for Sky did not emphasize importance within his list of news values: “Their [the Sky news team] whole day is oriented around ensuring that those time slots are filled with the most relevant, entertaining and breaking news stories of the day.”

Generating interest might be achieved by trying to portray the sense that news coverage is “moving all the time” (Executive Producer, Sky). Conveying the “idea that things might change” as a means of “keep[ing] things interesting,” the Executive Producer wrote a headline for presenters to read on air about Blair’s new cabinet, choosing the words ‘cabinet taking shape’ despite the fact that cabinet members had already been chosen.

He explains that “you are always pushing it forward rather than dwelling on what is actually happening.” Also “you want to keep changing stories to inspire movement, even if they are not moving” (Executive Producer, Sky).

In a similarly constructed manner, journalists may try to seek out dramatic elements and tension within the news item. The following example discussed by Political Correspondent David Akin (CTV) highlights the way in which the routines of beat journalists may inadvertently develop these elements, thereby transforming a *potential* news item to the status of a newsworthy story. Akin describes how his own research into the Canadian military’s planned purchase of an aircraft inevitably contributed to the knowledge of an MP as a result of their discussions, which in turn likely prompted the MP to criticize the government. As a result, Akin considers whether his actions contributed to the creation of tension that would enable the news item to become newsworthy and receive coverage:

Right now there’s a debate in Canada about a certain kind of aircraft to buy. We have set aside 5 or 6 billion dollars to buy. I will learn a lot about the background on this aircraft, it’s one of the specialized, you know, the kind of assessed military aircraft purchases and the NDP Member of Parliament, the opposition member, she’s very keen, the critic, and she doesn’t have some of the background. So I spent a lot of time talking to her, telling her what I learned about the background and I know that she’ll use some of that information in the house to bring her question. So am I planting something there? I don’t think so. It’s her job to learn this, it’s my job to get her response. And if she’s willing to take the time to learn about it, if she wants to go and use this to criticize the government about something, ok great. So we have a sort of feedback loop but because it’s so specialized she may be the only voice of dissent on a particular issue. And so on that one I sort of have to go, ‘Is she representing some sort of broad view, am I creating like, am I creating the tension in the story?’ I’m not supposed to do that. I should find the tension in a particular issue and describe it but I shouldn’t be just creating the tension just because I need tension to drive the story forward.

This construction of tension or drama may not be necessary if a newsworthy character becomes involved. Topics like abortion that have already been exhaustively covered in the past could suddenly become newsworthy:

There’s really not that much new to say in that debate. If there’s [something] new to say about the politics of it perhaps but the actual is it bad or good, people have pretty much explored the actual moral issues around that, there’s no news there. But there might be news if a politician decides to jump

in on one side or funding has been allocated that may increase or decrease abortion access. (David Akin, Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV)

Once again the reliance on official sources becomes evident.

### 3.3 Proximity

Similar to previous research, audience interest was also argued to be related to proximity. As Peter Kent (Deputy Editor, Global) explains, “everything has relevance the closer to home it gets or the number of us that are involved in it.” Perhaps this is why when an Executive Producer at Sky checked blinking information from the wires to discover that that there was a rescue in Nepal, he immediately turned to the Foreign Desk and asked, “Any Brits in the expedition?” Later on, the Executive Producer explained that, “if you say Westerners are dead, everyone goes, ‘oooooo.’ ... Westerners include Iraqis with Brit[ish] passports, etc.”

This expectation on the part of audiences, as well as the notion of a saturation point, helps to explain Canadian news coverage of Afghanistan versus that of Iraq:

We’re covering Afghanistan in Canada a lot more than we did or would if there weren’t 3,000 Canadian soldiers fighting there. And our coverage of Iraq is, other than the daily car bomb, when there’s a notable number of people, casualties, our coverage of Iraq is minimal because it’s *more of the same*. I mean that’s the way the audience sees it and if we try and push it any harder or with longer stories that’s when we see people switching away from, you know, to go to another newscast. (Kent)

Despite these factors, immediacy was clearly significant within selection and assignment decisions.

### 3.4 Immediacy and Being First

An important issue within today’s news values revolves around conceptions of ‘immediacy.’ When interviewed, journalists spoke about being first and being ‘live,’ associating these outcomes with immediacy. This section considers immediacy as linked to speed or being first – which was a common theme in this study – and is followed by the final section of this chapter that relates immediacy to being ‘live.’

Being first is a news value with a lengthy history and is a proxy for judging the competition. For instance, “immediacy is very important. I just know because I’ve seen memos saying, ‘CBC beat us by 2 minutes with X’ and I know Bloomberg and Reuters reporters and they do measure, like managers measure, you know, we had ours on the wire X seconds before Reuters did” (David Akin, Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV). Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) also emphasizes this competitive atmosphere: “Yeah I mean obviously you know that’s one of the key things that a 24 hour news channel is: to report stories first, be on the scene first, have the pictures first. So speed is really important.” The same sentiments were found at CTV: “breaking news is a big deal. I mean they want to – the management wants to have the ability to say we get it first, we report it first so I mean that’s premium number one” (Sean O’Shea, Investigative Reporter, Global). Ben Rayner (Editor, ITV) happily recounted an example that took place in Grantham where a crew was sent to cover a story on the ‘dangers of trampolining.’ Once a ‘terror story’ suddenly came up, the crew “stopped what they were doing and covered the more important story” (Rayner). Importantly, Rayner notes that “Sky was wondering how we got there so fast.” Paul Hambleton (Executive Producer, CBC) further exemplifies the nature of the competition by suggesting that news organisations exist in a ‘constant state of war.’ He also maintains that this situation is not new:

I mean that’s what’s going on right now. Those two channels right now [CBC Newsworld and CTV Newsnet] are the two all news network channels in Canada and we’re in a constant state of war to be first with something, to be ‘live’ with something and then everything else, when it’s just, it’s program we’re just filling in, we’re just filling time, trying to have interesting programming. But those fires [in Detroit and Montreal] – it’s like ‘Get those pictures first, we want to be first.’ So absolutely. But that’s been around, that’s not been that new. That’s been around for at least 10 years.

Purchasing decisions by news organisations reflect the continued importance of being first. Sean O’Shea (Investigative Reporter, Global) explains this in relation to Global’s acquisition of a helicopter:

that’s why we have a helicopter. Helicopter in the street, three cameras, order capable, and that helicopter is flying through the whole newscast at 6 to 7 and has been pretty much since they got it about 4 years ago because they want the ability for example to cover a fire that breaks out at 6:01 so they’re over there right away. We don’t have the capability with traffic ... to cover anything

from the ground last minute like that. With a helicopter they can – and it's regularly happening. A major fire, a chemical leak, huge traffic – pretty much direct ... that's a big deal.

### *Complicating Factors: Online News and Conglomeration*

However, in today's newsrooms a further issue complicates the notion of being first: the rise of online news. News organisations are reacting somewhat inconsistently to this development wherein deadlines extend throughout the news day and updates can virtually be made at any time. As the Executive Producer of CTV Online, Mark Sikstrom clearly feels that the online medium should not be trumped by the fact that there are other pre-scheduled television bulletins:

We don't hold news back on the web. In fact we generally are first with it because we can turn it around quickly. Next comes our headline news channel, Newsnet, and then what's happened is that the appointment viewing newscast of the day, your 6 o'clock local and your 11 o'clock national, that still provides a compendium and summary of the news to that date.

Similarly, Peter Kent (Deputy Editor, Global) describes the necessity of transforming attitudes that revolve around a traditional conception of news, for both newspapers and television:

we've had to convince the newspaper journalists and their editors not to sit on stories until the hard copy paper comes out but to treat the hard copy newspaper as the final edition of a now continuous 24 hour 7 day a week process. And on television the same thing, instead of sitting on that great bit of video of whatever, we have to convince the TV journalists to file their stories immediately, get them onto a server and get the server onto the internet so that people can begin.

In contrast, David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) emphasizes the need to reserve news for the traditional television broadcast despite the availability of the online medium and the speed it could offer. Here he relates the point to his own blog, exclusivity and audiences:

I know that certainly there's information that I'll get ahead of our 11 o'clock newscast and if I was Mr. Transparent I would get that out as fast as possible on our blog. No I'm not going to do that, I'm going to hold something in that's

an exclusive or extra juicy bit to my broadest, biggest punch platform which is the national newscast.

Furthermore, issues surrounding the exclusivity of items cause difficulties to this straightforward approach when two different forms of media are owned by the same company, as the newspaper *The Globe and Mail* and CTV News are. In some instances, the newspaper becomes a more important medium, thereby restricting the release of information on television. Akin explains this in relation to information about a big business merger:

if I found out that Nortel and Cisco were merging, I have to go on one of our business television channels and tell people, 'Big business story, Nortel and Cisco are merging.' And the odds are pretty good that I'd hold that information, make sure it showed up on *The Globe* the next morning and then go on TV and have this great thing. I'm pretty sure. ... we don't want to tip off our competitors in some cases. (Akin)

However, Akin also points out that this solution might be in the midst of change:

I get the sense that's changed to a degree and Ed Greenspon, the editor [in chief] of *The Globe*, has been relatively progressive. He has broken some news on his website before it was in the paper. And there's been a great discussion in his newsroom but he thinks that that's the mission of the paper. Be first with the news, so it sort of goes issue by issue.

### *Speed versus Accuracy*

Still, regardless of the medium that is used to alert audiences to a news item, journalists agree that accuracy as a critical news value cannot be underplayed. The obsession with being first can thus be viewed as a threat to accuracy: "You are broadcasting more quickly but it's harder to get your facts right with such emphasis on immediacy" (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). Comparing accuracy with speed, Mark Sikstrom (Executive Producer, CTV Online) declared that accuracy was more important:

Well the most important is you have to be accurate. You have to be accurate, you have to be right. But yes the second most important thing is speed to market because news is a time sensitive, fragile commodity. Old news is like old bread. Who wants it baby?

While previous research tended to conclude that accuracy was more vital than speed, journalists within the present study arrived at different conclusions, depending on the platform: news websites, 24 hour platforms and TV programmes that broadcast for multiple hours (like CBC's Morning Show which is 4 hours long) provide more room for errors than hour-long news bulletins. For example, "Well often you say to yourself, well, you know, the pressure is to be first and if we get it wrong there's always next hour, right? Where we can correct whatever mistake there was" (Morning Show Unit, CBC). Therefore, with 24 hour news, "Sometimes you just have to take a bit of a gamble, and sometimes you have to go with something and then say well actually it turns out that, you know, the report of the explosion coming out of Tel Aviv, it turned out to be gas – whatever" (Paul Adams, Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24). On the other hand, "for the bulletins speed is not so important, accuracy is as important. Probably more so actually" (Kevin Backhurst, Controller, BBC News 24).

Journalists working for public news organisations may arguably feel a stronger commitment to accuracy. Comments by Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) support this contention, with comparisons of the BBC with Sky:

if you ask most people in this building what's more important, being first or being right, they'll say being right. It's very important for the BBC. At the end of the day you may not be first on the news, you may not have necessarily been breaking it but you offer the best coverage in the long run. ... I think we are still more inherently cautious than Sky and that means that quite often we are not the first.

Further considerations of the importance of accuracy over being first are combined in the next section with the final component of immediacy: being 'live.'

### **3.5 Immediacy and Being 'Live'**

Immediacy as conceived in relation to offering 'live' coverage has become increasingly important for news organisations, which was discovered in responses to interview questions regarding the development of the ideology of 'liveness' over time. As noted in Chapter 2, more recent research had already begun to identify technological advancements that were improving the ability to go 'live.' Certainly the notions of

'illusory' immediacy discussed in the older production studies whereby unexpected story elements had to be eliminated to preserve a semblance of immediacy have been transformed. Today the desire to go 'live' has moved beyond coverage of breaking news items, extending to coverage of a wide range of news items. Immediacy thus becomes sought after as a means of showing the audience that the news organisation is *there*, 'live' on location, and can be trusted. News organisations increasingly aspire to gain audience loyalty in this way.

However, conceptions of immediacy are not always very well developed in the minds of journalists, which may be indicative of the developmental stage at which these news values currently exist within the so-called common 'news sense.' Some journalists inevitably combine all three elements of being first, 'live,' and accurate: "you've got to be right, but yeah we want to be first. So it's a constant source of competition: 'live' and right" (Paul Hambleton, Executive Producer, CBC). Another journalist makes a similar remark but highlights immediacy over accuracy, demonstrating that even public organisations may not be uniquely committed to accuracy first: "I would say here at CBC there is a real emphasis on getting it right but, you know, the main thing is to be 'live' and to get the story on the air as quickly as possible" (Morning Show Unit, CBC). John Northcott's (Video Journalist, CBC) comments reveal that being 'live' and first go hand in hand:

Something happened, who was the first up? Who was the first to go 'live' with it? The tsunami was one of those, right? How big is it? It happened on Boxing Day, you know. Everyone's on vacation. How soon can we get something in? How soon can we be 'live' from location, essentially.

Despite the interweaving nature of these news values, being 'live' has unmistakably become a significant element within news production. As Trina Maus (Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario) says, "'Live,' 'live,' 'live,' everything's 'live.'" Another journalist suggests that this trend has developed into a 'live' bias. The remarks are also supported by other journalists:

*Speaker 1:* I can definitely get that sense from [others agree] having worked in sort of before this 'live' revolution and after. And there is a definite bias towards getting things 'live.' Our whole show is based around –

*Speaker 2:* Well what's our mandate right? What's happening *now*. (Morning Show Unit, CBC)

Within the 24 hour rolling news platform, even more emphasis is placed on achieving 'live' coverage: "Because the 'live' stuff is very important to the life of [CBC] Newsworld, right, it's totally important. It's their bread and butter" (Brien Christie, Foreign Assignment Editor, CBC). Asking Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) if the BBC's 24 hour programme stresses the importance of being 'live' he responded, "Oh definitely. On location. That's what 24 hour news is all about really." Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC) was the only journalist interviewed who expressed the opinion that his organisation was not obsessed with 'live' coverage:

we're not sending correspondents abroad simply to deliver in 'live' situations. We do in certain stories, I mean obviously the Israel-Lebanon situation, obviously the whole bomb scare last week in London, you know, we respond like that. I think in many cases – I think if anything at the CBC we're sceptical of going 'live' or turning every event into a kind of a 'live' experience when the fact that it's 'live' is secondary to the merit of the story.

Regardless of whether every news organisation is obsessed with immediacy in this way, an important element of being 'live' is that it is no longer reserved only for breaking news items but increasingly used to cover a wide assortment of stories. For instance, discussions with CBC's Morning Show Unit revealed that a portion of their newscast is dependent upon pre-arranged 'live hits': "we have reporters in 'live' places and it's determined where they're going to be the day before depending on what the big stories are going to be the next day and then after that we go to interviews." Further examples can be seen via discussions that take place within editorial meetings: "In Northern Ireland there was a hanger from the results yesterday. A doorstep interview would be useful" (Editorial Meeting, Sky). The Executive Producer asked that the truck get sent in to "do it 'live.'" Or while talking about VE Day coverage: "Let's get presenters' friends to do 'live' bits on war – Alistair Bruce style" (Editorial Meeting, Sky).

It is certainly very clear that journalists – particularly the Executive Producers making these decisions – are now geared more towards 'live' coverage. During observations at Sky, the Executive Producer asked his news team to look for "anywhere 'live' to be at all

rather than just package” since it is “boring when you just wrap it up.” This practice relates to the desire to achieve a new sense of immediacy – being *there*. The following example of the desire to use ‘live’ coverage of US President Bush’s visit to Riga, Latvia within a news bulletin on Sky demonstrates not only the control over news output by the Executive Producer, to the dismay of one of his presenters, but also confirms that this type of immediacy is sought after as a means of showing audiences that the news organisation is “‘live’ somewhere.” While the Executive Producer was eager to cover Bush’s visit, no Sky correspondents were there due to the elections that had recently concluded, leading most correspondents to take the weekend off. The journalist in charge of the Foreign Desk told the Executive Producer, “We’re not there at all. We have Moscow for Monday.” Then the Executive Producer asked, “What about FOX? Can we hop on ‘live’ with them? Any chance?” The journalist replied that yesterday FOX only offered photos but she could check again at lunchtime. While the Executive Producer admitted that Bush’s visit was “bound to be absolutely dull,” he also explained why he was so intent on covering the news item: “you want to do Bush just to show we’re ‘live’ somewhere.” In the end, ‘live’ coverage was available, immediacy was attained and Sky appeared to “be ‘live’ everywhere,” covering important events for their audience. However, in the gallery one of the presenters was not very happy that the Executive Producer chose to go ‘live’ with Bush not once but twice during the news bulletin. Trying to explain his decision, the Executive Producer said, “I thought you’d do a quip. It shows we’re ‘live’ somewhere.” The presenter responded by saying “We are supposed to be doing news.” To this remark the Executive Producer replied, “Yeah but we’re also doing television.” This example demonstrates the relationship between the Executive Producer and a presenter, indicating that journalists maintaining positions higher up in the hierarchy may be more likely to enforce conditions that enable the value of immediacy.

#### **4. Summary**

This chapter focused on the selection and assignment phase of news production. An examination of the roles and responsibilities of various journalists indicated that control rests largely with Executive Producers during this stage while base-level journalists who are assigned stories maintain varied levels of autonomy. General assignment reporters who have no particular specialization may offer story suggestions but generally do not

maintain much capacity to determine their own story assignments, nor even the desired treatment of the story. Beat journalists – such as Political Correspondents – have more ability to negotiate selection and assignment since they are generally removed from the physical newsroom to some degree and are in a better position to inform the newsroom of important stories. Finally, foreign correspondents usually negotiate selection and assignment via their ‘liaison officer’ and typically maintain the highest degree of autonomy over this phase of production. Nevertheless, the Executive Producer ultimately maintains control over selection and assignment for all categories of base-level journalists, which results in the coverage of some stories despite alternative preferences by the journalists themselves. Related to these decisions is the ability of journalists to investigate news items in the sense of ‘original’ or ‘enterprise’ journalism. However, as argued within previous research the routines of production severely restrict the time available for such ‘digging.’ Still, the online environment has the potential to offer more opportunities for such creativity. Furthermore, the electronic delivery of news agency feeds has, at least in a minor way, diffused the power over selection since all journalists now collectively monitor this information.

Decisions made within editorial meetings by Executive Producers were also assessed in relation to institution-driven news, the construction of themes and desire for a ‘personal element.’ Also, the subjective nature of some selection decisions is shown to be a result of the individual preferences of Executive Producers, which confirmed arguments within previous research. Consideration of the final line-up also occurs within these meetings but any decisions made at this stage of production may be altered over the course of the news day due to various intervening factors.

The final section of this chapter examined the news values that influence selection and assignment in relation to those news values identified as significant within past research. While many of the news values remain the same, technological developments have influenced their command over news production. The necessity of finding ‘good images’ is now aided by the great expansion of the information producing strata and the volume of UGC. However, the news value that is most crucial for news production today relates to the notion of immediacy. While the conception of immediacy as being first represents a long-standing news value and relates to the competitive atmosphere that surrounds

news production, the conception of immediacy as being 'live' has grown immensely over the past decade. As a result, news organisations seek 'live' coverage for many news items, not just those that fall under the category of breaking news. Journalists argue that this shift represents a new means of attempting to retain the loyalty of audiences, by showing them that the news organisation is *there*, on location, and can be counted on to offer the best coverage. Nevertheless, these values were not always consistently applied by journalists – particularly in relation to the triad of accuracy, being first and being 'live' – which implied that these values were either in a developmental phase or that top-down decisions were more frequently influencing the production process and thereby obscuring the values held by individual journalists. Furthermore, the specific platform – discrete news bulletin or 24 hour rolling news – also influenced rankings of importance by journalists.

The next chapter focuses on the final stages of news production: newsgathering, storywriting and transmission. Many new issues arise within these phases as a result of technological developments. The potential autonomy accessible by base-level journalists is much greater during the newsgathering phase, which is partly facilitated by the range of new technologies that enable journalists to access the expanded information producing strata and maintain greater control over their own resources. As well, technological developments that relate to the transmission process will be explored, particularly in relation to the high value placed on immediacy.



## **Chapter 7:**

### **Newsgathering, Storywriting and Transmission Phases**

The final phases of news production – newsgathering, storywriting and transmission – take place after journalists have been assigned stories during the selection and assignment phase and they begin to develop them. While some very limited forms of newsgathering occur during the intake phase, the bulk of newsgathering occurs after journalists have been assigned a story. It is at this time that journalists seek out sources to include and set up interviews. This process also usually involves leaving the newsroom in order to film certain sequences, gather sound bites, perform interviews and tape a ‘stand-up’ which involves the journalist speaking on-camera about elements of the story. The images and sound acquired during these routines may be captured by the journalist assigned to the story – in which case they are a Video Journalist – or by the camera person working alongside the journalist. All of this material is then brought back to the newsroom in order to write the story and edit the piece to fit the planned narrative. Once an editor or producer has approved the piece, the final ‘package’ is entered into the line-up and transmitted during the news bulletin or at some point within the 24 hour news cycle. As well, during the entire process journalists are likely to be in contact with their editor or producer, who will supervise the direction that the story is taking. Normally a discussion will also take place with an editor or producer in order to confirm the basic script before the final edit is performed.

However, the above description only represents an ideal-typical sequence of production. In practice, these three phases do not necessarily occur as distinct processes, but can occur simultaneously. In particular, the phases of newsgathering and storywriting tend to overlap. That is, journalists often have an idea as to what narrative they expect the story to follow while they are gathering their information, performing interviews and filming sequences. As such, journalists are able to film their ‘stand-up’ element among similar backgrounds or settings within which other elements of the story were filmed since they have already formulated their narrative and can therefore add their own elements.

Furthermore, the assumption underlying the above descriptions is that the journalist was only asked to produce a package, but journalists can also be asked to offer a 'live' introduction and/or conclusion to the broadcast of their package or cover the entire news item 'live,' without any production of a package. If this is the case, the journalist will perform some level of newsgathering and storywriting but on a much different scale. For instance, journalists are likely to have done some research, set up interviews and certainly discussed the nature of the interview questions and predicted answers with superiors<sup>67</sup> prior to broadcast. They will also have a tentative idea of the script and narrative that will take place with the presenter. Alternatively, this process can occur in a much more finalized fashion where the script is set and the journalist reads cue cards held up behind the camera. However, some elements of newsgathering, storywriting and transmission will overlap in this situation. As well, the role of the presenter within these phases of production largely centres around preparation of the script and perhaps some background research.

This chapter addresses both the role of control and autonomy within these final phases of news production as well as the impact of technological developments. It begins with an exploration of the constraining factors that exist within the various routines that base-level journalists follow during these stages of production. Next, the practice of selecting sources is considered, as well as the ability for journalists to challenge official sources and their attempts to maintain balance. Following this, new technologies available to journalists during the newsgathering stage are examined in relation to how they can aid research, locate sources and manage information. As well, resistance to new technologies by journalists and the technical skill set of new cohorts is relevant here. New technologies chosen by upper management – such as server technologies and non-linear editing suites – are examined next with respect to their impact on traditional workflow patterns and the final section focuses on the use of transmission technologies, their relationship to immediacy and journalists' criticisms of these developments.

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67 As well, they will have had contact with their editor or producer and will be in contact with either the producer, director, Executive Producer or a combination of supervisors prior to and during the broadcast via an ear piece.

## 1. Issues of Control

Control mechanisms described in this section relate to internal forms of control discussed within previous research.<sup>68</sup> Factors such as economic security, blacklists and punishment were not brought up within interviews, but potential loss of employment if journalists continually fail to conform was mentioned. Other implicit and explicit forms of control identified generally matched the mechanisms indicated within previous research, however there were also conditions under which control was not always particularly limiting. Within the realm of editorial control, specific contexts are considered in greater detail in order to compare constraining factors and experiences of autonomy. These contexts are: production of packages which involve some level of autonomy over source selection but inevitably include an underlying measure of control; 'live' coverage, where breaking news involves the least autonomy; professional journalist blogs which offer the greatest autonomy; and the roles of presenters wherein relative autonomy depends in part on seniority and experience. Control over language which involves either top-down or more general discussions depended on the context and developmental stage of the story. Finally, issues of top-down control are also discussed, ranging from the knowledge that superiors will closely watch particular types of coverage to the general absence of significant control by owners.

### 1.1 Implicit versus Explicit Control

Apart from control maintained over selection and assignment discussed in the previous chapter, control over the final phases of news production occurs in both implicit and explicit variants. As discussed in previous production studies, some control is maintained via osmosis. That is, working for an organisation naturally generates knowledge of the values and attitudes employed within that organisation in relation to news coverage and story treatment and this knowledge is internalized and eventually becomes habitual practice. As Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) explained, "after a while you become familiar with the organisation you're working for." Similarly, an Executive Producer at Sky explained how "you learn as a reporter and absorb" the values

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<sup>68</sup> The role of external pressure is considered within Chapter 8 in relation to governments, public relations professionals, lobbies and audiences.

of a news organisation. As well, a related factor highlighted by journalists involved media consumption and comparison practices that aid the internalization process: “journalists know from watching Sky what it looks like” (Executive Producer, Sky).

When journalists were asked about their experiences of internal pressures within interviews, most either related control with editorial processes (discussed in the next section) or referred to discussions that occurred following production of a news item. In this more explicit way, control is manifested through routinized practices such as the ‘post-mortem,’ or a meeting between base-level and (typically only) mid-level journalists that involves discussion of past output. Trina Maus (Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario) describes this process: “We have meetings with our news director where we’ll take our stories from the past and break it down, where you could have done better, where it was great, so all our on air have to have that.” Maus sees this process as pressure to improve her journalism: “So I wouldn’t say pressure to change but to make things better.” Assistant Editor Mick McGlinchey (BBC Scotland Online) explains his role in this process, highlighting the way in which his greater experience is employed when dealing with base-level journalists:

I’ve gone back to journalists who’ve done a story and said ‘Hang on a second, why did you do this story in the first place?’ Sometimes it’s not right. I’m not saying my judgment is perfect but, you know, with quite a few years of experience I know what’s going to be a good story in terms of what we should be doing.

Similarly, a mid-level journalist may say, “what the hell you missed this big story” (David Akin, Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV). In this way, journalists are generally aware of the boundaries set by their organisation and the general “rules of engagement” (Executive Producer, Sky). Of course, journalists also risk the danger of being “sacked” if they repeatedly fail to conform.

## **1.2 Editorial Control**

Another form of explicit control highlighted by journalists is manifested within editorial ‘guidance’ given during the editorial meeting (as mentioned in Chapter 6) and reinforced and elaborated during the post-assignment phases. This latter control is routinized within

the production process, situated at the following points: initial discussions between an editor or producer and a base-level journalist regarding the assigned story; to a limited degree during contact throughout the newsgathering and storywriting process; to a greater degree after the item is nearly complete and the journalist seeks approval before editing; and via discussions prior to 'live hits' or during the course of breaking news coverage. Therefore, while upper tier mid-level journalists initially regulate story treatment, editors and producers continue the process by "set[ting] the editorial tone" of particular news programmes (Sophia Hadzipetros, Managing Editor, CBC Toronto).

In line with previous research, the first instance of editorial control occurs within the editorial meeting where editorial judgments are transmitted along with preferred frames or news angles. Discussions during a meeting at Sky exemplify this process: politicians were viewed as 'Brownites' and the Executive Producer advised that this perspective should be considered the 'flavour' for coverage. Also, during discussions surrounding the massive collapse of the DUP – "the party has been basically eliminated from Northern Ireland politics" – the Executive Producer decided that the perspective for the story should be "unionism from the unionist perspective." Regarding coverage of VE day, the Executive Producer asked that coverage focus on "remembering the [Second World] war and justifications for it." Following this type of 'guidance,' editors and producers continue the editorial supervision process throughout the day. In response to interview questions about pressures, Alan Fryer (Investigative Reporter, CTV) associates the level of supervision throughout the day with micro-management when comparing his experience of a general assignment reporter to his current, more autonomous role as an investigative reporter for W5:

But that's the thing I like about it, once the story's signed off on, we're not unlike the CBC, we're not being micro-managed. You don't have a boss breathing down your neck everyday saying, 'Well now what's happening? Have you done this interview? Have you got this guy yet?' So they leave you alone with the understanding that you've got to deliver. And I kind of like that.

Any remaining forms of editorial control culminate in the final vetting of a news item before broadcast. In this way, "the person vetting the story always has to ensure that yes

it's balanced, does it cover all the bases, you told the story in an engaging enough way" (Sean Mallen, Parliamentary Correspondent, Global).

However, this control is not always necessarily limiting to the base-level journalist's autonomy. In fact, some mid-level journalists conceive of this process as more of a 'two-way' relationship. For instance, an Executive Producer at Sky explains that some element of independence for journalists is valuable: "What if they did just say what they were told all the time?" Even further, at least one base-level journalist considered his seniority to work to his advantage, enabling a greater level of autonomy. John Northcott (Video Journalist, CBC) considered himself an "old bastard" and said, "when they say, 'We should do this and we were thinking of signing off<sup>69</sup> like this,' I'll say, 'I don't think so.'" In a comparable manner, Foreign Assignment Editor Brien Christie (CBC) had trouble believing that senior, well-established journalists would be subject to the *normal* level of editorial control: "I just, I can't imagine my counterpart at the BBC telling Jeremy Bowen what to do, you know. I think that again the editor there would be making Jeremy's life as efficient and simple as possible so he can do a story." Similarly, well-established journalist Lindsey Hilsum (International Editor and China Correspondent, Channel 4) made it clear that she did not experience internal forms of pressure: "there's no pressure from my superiors. ... certainly in Channel 4 News, do I have pressure from my superiors? No."

To explore editorial control further, four specific types of news production are examined: packages, lives, breaking news and blogging. As well, the special case of presenters is considered, elaborating on a discussion from Chapter 6.

### *Packages*

When producing a package, initial discussions will occur with a journalist's editor or producer before they begin the newsgathering and storywriting process. Both resources and time factor into these discussions:

It depends, it depends what the story is. Because an uncontroversial story you'll have a discussion – well if it's a package you'll have a discussion with the

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69 Signing off refers to the concluding remarks of a package.

programme editor or the item producer at the beginning of the day. And you'd discuss what you would want to put in that package. Because it's always a balance between the ideal world and the resources and the time. (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland)

Editorial comments made within these discussions, along with story treatment and source 'guidance' offered during story assignment, help direct the consequent newsgathering and storywriting. Speaking about source 'guidance,' John Northcott (Video Journalist, CBC) describes how the relationship is generally "6 of one, half a dozen of the other ... [wherein] I get to kind of choose the approach and I get to choose a lot of the characters." For instance, Northcott describes an element of autonomy within the newsgathering process for coverage of a story about AIDS. In the midst of meeting a source for an interview – which was a result of previous discussions with supervisors – other people could also be interviewed on the spot:

So I phone him and say I'll be there at 11. I meet another guy and I interview him, meet people who were there to look at the clothes and get their stories. And I get pictures, all that. So that was fun and I got a kick out of using my brain and yeah they were happy with the story. So, you know, there you go.

Mentioning that Northcott's supervisors "were happy with the story" reveals their underlying control. After suggesting that he can select many of the characters for his story, Northcott also discusses how his supervisors do maintain some control over this process and again refers to their happiness:

Although they say, 'We'd like a bit of X, we'd like to hear from X,' they may not want a specific but they want an element: 'I want to hear from the government on that.' Ok, well alright. The minister's not available but I got his assistant. So when I'm doing my stand-up or my bridge then I can include that information, blah blah blah. So then they're happy. And if I can get the minister, great, I'll go get the minister.

As well, journalists also ensure that their final plan for the story is approved before they edit the package. Trina Maus (Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario) describes this process: "get a producer to check it over, make sure it's good, go into editing." For foreign correspondents who are located much further away from the newsroom, "The

Programme Editor watches it and if doesn't like it gets him to redo it" (Ben Rayner, Editor, ITV) or it is reedited in the newsroom.

### *Lives*

When news items contain 'live hits' – either as an introduction and/or conclusion to a package or as an entirely 'live' piece – the mid-level journalists have much less control. Through an ear piece, the Executive Producer will speak to the reporter on location before the 'live': "you talk through to the correspondent if you can which areas you're going to talk about" (Kevin Backhurst, Controller, BBC News 24). An Executive Producer at Sky explained how he has arguments over how the event should be presented but when journalists are on 'live' they can "say what [they] want" since "you can't gag [them]." Observations within Sky's gallery reveal how the Executive Producer determines what order the reporter's questions should take. The reporter also asked, "How do you want to wrap it up?" As such the Executive Producer appears to have the final say on what types of questions should be asked and their order, but the reporter can also question those decisions and, as suggested above, defy the 'guidance' offered. Trust also factors into this relationship: "So if you're trusted quite a lot then ... If they know you have good editorial judgment they might talk through, they might say, you know, 'We'll run the pack and then we're gonna talk off the back of it' and then just let you get on with it" (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland).

Breaking news is also often covered 'live,' but within this situation the base-level journalist maintains the least autonomy. They must rely on mid-level journalists extensively since there is so little time:

So you're heavily dependent in that kind of situation on the item producer back at base to put together – and there'll be a very heavy discussion about – they'll say, 'I see it like this' and you can have 5 seconds on this material and 3 seconds of this and you need to write that amount of time and you just have to trust their judgment 'cause you haven't got time and you'll just knock out a script very quickly. (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland)

The final section of this chapter returns to concerns with time constraints and the rolling impact on newsgathering during coverage of breaking news.

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*Blogging*

Within the online medium, journalists are also increasingly asked to produce news in the form of blogs.<sup>70</sup> This relatively new outlet appears to offer the greatest level of autonomy for some journalists. David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) describes how little editorial control exists when he produces a blog for his organisation's website and also links this to the notion of trust:

*Akin:* So blogging for us – we sort of figured out a system to say this superstructure sort of says to me the reporter, 'Alright we trust you, go ahead and post.' So I post and there's nobody in-between me and the stuff that goes up. The stuff that goes up gets simultaneously emailed to Bob [Bureau Chief Robert Fife] for instance, he'll get a copy of whatever I post, others in our organisation in Toronto that work with Mark [Sikstrom] and our online team will see it and if there's something that is not appropriate for a CTV reporter to be posting presumably they'd modify it or take steps.

*Interviewer:* Has that happened?

*Akin:* No.

However, even if a journalist was interested in blogging for their news organisation, they still have to contend with their superiors for the chance to do so. For instance, Trina Maus (Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario) says, "We're not allowed blogs as on air people." Asking for a reason, she explained it had to do with "Image. They are very eager to control our image." Alan Fryer (Investigative Reporter, CTV) found the same perspective among his superiors: "Our supervisors don't like blogs. Which is kind of amazing to me but they don't like blogs." After mentioning that a previous interview with Fryer's superior, Mark Sikstrom (Executive Producer, CTV Online), suggested this was the case, Fryer explained that the decision is made by those even more senior than Sikstrom. Once again, the notion of greater autonomy is mentioned:

Mark does like them but his boss – he's just toeing the company line. The reason they don't like them I think essentially is that they're unpredictable and, you know, networks like ours are always concerned about not getting sued. And, you know, you're writing away freely on a blog, even smart and usually cautious people can say things that can come back to bite them. I mean we've seen tons of examples of that right. You know, mostly from

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70 These blogs are either written by a group of journalists or a single journalist.

political people who have blogs that post something and then the next day it's in the papers and two days later they're fired or sued or both. So I think that's why networks don't like them.

However, news organisations do realize that blogs provide yet another platform through which online audiences can grow. Peter Kent (Deputy Editor, Global) explains: "I think a lot of broadcasters and newspapers have things like blog sites, the interactive corners of the site basically because they want to be multifaceted, you know, they want to have a whole bunch of reasons to draw people to that site." While David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) suspected that blogging does not earn his organisation extra money, he was convinced that "no organisation would put in the publishing software unless they thought there was some benefit commercially." While this form of production was available in both countries in the sample, when comparing Canadian professional journalist blogs with their UK counterparts it was clear that Canadian news organisations had not yet expanded to the same degree.

### *Presenters*

Presenters represent a unique category of base-level journalists since they are usually not directly responsible for news items. Instead, they largely narrate the news bulletin, perform interviews with guests and occasionally add particular elements to pre-packaged news items. Depending on a presenter's experience and seniority, they maintain a varying degree of control and input over the script. Established presenters – like Channel 4's Jon Snow, etc. – will play a large role in this process. On the other hand, some presenters will read a script on air that is prepared for them by writers and vetted by the show's producer. Normally presenters at least look over the script however even this is not always possible, as Heather Hiscox (Presenter, CBC) explains:

they're telling you you've got this guest upstairs or coming up we'll do this. It's hard to look ahead so you really do have to trust. You know sometimes I'm reading copy cold which I haven't had even a chance to look at. That's obviously not desirable ... I have a team of writer's for the news portion of it and hopefully they're, they're paying attention.

Presenters also wear an ear piece (or IFB<sup>71</sup>), through which producers or directors can speak to them. Observations in the gallery at CTV's Ottawa Bureau demonstrated how the producer and presenter discuss the topic of questions to be asked and the producer reminds the presenter about the line of questioning during the interview. For example, during an interview with Canadian Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion, the producer told the presenter, "You only have a little bit of time left for one question: French separation." While Dion continues to speak, the producer says again that there is only a short period of time left. The planned line of questioning is altered depending upon the responses received:

Yeah today was a good example. Our second question was going to be what the big topic of the election campaign would be so we thought ok if [Dion] says Afghanistan, this'll be our line of questioning, if he says environment this'll be our line. So he said a lot of things so Craig picked up on environment and went with those lines. So after environment we had economic questions in there and then we got to Afghanistan where if he had chosen to go with Afghanistan we wouldn't have had the economy till later. (Producer, CTV Ottawa)

The guests that are selected for presenters to interview can also be directed largely by the Executive Producer. For instance, during the course of a news day at Sky, the first editorial meeting reveals the Executive Producer's preference for guests:

Get as many politicians on as possible. New Labour, new Lib Dem,<sup>72</sup> new Tory on. The new guys in Commons. I know 3 new Tories, can't help you with Lib Dem. It is all new to them, being on telly is kinda fun. Try for one new one for each [party]. ... We want any angle we can think of on pols [politicians] to get them in. Even new, young Tories.

Later on in the newsroom the Executive Producer is asked if he is "interested enough in Northern Ireland guests." "Yeah, try to get some," is the reply. Then, at the final meeting before the evening bulletins, the Executive Producer asks about guests and is told that there are lots of politicians ready but "no Lib Dem." He then asks about Northern Ireland guests, to which he is told there is "no Northern Ireland – rang them all."

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71 IFB stands for Interruptible Feed-Back.

72 Referring to the UK Liberal Democrats Party.

### 1.3 Language

Issues surrounding language have long been a point of contention within the production of news due to the meaning attributed to the use of specific words and the subsequent interpretation by the audience. As such, news organisations attempt to ensure consistency across all of their news programmes. As Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC) explains, “The last thing we really want is inconsistency where one of our programs would be saying X and another would be saying Y.” Therefore, when organisational-level decisions regarding language must be made, discussions take place between top-level and mid-level journalists. Burman describes this process: “What we find ourselves doing is not necessarily the moment something happens but really after a period of hours or a period of days, if there is reason for us to, you know, come together and sort out exactly what terminology should we use, what label should we use, what words should we use, then we do that.” Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) refers to this process at the BBC in relation to the contested use of the word terrorism: “in the end someone in the BBC, the Governors or whatever will have to say this is our accepted views of the word terrorism or terrorists or whatever.”

To Richard Stursberg (Executive Vice-President, CBC), the issue of terrorism has “become a gigantic issue”: “When does one call somebody a terrorist and when an act of terror? It has become a proxy for conversations about bias in terms of coverage.” The BBC’s general policy involves “try[ing] to avoid using the term terrorism” since “It’s easier to use an ‘act of terrorism’” (Paul Adams, Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24). Still, Adams considers terrorism to be “a very narrow and rather unproductive term.” In practice decisions regarding language can cause a stir within the newsroom. In June 2006 Canadian journalists suddenly had to react to the first arrests allegedly related to terrorism in Canada. Paul Hambleton (Executive Producer, CBC) describes the response at CBC: “so are these people terrorists – and oh my god you’re jumping through hoops.” In the end, “we allowed ourselves to say that they are arrested on charges of terrorism” (Hambleton). The term ‘alleged’ inevitably operates to distance the news organisation from information that has not yet been confirmed: “You have to be very careful what you say just off the cuff by a mistake but I think, I’ve never had any difficulty but you do have to be very cognizant of the fact that everything is alleged” (Heather Hiscox, Presenter,

CBC). In the same way, journalists must be careful when adopting terms and phrases used by political figures. For instance, “If you say ‘war on terror’ you are adopting Bush’s language. You say ‘what Bush calls the war on terror’ or ‘what President Bush dubbed the war on terror’” (Ben Rayner, Editor, ITV). Even language employed by producers when writing headlines is of relevance when it sets the tone for a news item. During observations at Sky, the Executive Producer used the words ‘week in terror’ for a news item meant to illustrate the timeline of violence in Iraq. However, he suddenly recognised his role in setting the tone for the story and said, “You tend to use formulas for describing things. There are some language rules and you try to be agnostic and neutral.”

Conflict reporting is more apt than most areas of news coverage to be riddled with language issues: “We’re very, very careful in terms of conflict and, you know, in all areas of what we do but in terms of conflict coverage we have to be really careful. ... there’s a whole other language that we have to use when we’re talking about conflict” (Mick McGlinchey, Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online). Alan Fryer (Investigative Reporter, CTV) considers a few examples of disputed terms: “The Palestinians call it occupied land, the Israelis call it disputed territories. Some people call suicide bombers terrorists, others call them insurgents, all of the networks now have decided collectively to call what’s going on in Iraq a civil war – oh boy, you know, what a revelation.” Over time, some of these terms are argued to have become devoid of meaning altogether: “insurgent is another word that’s just lost its meaning” (Paul Hambleton, Executive Producer, CBC). As well, meaning can shift over time, as seen within this example relating to the Northern Ireland conflict: “The Protestant community called it Londonderry and the Catholics called it Derry. So you keep switching back and forth. You try to be sensitive. Public opinion shifts. What used to be found offensive isn’t any more” (Ben Rayner, Editor, ITV). Nonetheless, effective communication is critical in order for a news organisation to remain consistent over the use of terms. Referring to the 2006 Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) considers the effect of the “big debate” over the terms ‘captured’ or ‘kidnapped’: “I was quite interested to see that after a few days someone said we should not be using kidnapped. I noticed that even after, the ten o’clock news continued to use that a few days after ... And the reason for that is lack of communication.”

A further example of language issues, unrelated to conflict coverage, demonstrates the nature of political correctness. In the following situation, journalists defied organisational decisions regarding the use of the term 'fisher,' which inevitably led to the retraction of the guideline:

There's hunters and there's fishers, right. And there was a time a few years ago where it was decided that we would say 'fisher' instead of 'fisherman' right. And that one was just unbelievable and I was on the East Coast when that was going on so like everybody out there just thought it was the most ridiculous thing in the world and in fact every bureau I was in. And we defied it because you can't hold your head up on the street and say 'fisher' 'cause all the women say 'fisherman,' everybody says 'fisherman.' So finally that got undone. (Paul Hambleton, Executive Producer, CBC)

Overall, responses to interview questions regarding pressure over language issues demonstrated that control is either explicitly directed from the top-level and becomes a working policy or is the outcome of discussions that involve a range of journalists. The latter process tends to occur when an issue must be resolved immediately, for instance in the case of breaking news coverage.

#### **1.4 Top-Down Control**

While control over newsgathering, storywriting and transmission within this section has largely concentrated on the relationship between mid-level journalists and base-level journalists – with the exception of policy directives over language issues – there remains the issue of control directed from the top-level of a news organisation. Since the hierarchical structure contains two tiers within the top-level, three variants of control are discussed here: influence of lower tier top-level journalists over news coverage; the control relationship between the bottom and upper tier of this top-level; and finally the potential control over production instigated by the upper tier. The first two variants are discussed in relation to examples from CBC while the last considers both Sky and ITV.

The first example of control simply relates to the awareness that journalists from the top-level will be 'watching' particular news coverage, which may influence news production by both mid- and base-level journalists. For example, during an editorial meeting at the CBC, a lower tier top-level journalist – Editor in Chief, Tony Burman – was mentioned in

relation to coverage of the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War. It was clear that the concerns of Burman are passed on to journalists via this forum. At this point, the issue of whether Israel was 'victorious' within the conflict was used somewhat sarcastically to emphasize the point that CBC's news coverage should not contain any element that may convey the notion that one 'side' was more successful than the other:

*Speaker 1:* Terry stopped short of declaring victory. I read the script. I noticed. I read the early script. We had a discussion at the 12 o'clock meeting and Tony [Burman] is concerned that we write carefully around that one. [some laughter] Because the volume of mail that he gets from both sides of this equation.

*Speaker 2:* I wouldn't have said that Israel is victorious here.

*Speaker 1:* No I'm joking but I'm also raising it because it's something that Tony will be watching closely.

*Speaker 3:* As will many others.

*Speaker 1:* Well we already had – it's fine. (Editorial Meeting, CBC)

Based on this interaction it is clear that contested areas of news coverage are more closely monitored by upper management. On the other hand, the Editor in Chief has a superior in the upper tier of the top-level to whom he reports to. In this case it is CBC's Executive Vice-President, Richard Stursberg. The relationship between the two tiers is described by Stursberg:

Now the Editor in Chief reports to me, he works for me. Our relationship is not unlike the relationship with the publisher of a newspaper and the editor. Which is – I'll express views to him on the news and I'll say, 'Tony, Tony, god what was that piece of shit? Don't you think you should do X, Y, and Z?' Sometimes he will agree with me, sometimes he will disagree with me. If he agrees with me there's no problem. If he disagrees with me then – and if I really feel strongly about it, and if he were to feel strongly about it and I were to instruct him that he must cover that story in such and such a way or do such and such a thing, then he would have to decide whether, you know, if he was comfortable carrying on like that. And he might tell me to piss off. And then I might fire him. Or he might quit.

These revealing comments demonstrate that the ultimate authority lies with the upper-most tier of the organisation. However, Stursberg is also well aware of the consequences that this type of struggle would entail. He goes on to reveal how such interactions would lead to public exposure of his role within the CBC, which in effect could lead to a crisis of credibility:

So we would both know if we had that kind of a disagreement that it would be a gigantic public event, right. Gigantic. Because then the issue would revolve around the independence of the news in terms of its neutrality, fairness and integrity. People would say, 'Well wait a minute now this is supposed to be the Editor in Chief, he's supposed to be in charge of making those sorts of decisions. So if Richard is instructing the editor then to what extent is it actually independent?' So that's the whole kind of complex of – so it turns into a very interesting, complicated relationship.

One other area wherein Stursberg maintains control revolves around financial decisions: "at the same time I decide how much money he spends. If I say, 'Well, you know, don't spend the money over there, spend the money over here.' Which is perfectly legitimate for my job."

Furthermore, previous production studies noted how the owners of a news organisation may also impose direct control over some aspects of coverage through activities such as 'sending memos.' In contemplating Rupert Murdoch's role as owner of Sky an Executive Producer suggests that there is in fact a lack of control in this regard. He says, "Murdoch hasn't called. Ten thousand people watch Sky. It is not a way to communicate with Brits. Murdoch doesn't intervene or drive it." The only instance he recalled was when there was a "charity walk in the North Pole and he suggested it to the planners." The Executive Producer explains that Murdoch has "few very strong interests" and so while he "wouldn't like an active campaign against the Iraq war," Sky would not take such a stance since "that's not the role of journalism anyway." Similarly, Ben Rayner (Editor, ITV) declared that his network does not send memos in an attempt to influence news production: "It is an independent company. They [upper management] might say it is a really great story. But there is not pressure from above."

## **2. Selecting Sources, Challenging Officials and Maintaining Balance**

News coverage is highly dependent upon sources and therefore much of the newsgathering process involves the pursuit of sources that are either 'primary actors' within the story, secondary actors who are involved or members of the public who have opinions to share, experts who can offer context and analysis and any other source that might be required in the attempt to achieve balance. However, achieving balance

complicates the practice of locating, gaining access to and interviewing sources. As well, professionalized norms traditionally embrace a desire to retain objectivity, yet many journalists concede that such goals are unfeasible.

The first sources pursued are the “primary actors in this little drama that may have some input” (David Akin, Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV). However, if this approach is unsuccessful or limited to very few primary actors, ‘secondary sources’ are targeted. Akin describes how in some cases these sources act as proxies, representing an element of the story that was impractical or impossible to attain. On some occasions, Muslim organisations had inevitably become proxies for terrorists:

Muslim organisations often stand in on news stories as actual proxies for the actual terrorists themselves just because the terrorists happen to be Muslim as well. So we can’t interview the terrorists, and what’s the next best thing? Interview people of their same faith because we believe that they’ll have some sort of insight into terrorists. (Akin)

After primary actors and secondary proxy sources have been exhausted, journalists seek out alternative secondary sources that are unrelated to the story but can provide further information. As Akin explains, “that’s when we get down to academics who’ve written a book 5 years ago [who will] stand in in a news story to explain something because we were unable to find someone closer to the centre of that actual event that we’re discussing.” Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) explains how some secondary sources are likely to be chosen as a result of a journalist’s prior contact and relationship with the source. However, this prior knowledge of the source tends to enable assumptions regarding the type of information that will be provided:

Well you still have your own, everyone has their own favourite people to talk to but, you know, half of having these is knowing the track record and knowing that ... so and so says such and such about this subject so they’ll have views on that. You call people because you sort of have some assumptions about what it is that they’re going to say. (Adams)

Similarly, during an editorial meeting at Sky, a potential guest is suggested to the Executive Producer based on the fact that Sky had “done her before.” For some journalists the process of newsgathering revolves around a ‘contacts file’ filled with

people “you can count on for phone interviews” (Foreign Desk, Sky). In this way, “the availability of guests is completely dependent upon who picks up the phone when the news team call” (Executive Producer, Sky). For Parliamentary Correspondent Sean Mallen (Global), “I’ll know off the top of my head that I’ll need to call this group or that group” simply because he “know[s] a lot of the players” involved in his beat. For Adams the process is similar in that “most of the people I call will be people who because of positions they’ve occupied have expertise in” a particular subject, suggesting that seeking out new information from a variety of sources is not high on his agenda. However, this is a result of the type of work Adams is asked to perform, which “is simply to supplement stuff that we get from abroad with somehow kind of an overview, maybe the international perspective on a story ... doing a bit of analysis ... So you have your correspondent in the field but then you have me coming along, sitting on the set.” Nevertheless, many of these accounts reflect the relationships described in previous research regarding journalists and their sources.

For beat reporters, like Parliamentary Correspondent Sean Mallen (Global), newsgathering revolves around watching to “see if anything else develops, see if there’s any surprises in terms of ministerial statements, whether they’re gonna vote themselves a pay raise which is the big issue at the moment.” In this sense, some journalists become reliant on pre-packaged information from official sources, which was an issue identified within previous research. As well, since official sources are often the ‘primary actors’ within such stories, their lack of availability can be detrimental to news production. For instance, “on a Saturday morning it is hard to get someone from the Israeli cabinet” (Executive Producer, Sky). Another Political Correspondent, David Akin (CTV) explains how official sources can also be uncooperative and suggests a hierarchy within the potential sources that a journalist can seek out:

They’ll run and hide coming out of the Commons, we can’t scrum them, they make themselves inaccessible, no comment. And when that happens for TV journalists particularly that really shuts the story down because it removes, makes it less interesting because a key primary actor is not going to be in the story and now we’re just left with opposition politicians or interest groups or academics, going down the list. Even worse other journalists.

Official sources effectively act as gatekeepers. In this way, they can restrict access that was previously available to journalists, particularly when they are sources of high stature, like the Prime Minister.<sup>73</sup> An increasingly competitive news marketplace has also complicated matters, with gatekeepers considering bloggers as potential candidates. This may impinge upon the number of seats, for instance, on Air Force One that are allotted to professional journalists. In these cases gatekeepers must decide how they “define who’s a journalist” (Akin).

Responding to interview questions regarding the long-standing criticism that news output is overly reliant on official sources, journalists pointed out that they are simply necessary for coverage of particular news items. Sean O’Shea (Investigative Reporter, Global) argues that “you’re always going to call the hospital to confirm whether somebody has died as a result of malpractice, you’re still going to get confirmations of that sort of thing.” Nevertheless, many journalists pointed out that official sources should be challenged and it is necessary to consider differing opinions. As Trina Maus (Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario) says, “that’s our job. ... not to be a sounding board for politicians. We’re not here to present the politicians’ message.” Therefore, in response to interview questions about maintaining balance, journalists tended to argue that “you have to get a variety of voices to deal with any story” (Sean Mallen, Parliamentary Correspondent, Global). However, Maus admits that “unfortunately because of timing or laziness sometimes that’s not happening ... it’s not always necessarily done properly.” Maus goes on to describe how this can be avoided, particularly via the incorporation of members of the public, in order to ensure that a range of angles to the story are reported. Similarly, David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) argues that journalism should examine issues in depth. If information from official sources is accepted at face value, news begins to resemble stenography. Akin explains this point in relation to a story he was covering

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73 David Akin (Political Correspondent, CTV) offers an example related to coverage of the Canadian Prime Minister. Whereas journalists would traditionally travel with the Prime Minister on board his plane, Akin highlights the economic consequences if this practice would be discontinued:

“we’ve heard rumours that the [Canadian] Prime Minister in the next election here will not have reporters accompanying him on his plane, which is pretty standard practice, right – plane leaves with the PM, journalists are on board. He doesn’t want journalists on board so we’d be forced to somehow keep up with him – ‘cause I mean he’s literally flying place to place, dropping in, announcement, get on a plane, fly. It’s very hard to do that commercially and way too expensive to hire your own aircraft and just follow him around.”

stemming from a government announcement regarding a financial investment into Ethanol:

So wow so people driving around, less greenhouse gas in the air and of course the reporters say, 'Let's look at the whole equation,' because to produce ethanol you've got to grow a lot of grain, that produces a lot of greenhouse gases and the trade-off, well – there really isn't one. So maybe this 500 million dollars the government's spending is – well I'm not the one who should say that, there'll be environmentalists who will say that but the job for reporters is to say let's have a discussion about this, is this achieving the goals that the policy makers wanted to achieve. Some say no, some say yes. ... So anyway that's I think helpful reporting as opposed to stenography – 'The government's now planning this, here's what's going on and so on so the minister said' – which is a lot of reporting that used to occur.

While journalists are expected to consider the credibility of the information they are receiving from all sources, official sources and information from the public relations industry appears likely to be laden with a desire to promote particular views to the detriment of others. Journalists argued that this bias is assumed, particularly when it is coming from the public relations industry. This is especially important considering the rise of the public relations industry and the expanding use of spin tactics that accompanies this growth. Alan Fryer (Investigative Reporter, CTV) explains how the rise of sophisticated spin is partly a result of former journalists turning to positions within the public relations industry. Consequently, the job of the journalist has become more challenging, especially for the younger generations who may not be as spin savvy:

the people we report on have become a lot more sophisticated because a lot of us have gone over to the other side and they're teaching politicians and business people and whatever how to deal with assholes like me, right, so they understand the medium and that's where you have, you know, the spin. So I mean cutting through the bullshit that you get from government bureaucrats or politicians or business people or whatever, that's a huge challenge now. And I'm, I'm not sure a lot of the younger people coming into the business today realize that they're being spun to the extent they are because a lot of people who are doing the spinning now, former journalists, are a lot more sophisticated than the kids coming into the business.

With such a large amount of material being sent to journalists, they may be tempted to rely on the information as opposed to discovering things on their own: "it's so tempting,

because there's so much stuff coming in you can just sit and read stuff" (Paul Adams, Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24).

Despite these temptations, journalists must also consider organisational desires to maintain an image of objectivity, fairness and balance. As Richard Stursberg (Executive Vice-President, CBC) says, "We are widely preoccupied by balance and fairness." Similarly, Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) argues, "[W]e could be at that one all day – objectivity, balance, fairness." However, achieving these standards is difficult: "the ability to be perfectly accurate or credible or balanced or fair in a totally unscripted spontaneous, in many cases, emotional setting I mean requires experience and requires a lot of thought and care" (Tony Burman, Editor in Chief, CBC). In some cases, presenters are able to occupy another viewpoint in order to try to represent the range of voices connected with a particular news item: "[if you] only have one side of the argument, then the role of devil's advocate is played by the presenter to achieve objectivity" (Executive Producer, Sky). Moreover, in line with conclusions by academics within previous research, many journalists claim "there's no such thing" as objectivity (David Akin, Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV). As Alan Fryer (Investigative Reporter, CTV) puts it, "if anybody stands up and tells you, 'I'm perfectly objective' they're full of shit." The reason for this is that "journalists have opinions and journalists are biased and they look at things in a biased way" (Fryer). Despite this, "The good ones will try to get through that and still at the end of the day present a balanced report" (Fryer).

Still, journalists are well aware of the professionalized norms they work under. As Trina Maus (Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario) explained, "I can't, *I can't have an opinion*. I'm not allowed to have an opinion on anything. So I mean I can but I can't voice it." However, she goes on to suggest that perspectives can be incorporated into the news item through the use of a member of the public: "And that's why I find somebody to tell the story and that's your opinions." Furthermore, she also provided an example wherein she was able to get her point across despite pressures to remain neutral. In this situation, Maus describes how actions taken by the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) to taser a 'vicious dog' appeared to be unfounded, which led her to position herself physically close to and pet the dog during the section of the story where she performs a 'bridge,' connecting parts of the story together:

I did a story where the OPP went in to a house where a guy was moving, it was just a landlord dispute. The guy was moving, he hadn't moved out fast enough, he moved his Rottweiler last. So what did the OPP do? Instead of waiting for animal control, there was no immediate concern for them to go into that home, they went in and tasered the dog twice. Their official statement was: 'We heard the dog growling, we did not know if the owner was in there and when we walked in she was poised to attack, she's a vicious dog.' The police say she's a vicious dog, here's my bridge: 'This is Misty, [petting dog, kneeling beside it] the dog in question the police tasered.' I didn't say anything, but I injected a little bias in there. I didn't have to say anything, it was in the bridge. I didn't say anything. And there was an outpouring from the public, I think we must have, I think we had to deal with at least 50 emails locally and then another 50 nationally because the story went national about this dog tasered thing. People were very upset. She wasn't mean, she wasn't mean. The cops were in the wrong but how do I tell the story? I can't go in and say the cops are wrong so that's what I did.

This example demonstrates that journalists will inevitably find themselves in situations where they will struggle to exclude their own opinions. Alternatively, journalists are also confronted with circumstances where a perspective is available for inclusion into a news item but it might represent such a minority that it is unrealistic to incorporate it. The following example involving a protester on Canada's Parliament Hill demonstrates this dilemma, particularly when no oppositional protesters are available:

It's like when we had President Karzai of Afghanistan come to Parliament Hill, he gave a speech to the House of Commons and there was one protester. And a very noisy one. And then there was no other pro or for. There's one protester. So on our news coverage of that event, do we give that one protester some time? Do we allocate some time and how much time? One third of the news item? (David Akin, Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV)

Overall, it was clear that journalists normally strive to achieve balance despite the constraints imposed by the use of official sources. Nevertheless, journalists are not free of their own opinions and on occasion they may intentionally produce a news item in a way that reveals which particular angle they believe is most important to the story.

### **3. New Media and Newsgathering**

Some material and tools that were traditionally widespread within newsrooms have now disappeared. For instance, manual typewriters and 'sheets of carbon paper' are now

uncommon. Instead, what is readily noticeable are the computers that line the desks and of course the internet connection. While the telephone may be considered by some as “still the most important thing” (David Akin, Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV), mobile phones and BlackBerrys also enable new functions for journalists out in the field while email and professional journalist blogs have amplified newsgathering opportunities. This section considers the impact of new media on the newsgathering process, highlighting enhanced research capabilities, the transformative means of accessing sources and improved information management strategies. The concluding section discusses the resistance by some journalists towards new technologies and the propensity for new cohorts of journalists to be better equipped with a technical skill set.

### **3.1 Research**

Interview questions relating to the internet’s ability to aid searches led to journalists praising the development of the internet as a ‘revolution.’ As Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) says, “research is one of the areas that’s been revolutionized. The internet is such a fantastic tool for research.” As such, “you would expect every producer to use the internet as a research tool” (Backhurst) since it is clearly “an incredibly powerful tool” (Ben Rayner, Editor, ITV). Others argue that the internet has become “indispensable now – as a journalist you can’t even imagine doing your job without it frankly” (Alan Fryer, Investigative Reporter, CTV). The reasons for these high accolades are two-fold: the great quantity and variety of information available and the speed at which it can be accessed.

Among the information that is increasingly available is government documents. David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) stresses this point: “it’s important for again retrieval of primary sources, government reports, you know, UK government, Canadian government, US government is tremendous in terms of the way they’ve moved their delivery of government documents, releases, background information online.” Similarly, Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) tends to use the internet “for access to a lot of sites that I routinely need to look at like the Ministry of Defence, Number 10, or the UN.” Since governments also tend to open access to every information request online, David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) considers the internet “a great treasure trove for a smart journalist who has a system to collect or survey this

information, pick through and get some stuff.” Perhaps the enhanced research capabilities might allow journalists to “penetrate their sources’ informational worlds” (Ericson 1998: 1) – a notion that was deemed rarely possible within previous research due to a lack of journalistic resources.

Importantly, journalists can now access this information much faster due to these altered systems of information provision. As such, in the past it “could take you weeks on the phone trying to dig out and now, you know, with an hour and a few clicks of the mouse you’ve got all this stuff” (Alan Fryer, Investigative Reporter, CTV). Even access to information within newspapers took much longer in the past: “before we used to have to cut into the library and you’d have to phone up and ask for newspaper cuttings on a particular story or whatever and, you know, that doesn’t exist anymore now because everything is stored electronically” (Kevin Backhurst, Controller, BBC News 24). Some journalists are still shocked at the way in which the process of newsgathering has been sped up by these developments: “I still sometimes pinch myself at the speed at which you’re able to find out information, get pictures of a crash, or locate particular individuals” (Paul Adams, Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24). Sean O’Shea (Investigative Reporter, Global) points out that coverage of breaking news could certainly be aided by bloggers acting as citizen journalists due to the speed at which they can publish material: “for somebody covering a breaking story, a blogger can put information up on a website a lot faster than a news organisation could in some cases.”

The ease with which information can be accessed even leads to last minute searches within the gallery while the news is on air. For example, in Sky’s gallery the Executive Producer was intermittently looking things up on *Google* – like the capital of Latvia and the UUP. The internet is also beneficial to journalists out in the field since “cut and pasted versions of the wire stories” (O’Shea) and press releases can be sent over BlackBerrys. For example, “let’s say there’s an arrest made in a crime and a police press release could be transmitted out to the reporter, he or she’s got that access to that information quickly and can cobble together some information in addition to their own facts” (O’Shea). This development is particularly useful for foreign correspondents who work in relatively isolated locations, as O’Shea explains: “I remember in El Salvador wherever where you’re

working in a location that's very isolated, right – you're there on the ground but you can only see one small component of the story, you don't know the big picture."

In general, blogs represent a new element that journalists are increasingly accessing during their newsgathering routines, either intentionally or as a consequence of a *Google* search. Chapter 5 set out the concerns of many journalists regarding credibility, which is a significant deterrent to their incorporation into production practices. Nevertheless, even the journalist who shunned blogs the most – considering their use "like drinking bath water" – acknowledged the potential for blogs within foreign news coverage. Considering the complexity of the conflict in Iraq, Mark Sikstrom (Executive Producer, CTV Online) suggested that blogs can be valuable since they represent perspectives that differ from mainstream media coverage:

You know what, I do think that the more viewpoints and opinions that you can harness in a complex – take Iraq, right ... All the nuances there, the history of it, the impact it has on people, where it's likely to go, is there value in a journalism that's a grassroots, that springs up – there's a couple of Iraqis who have been notorious bloggers, made a name for themselves. Why? Because they're revealing a part of the story that Western media can't tell or hasn't told. So yeah there's value in that.

As Sikstrom suggests, regions of the world that are difficult to access or fraught with conflict are more likely to benefit from this development since journalism is then no longer as constrained by the handful of news agencies deemed to be providing a foundation for this area of coverage within previous research. For instance, Mariita Eager (Editor, BBC) pointed out that correspondents in Iran have difficulty moving around which is why "they use a lot of blogs and people are logging into blogs and it's a way of accessing what's going on on the ground." As such, the blogosphere is increasingly playing a role in newsgathering: "If we were doing a story on Iran today, I would get, somebody up here [in the UGC Hub] or downstairs in the newsroom, just kind of contact the editor of *Global Voices*<sup>74</sup> or something like that, have a chat to him. And download some of the blogs and what they were saying and all of that sort of stuff" (Eager). Also involved in the

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74 *Global Voices Online* (<http://www.globalvoicesonline.org/>) is a non-profit global citizens' media project that aggregates and translates blogs from around the world and organises them by country and by topic.

interview with Eager was Nicola Green, the BBC's UGC Hub Producer, who went on to point out how news can be improved in this way: "And that's a very good example, Iran actually, is where user generated content can really enhance our news."

Furthermore, blogging by professional journalists for their news organisations also represents an increasingly common practice. What is significant here is the capacity for members of the public to comment on these blogs and therefore aid the newsgathering process. As a beat reporter, David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) explains how blogging has significantly enhanced his ability to provide news and expand the depth to which he can explore various topics. He notes that in the past readers would write a letter to the editor but today this function has been transformed:

Now in the world of the internet they are amplifying what you wrote, they're correcting, they're steering you in a different direction about what you wrote ... So your news consumers now can amplify, extend, comment, annotate your writing. Fabulous. What a great resource for a reporter on a beat. So in that ecosystem are those consumers and there's also the people who have a commercial interest in what you're writing about so policymakers who have an agenda that they're trying to advance. And so they too are able to rapidly circulate electronically what you may have written and again there's this great feedback loop that comes back to the reporter and so you will definitely find all kinds of new people to comment, provide new story ideas, correct, etc. on what you're doing.

Akin's comments demonstrate how professional journalist blogs can be particularly advantageous for beat reporters since audiences are typically attracted who will "read anything at all, they're hardcore, they'll follow everything you write and often respond to you."

### **3.2 Locating Sources**

The same developments that have led to a greater capacity for research have also altered and improved the means of locating sources within the newsgathering process, which has inevitably broadened the source base. Responding to interview questions regarding the ability of the internet to aid the search for sources and alternative perspectives, journalists generally agreed that this development represented a significant improvement. Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) describes how

the internet has increased this process dramatically: “The great thing is the internet enables you to track down people so much more readily than you would have been able to before. You hear that somebody said something, well you pretty quickly find an email address or a phone number.” Sometimes all that is necessary is “the magic *Google*. Type it in, see what names come up” (Sean Mallen, Parliamentary Correspondent, Global).

Past research that identified time constraints as a main justification for “not explor[ing] other avenues of enquiry or consult[ing] other than the most predictable sources of information” (Williams and Miller 1998: 155) may now be invalid. This is because the speed of access was so frequently highlighted when compared to previous newsgathering routines. In the internet age, some journalists suggest that “there’s nothing that you can’t find and nobody that you can’t find” (Sophia Hadzipetros, Managing Editor, CBC Toronto). With the help of technological tools, contact information can be quickly gathered and research can now be conducted before any contact is made in order to improve a journalist’s chances of successful access:

[In] my earlier researching days, I’d call – say you wanted to get some big poncho, CEO, to take part in a panel, well now I would go onto the web and get some information on the person and then call as an informed person. [In the past you] could spend a fair bit of time doing research to get information before you even start your work on your story that you’re doing. ... It’s the biggest time saver ever. (Hadzipetros)

Still, Hadzipetros also notes that it can also be to a journalist’s benefit to move beyond the instant nature of online research in order to find “those secret little tidbits” which she could then “use to have cachet to get in with the guy.”

However, journalists are also often seeking members of the public to participate in stories as a means of adding a ‘human element’ or character and in doing so create more interesting news items. Since television news in particular drives this ‘need for people,’ as seen within Chapter 6, the ease and speed of the internet and email have been a welcome development. David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) explains how a story on the unemployment rate would be ‘dull television’ if the only characters were “a bunch of economists.” Therefore, “You need somebody who just got a job, somebody who just got laid off ... who wants to go on national TV, is compelling, interesting,” which

can be difficult within a “six hour window” (Akin). However, creative journalists such as Akin who choose to engage with technology are able to use these developments to their advantage. One of his numerous examples explains how he used his blog as a means of finding people to comment on a news item. The story was instigated by a study that concluded that the ‘tween<sup>75</sup> magazine market was full of sexually inappropriate content:

so my challenge was to find an 11 and 12 year old girl and her parents who wanted to talk about this so I, you know, blog post: ‘wanted: young girls to talk about sex’; maybe I’d better rephrase that, that’s going to look a bit funny. But you can see. So again there’s no way I probably would have found somebody unless, you know, the thousand publicists – ‘Do you know a friend who? Do you know a friend who?’ And sure enough I found my dad of a ‘tween who didn’t know that some of this stuff was in the magazine and a nice little television piece, right.

However, Akin argues that email can also produce a similar effect and in fact represents “the number one biggest thing that has affected journalism.” Therefore, he encourages journalists to take advantage of email addresses that may not initially appear valuable, such as any from the public relations industry or even from academics. Since they are “trying to establish a relationship with you,” Akin believes that journalists should “find a way to continue that relationship.” These contacts can be recycled in order to multiply the number of people who are aiding the newsgathering process:

I harvest those email addresses. I have a big databank with about a thousand publicists who wanted me to write about their story. ... so I asked a thousand publicists on mass email, ‘Find me someone who just lost a job or found a job.’ These are people who all want to curry favour with me so when I ask them something like that that’s one email and a thousand people now are helping me find someone for the story I’m working on. I keep a separate list for public relations people and academic institutions. I need an expert on Ethanol who can talk about this and has done this – they all want to get their person on TV and they’re thrilled that a reporter’s doing this. One email takes me 20 seconds. Done. Same thing for government PR types.

Akin considers this “a great example of how you can use technology to accelerate your newsgathering, improve your newsgathering, widen your sources – because I want to find

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75 Otherwise known as ‘preteen’; refers to ages ranging from 8 to 14.

people I've never heard of before." While Akin is a former technology reporter and therefore perhaps more in tune with technological developments, he encourages journalists to take control of their information and organise their sources in these ways. In effect, "You can reverse-spam, it's quite empowering. I'm sending it back out there!" (Akin). This process is therefore "Way better than making a thousand phone calls to find the needle in the haystack when you can ask the haystack to produce the needle essentially" (Akin). He goes on to describe practices that some journalists employ in this regard but criticizes them when they only choose to send emails within the newsroom: "reporters will send emails around a newsroom saying, 'Oh I need somebody who's just bought an iPod because I'm doing stories on iPods,' it's probably not too hard to find someone who's just bought an iPod but that's typical." Akin is also disappointed that more traditional sources are not as likely to exploit new technologies. For instance, "they don't use instant messaging or BlackBerry pins [available on his website] ... they're sort of pretty traditional in the way they put a message out there."

A further advantage of email, which is particularly helpful for investigative reporters, is the sense of anonymity. As a result, sources that would have otherwise remained silent might make contact: "the great thing about the internet is that somebody who maybe saw that story could come out of the woodwork very easily and without a lot of risk, email me some more information, be sort of a brown envelope source" (Sean O'Shea, Investigative Reporter, Global). Aside from 'brown envelope sources,' the public more generally has greater access to news organisations as a result of new technologies. Technology impacts "the way people have access to this huge institution" (Vince Carlin, Ombudsman, CBC). When someone sends an email or posts a comment online, journalists are able to follow up those leads very easily:

they'll see an email come in and they'll say, 'Hey that's a great one, somebody's got personal experience. Can you send us their email address? We'll get back to them, see if they're up for doing an interview, etcetera.' So as I say it's just a very dynamic process and things can grow from nothing sometimes. (Mick McGlinchey, Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online)

The solicitation of UGC via a news organisation's website also facilitates this search: "We're looking for the human aspect to stories that doesn't necessarily get told to us on

the wires, from agencies, and it's particularly useful to us in the interim period from a story breaking and our newsgathering crews arriving on the ground" (Nicola Green, UGC Hub Producer, BBC). With the rise of UGC and these shifting public behaviours, journalists are now arriving at the scene of a breaking news event and immediately offered images. Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) recalls such an experience during the July 7th, 2005 bombings: "I think I ended up on my bike cycling to various places where things could be happening, right. ... again within minutes of arriving people were coming up to us offering pictures." Especially within the realm of breaking news coverage, public news-producing behaviours have provided journalists with a much greater volume of material and improved their ability to find sources. Citizens are also able to provide news organisations with images that can enhance journalists' understanding of a breaking news item. Adams recounts an example where he had been sent images from a colleague that had been emailed to the BBC less than an hour after a Hercules plane, which had the British Ambassador to Afghanistan on board, landed in very rough air space and caught fire:

Someone just said, 'I was there last year, thought you might be interested.' Sent a whole bunch of pictures. I thought that's amazing, that's great. And it was very useful to me 'cause I looked at the pictures and I thought I could totally understand why we were being told the Hercules had burst on fire, I could perfectly easily understand why because there's no tarmac, it's just rocks and gravel.

Mobile phones have also facilitated the use of sources that formerly would not have been accessible. A journalist from CBC's Morning Show Unit provides an example from the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict:

every morning for the last 4 weeks we've had sort of civilians on the ground on their phones, on their cell phones telling us what's going on. And we just never would have had that before because phone lines would have been bombed out, that would have been the end of it. You never would have been able to hear from people.

In these ways, access to sources is greatly enhanced and members of the public have more opportunities to become part of the production of news.

### 3.3 Information Management

While journalists have always been in the business of information management, the development of technology has led to new tools designed to aid this process. Prior to the internet, some journalists would “take scissors and they’d clip stuff out and they’d glue it into a big scrapbook” (David Akin, Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV). Today, tools such as *Google’s* free Desktop Search enable journalists to quickly access information stored on their computer’s hard drive. Former ‘good journalists’ “tend[ed] to be packrats [and had] a vague idea in a pile on their desk, ‘Oh yeah, I’ve got a report on that somewhere here,’ – and they’ll find it” (Akin). Today’s journalists can employ technologies to find any previously stored information on their behalf:

CTV, like all the broadcasters in this town, subscribes to a transcription service so that whenever there’s a scrum of a parliamentarian it gets emailed to us. So I just put those on my hard drive, I don’t even have to look at them. *Google* indexes them, *Google* on my drive. And so, anytime I’m doing a story, ‘Oh so and so said this on that day,’ same thing if someone sends me their research, I’ll just throw it on my drive so that I can search it ... stuff that comes through my inbox I’ll’ve looked at it once, even if it’s a subject line so have a vague idea it’s there. I subscribe to like tons of listserves, especially on the text side when I was doing that, so it goes in the hopper and *Google* will find it for me when I need to find it. (Akin)

When these tools are combined with a BlackBerry out in the field, effective retrieval assists journalists within ‘scrum’ situations. Akin explains how he is much more prepared to challenge a source when his supporting evidence is quickly accessible:

So I’m also not tethered to my desktop, my physical computer at work if I’m on the road, if I’m on an airplane, if I’m in the middle of a scrum, you know, politicians have said things in the middle of the scrum, I kinda go, ‘That doesn’t compute’ and fire up the BlackBerry with a decent service here, still web-access, search. In a scrum now I can challenge a politician saying, ‘You know you just said Y but a year and a half ago you said X.’

By taking advantage of these technologies, journalists can gain greater control over their own resources and once again gain a greater ability to “penetrate their sources’ informational worlds” (Ericson 1998: 1).

### 3.4 Resistance versus the New Cohort

It is important to note that the range of technological knowledge among journalists varies to a large degree. Some journalists within this sample were self-confessed Luddites and recognised the growing divide between themselves and new cohorts more likely to already be equipped with a technical skill set:

And younger people who come in to work come in with the skill set that the older employees like myself – that many of us don't have as readily. So it's like it's just, it's become really the norm for people to do things that are still skills that somebody like me, who's a bit of a Luddite, is learning. (Sophia Hadzipetros, Managing Editor, CBC Toronto)

On the other hand, Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) explains how some of his colleagues need to get 'caught up' with technological development: "technology is moving so fast but we've got to be familiar with the tools and we've got to get that across." McGlinchey says he becomes concerned when he is confronted with reactions like the following: "I'll show them what I'm using for downloading the content, whether it is news or whatever and they're still looking at me and blinking and going, 'God this is incredible.'" In this sense, David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) argues that these changes become most significant "for those who've had their eyes shut I think for the last ten years." As a result of the varying degrees of technological skills, Daniel Morin's job (Supervising Technician, CBC) is largely support-based:

I would say 80% of my job is the support aspect of it all because as we are merging in technology we are dealing with a lot of reporters who are not technically savvy – both from a computers perspective, and you'll get all different kinds of people, but generally speaking they're not as technically savvy as a cameraman would be. And that's understandable I guess to a certain extent.

Apart from technological knowledge, some journalists highlight the burden and increased control from superiors that some devices carry with them. Sean Mallen (Parliamentary Correspondent, Global) makes this point in relation to BlackBerrys: "every time new technology's added it means there's new demands. I carry a BlackBerry now which I didn't before so they can reach me all the time, they can email me all the time. It's buzzing all the time. And it's harder to hide." Some journalists do not use BlackBerrys

while others declare that, “I hate to say it’s changed my life but it has” (John Northcott, Video Journalist, CBC).

In many cases, the decision to engage with particular technological developments rests with the journalist themselves. For instance, implementing blogs as research tools or actively seeking out sources via blogs represent elements that can potentially be added to any journalist’s newsgathering routines. The following three examples demonstrate the autonomy retained by journalists in this regard. First, Sean Mallen (Parliamentary Correspondent, Global) was not aware of any bloggers relevant to his political beat but said, “I should know this, I’m sure there are Queen’s Park bloggers, I just in the course of my work haven’t had to access them.” Nonetheless, he had already anticipated that bloggers could become influential during the next election: “that’ll be an issue as I’m sure the bloggers for the various parties will be firing out stuff. That I’ll have to keep an eye on.” As such, Mallen had planned to alter his routines by including bloggers within his repertoire of sources accessed each day at a time when they would likely become most pertinent – during election campaigns. Secondly, Foreign Correspondent Nicolas Spicer (CBC), who had recently returned to Canada from his post abroad, said he had just been thinking of accessing blogs for a story he was assigned to cover. Spicer had been asked “to do a story on, you know, how the Jewish and Arab Canadian communities are reacting to the so-called peace in the Middle East.” Therefore, Spicer “thought, oh I could go out and find some blogs about and get some names. ‘Cause the blog people are talking anyway, they think they have a point to make and easier to get a TV interview if they’re already out there broadcasting.” In this way, Spicer actively and autonomously decided that bloggers could prove fruitful for his assignment. Finally, Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) argues that he has little time to peruse blogs and despite the potential advantages, he had not yet chosen to do so:

And yes it’s more democratic now and yes the opportunities are almost infinite but you know I haven’t yet been tempted to email a blogger. Perhaps that’s rather narrow-minded of me. You know, there are bloggers who could tell you what life is like in a part of the country you don’t get to. Those sort of things.

These three examples illustrate how journalists are capable of determining whether or not to include blogs within their daily routines or as a means of newsgathering for particular story assignments.

David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) argues that not every journalist is as eager to find new sources. As such, Akin believes that for some journalists, new technologies and the opportunities they provide “scares them a little bit.” In response to receiving calls might prove fruitful yet are from strangers, Akin says some journalists would say, “I don’t want phone calls from, I only want phone calls from people I know.” Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) argues that some journalists are losing opportunities because of these attitudes: “experience isn’t always the thing that gets you through ‘cause there’s a lot of experienced journalists out there who’ll shut the door on things like this, who are afraid of the web.” Akin agrees, relating his point to the use of technology as a means of effective organisation and lays fault with both journalists and organisations as a whole:

But it just allows you to gather news at an incredible rate because you can automate a lot of the tasks if you’re smart about it and journalists in my experience are not smart about the use of technology, they’re dumb and they’re really not that interested in changing. And that goes from an organisational level and an individual journalist level.

Still, Akin agrees that such resistance is much more difficult to discover among the new cohorts of journalists who are increasingly exploiting new technologies: “some reporters would – especially among younger reporters that’s certainly changed.”

#### **4. Newsroom Technologies and Storywriting**

The new technologies within newsrooms that have the biggest potential to influence news production – mainly the storywriting phase – all relate to one transformation: the transition to digital. Originally news organisations grappled with the switch to tape from film, but the switch to digital video represented yet another phase of technological development. As well, the same transition is occurring from linear to non-linear editing. However, the most significant change relates to digital media content distribution and

management systems, referred to here as server technology. This section concentrates on the impact such technological developments have had on production routines.

As described earlier in this chapter, it is the top-level of the news organisational hierarchy that maintains control over decisions regarding which technologies will be implemented, largely since considerable expenditures are involved. The news organisations involved in this study were at varying stages of the digital transition but all were headed in the same direction. Generally speaking, Canadian organisations were slower to adapt than UK organisations. As such, some journalists indicated displeasure with the speed of this transition: “We were quite cynical that it took CTV a long time to pry their wallet open” (Derek Thacker, Director, CTV Ottawa).

#### **4.1 Non-Linear Editing**

One aspect of the digital transition involves the shift from tape-based editing to digital, non-linear editing. Linear editing involves the sequential recording of each segment of tape from the source tape to the new tape. In order to perform a linear edit, a journalist must be very certain about the desired final sequence since any changes to the edit list require the re-editing of everything after the point of change. Non-linear editing is much more flexible since there is no need to work sequentially; instead a list of sequences is digitally altered, usually via the drag-and-drop feature.<sup>76</sup>

While at first it may appear that non-linear editing is much quicker and therefore more advantageous, some journalists remain loyal to the linear editing process. To some degree this is a result of the continued use of tape that must first be digitized before any non-linear editing can occur: video is ingested “in *real time* before we can start working on it” (Trina Maus, Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario). As such, journalists at Global who have been using “the same editing technology for news as we had in 1981” consider linear editing to be very fast: “An editor can crash a story together in 20 minutes or 15 minutes or less” (Sean O’Shea, Investigative Reporter, Global). An editor at Sky also preferred linear editing because “you can still spool it and see what you are spooling. For

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76 Avid’s non-linear editing suite is most commonly employed for this process.

speed, you can't beat it." As for digital, he confessed that the quality is much better. On the other hand, journalists with a lot of non-linear experience tended to consider linear editing to be a "very slow process." As well, the flexibility of non-linear is a clear advantage: "Now if I have a tape machine and it's too long or something and you have to cut something out and you want to cut something out earlier on in the piece you have to record the whole goddamn thing whereas on Avid you just pull it out" (Derek Thacker, Director, CTV Ottawa).

A final issue relating to this transition is the impact that different types of editing can have on the content of a news story. While non-linear editing involves the use of software packages that make various transitions and other digital effects possible, Vince Carlin (Ombudsman, CBC) recounts how changing from film to tape also drove a change towards sequential thinking:

The grammar of editing had changed. It was a bit more demanding because you had to think much more sequentially even though that technically was the drive in film was to tell that but you, you could get away with telling it in a discontinuous way. In ENG<sup>77</sup> you actually had to think more in terms of that the images would not be jarring, that they would seem like they were flowing one to the next.

Additionally, the switch from linear to non-linear editing increases the ability to ensure content is not jarring since the editing suites incorporate a multitude of digital effects that can smooth transitions between different sequences.

## 4.2 Server Technology

Digital media content distribution and management systems provide journalists with the capacity to extract content produced by affiliates and other elements within their own organisation as well as content produced by other news organisations via ongoing partnerships. The end goal of most server technology is to enable journalists to search, preview and retrieve pictures, video and associated meta-data from their computers

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<sup>77</sup> ENG refers to electronic newsgathering and is used to differentiate the use of tape from the previous use of film when shooting in the field.

within their own workstation. Beyond content trading, archival material is also typically included for access by journalists. There are four main outcomes of this technology for news production: increased speed, decreased cost, improved workflow and greater control over archival material.

There are a variety of different means through which news organisations have employed server technology, yet some organisations, like the CBC and Global, were only in the process of developing and instituting their own. For instance, CTV uses a system called Gateway – deemed a ‘video highway’ – which enables journalists to access content from elements within their own organisation as well as content from CNN and ABC. Since server technology tends to be internet-based, wherever there is an internet connection a journalist can access material. Therefore, if “a riot breaks out in Kitchener and the Prime Minister was there and he was shocked, I can shoot that video, put it into our system, throw it on our Gateway service – which is internet based – and *every single* media outlet in all of Canada, including CNN and ABC who have rights, can access that video” (Trina Maus, Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario).

### *Speed and Cost*

An important advantage of server technology is the dramatic increase in speed at which journalists can access video. First of all, instead of feeding a tape in real time, videos can now be sent a great deal faster: “For reporters, if we’re shooting a sequence of material in Vancouver, all someone has to do is put it on their server in Vancouver and then the reporter in Toronto can pull it off and use it. Before we’d actually have to feed the tape” (Paul Hambleton, Executive Producer, CBC). Without server technology, feeds would normally be sent using satellite time which meant that journalists would have to wait for a scheduled time to begin ingesting the specific feed. For Global, “both NBC now and CNN transmit all of their material to us via the internet” which is now “pretty much video-on-demand of whatever they’ve got” as opposed to “waiting till 3 in the afternoon for some video because that’s when the satellite window opens up” (Sean O’Shea, Investigative Reporter, Global).

Cost is also reduced as a result of a decreasing reliance on satellite to transfer feeds. David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) explains how the former procedure required a lot of organisation and strict schedules: material was moved “with very expensive satellite time with a feed window set up so this is coming on the 3:30 feed and you literally have to have everybody ready across the country to hit play.” As a result, “somebody would have to sit in the room, record it, shot list it and all that sort of thing” (O’Shea). Economic savings are also a significant consequence of the fact that news organisations can view the material and select how much of each item is required, as opposed to prior processes that sent “big chunks of video down by satellite or landline from different parts of the country” (John Bainbridge, Deputy Director, CBC), of which only selections would ever likely be used. Since previous research identified the economic-logic of news production, it follows that the same logic continues to operate and increased sharing will mean a greater use of material produced by other elements within the organisation or by partner organisations.

Furthermore, foreign correspondents are able to send in feeds at many points throughout the day as opposed to waiting for the pre-scheduled satellite window. What Derek Thacker (Director, CTV Ottawa) calls “remote control news, or listening post” is now increasingly common wherein “you can file anything from anywhere, right. I can’t even tell you how many Afghanistan stories I’ve cut, how many Rwandan stories I’ve cut, how many Bosnian stories I’ve cut without ever travelling there, right because you can get everything fed in.” Efficient and cheaper access to feeds from other news organisations is deemed an advantage for news organisations with limited resources. For instance, “CNN has more money they’ll send a greater number of people into Afghanistan” (Thacker). Therefore, CTV has a wider range of material they can use: “As reporters are writing, they may say, ‘Oh hell we don’t have any decent pictures from Afghanistan, let’s see what CNN has’” (Thacker).

### *Improved Workflow*

The most significant impact of server technology in terms of the daily routines of journalists is the improved workflow that results from easy and quick access to material. These advantages dramatically increase due to the fact that journalists can also access

this material simultaneously. Without server technology, incoming video does not get digitized but instead remains on tape. Therefore a single tape has to be shared by journalists and passed around the newsroom. Video “used to be sort of trapped on one tape and had to be handed around to the promo people and tease people and then the guy who’s cutting the actual story and then the person who’s using it again for headlines in another news programme” (Peter Kent, Deputy Editor, Global). As such, announcements like the following were still heard around CBC’s newsroom: “Greenspan tape 37 with Naomi, you can take it now.” John Bainbridge (Deputy Director, CBC) explained the disadvantage of this process: “you would see these on a daily basis so missing tapes, please return the tape, who took the tape, this is all – ‘cause tapes go missing all the time, right?” With the advent of server technology, as soon as the video is ingested onto the server, “*as it’s going in you could start working on it*” (Trina Maus, Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario). In this way, tapes are not limited to one terminal; instead “Everybody gets to use it. So that’s the real benefit of the desktop – instant sharing with everybody” (Bainbridge). Derek Thacker (Director, CTV Ottawa) explains the process in reference to politicians who are scrummed on Canada’s Parliament Hill:

so say an event on Parliament Hill, the moment the tapes come back they go first into ingest and 20 seconds later as the streaming of that material is going into the server it’s available on everyone’s desktop, it’s spectacular. So a reporter can start to craft their story immediately, right.

Along with instant simultaneous access to material, “a lot of job functions” are also altered which in some cases may lead to “people do[ing] more work” (Morning Assignment Editor, CBC). The most obvious change is the ability for journalists to remain at their desk instead of sitting in an editing suite while viewing material and performing other tasks such as writing scripts. More significant, however, is the shift in job functions wherein journalists who were previously restricted to writing and therefore “sort of run into an edit booth and say, ‘Ok I want a picture of this and a picture of that, this sequence 45 seconds long’” (Peter Kent, Deputy Editor, Global) can now also edit the material themselves. Some job functions have also been eliminated. For instance, during a news bulletin “no one has to load a tape anymore in the right order and somebody in the other room play it back by pushing a button when the director says roll 6” (Kent).

Furthermore, John Bainbridge (Deputy Director, CBC) pointed to the opportunities created “for the more ambitious and craft-oriented producers.” By visually producing a schematic of one’s thoughts, journalists can essentially “go back to the old days of the story board” (Bainbridge). Therefore instead of lost time due to the sharing of tapes, base-level journalists can begin discussions with editors or producers and perhaps have more time to debate particular ideas: “So as that media is coming in a reporter can see right on their desktop, ‘Ok that’s my clip’ and they can immediately start talking to an editor, ‘Ok I’m thinking of opening with this clip’ as opposed to that long turn around that used to happen” (Thacker). However, Thacker also argues that journalists “don’t have the time to finesse things” because of the need to respond to news items faster, which is reinforced by the overarching value placed on immediacy. This technology therefore also enables journalists to “take short cuts”:

So we have a derogatory term for filling a story, papering it – wallpaper it. So if you’re tight to deadline, you’re not really concentrating on the best pictures. If you had 6 hours to do the piece you’d be concentrating a lot, if you’ve got 6 minutes to do it something’s gotta give. ... What will happen is I’ll jump on there and the first thing that I see, it may not be the best thing, but the first thing that I see – I’m missing shots of Taliban training camp, bam I’ll jump on there, I’ll print it to tape and that’s all I need. The story’s done. (Thacker)

Overall, the impact of server technology is enormous due to the streamlining of workflow and the increased autonomy now accessible by journalists as a result of their ability to perform more job functions:

This is a huge change, this whole thing. This is probably the biggest change for our organisation since moving from film to videotape, even more so because it really changes the whole workflow. It puts the power and options, takes them away from certain people and gives it to others. Like a journalist now has, if they really grab onto it, can really take control of their own searching and stuff. (Bainbridge)

Journalists frequently need images from the archives, which is another element that is transformed through this technology.

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*Archival Material*

The final impact of server technology relates to the use of archival material which becomes available for base-level journalists to access and employ more freely. In the past, a news organisation's library tended to occupy a largely reactive role: "they wait for a producer to come in and make a request for tape" (John Bainbridge, Deputy Director, CBC). Therefore, "if you're working on a historic piece and you want archive material somebody will go down to the basement, grab a tape off the shelf, bring it up and then put it on" (Bainbridge). For beat journalists like Sean Mallen (Parliamentary Correspondent, Global) who are based outside of the newsroom, access to archival material has been difficult which is why he looks forward to a time when his off-site newsroom will be connected:

It would be a lot simpler if we were on the server as well because then I could access archival tape. Like right now I have to have physically archival tape driven down to me here by a cameraman,<sup>78</sup> drop the tape off so we can put it in. Because the liner's only a one way line. We can feed up but they can't feed back to us.<sup>79</sup>

Through server technology, any journalist can perform specific searches and access archival material instantly. When a story is digitally archived on the server, the following information is included: "that story and all the information that accompanied it, the anchor's introduction, the reporters narration, the names and titles and quotes of the interview subjects, all of that meta-data will travel with that slug when it's moved off the server into archive storage" (Peter Kent, Deputy Editor, Global). As well, hours of video can be stored in relation to particular newsmakers or topics. For instance, once CBC's archive is finished the following necessities will be available: "10 minutes on the Queen, 10 minutes on all the popes, 10 minutes on all the presidents, all the prime ministers and, you know, plus obits [obituaries] ... I can put all the shots of every parliament building in every season" (John Bainbridge, Deputy Director, CBC).

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78 Due to security issues at Queen's Park, a taxi driver would not be able to bring the archival tape to Mallen, which makes the procedure more complicated.

79 In other words, Mallen and others working for Global at Queen's Park could send material to Global's Toronto headquarters but they were not yet able to receive any material.

The ability to perform more specific searches via the stored meta-data, and the fact that the journalists assigned to the story can perform these searches themselves, has the potential to limit the number of stereotypical images that are used. The use of such images is related to stock footage archives that end up getting “used over and over again” since many of them are stored as “generics rather than specifics” (Kent). Kent provides an example: “There’s the shot of the Mad Cow that falls down in the pen in England, you know, whenever they’re doing a Mad Cow story you see that poor cow falling over.” As Philo et al. (1999) demonstrated within coverage relating to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, images used in this manner can misrepresent societal groups and perpetuate stereotypes. Similarly, images of a riot in “the right region with the right looking climate” could be used for a variety of unrelated stories (Kent). However, with server technology and stored meta-data, journalists can increasingly take control over their searches, seeking specific images as opposed to relying on the first and easiest image arising out of a librarian’s search.

Overall, the changes resulting from these newsroom technologies relate to speed, flexibility and increased access to material that can, in theory, be searched and retrieved much more easily than without the technology.

## **5. Transmission Technologies and Immediacy**

The development of technology over time has facilitated the ability for news organisations to place a high premium on immediacy, particularly in the sense of being ‘live,’ on location (as discussed in Chapter 6). Such transmission technologies have lowered the costs of ‘live’ coverage while technical decisions regarding transmission are increasingly shaped by the desire for immediacy. A perceived benefit of technological developments is the increased access that news organisations have to isolated regions or conflict zones prone to access difficulties, as well as the general capacity to be on the ground more often. However, the response from journalists to the escalating demand for ‘live’ coverage is overwhelmingly negative. This largely relates to the severe depletion of time available for newsgathering. While these developments impact the full range of base-level journalists, it is foreign correspondents that appear to bear the largest burden for their news organisation’s growing appetite for immediacy.

In response to interview questions regarding the impact of transmission technologies, journalists highlighted the facilitation of immediacy. As Don Knox (Senior Director, CBC) argues, “because you can get it on, the technology means you will get it on.” In the past, the technical capabilities for achieving immediacy were very limited compared to today, which is why an on-camera talk-back by a reporter was “pretty much unheard of 15-20 years ago. It simply wasn’t done” (Morning Show Unit, CBC). There is an “increasing capacity” for ‘live’ coverage today compared to 10 or 20 years ago when “the technology was too expensive and satellite transmission too complicated” (Nigel Baker, Executive Director, APTN). Instead, news organisations had to go to great lengths simply to get material back from foreign correspondents, which involved sending film on planes before satellite was a viable option, and even then a flight could be necessary simply to reach a destination that had facilities for satellite transmission. Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) describes how this former transmission process could delay coverage of a story for days: “In terms of treating it on film, sending it back, you know, on an airliner, getting it developed, putting it together with a soundtrack and all that, getting the report back maybe 3 or 4 days after the event has taken place.” Some journalists have argued that this delay may have contributed to the quality of coverage and the different emphasis in terms of news values. Vince Carlin (Ombudsman, CBC) makes this point in relation to the time that journalists used to have at their disposal:

They ship the film over and then it’s edited according to the instructions or sometimes they edited it there in satellite. It took days. The reporter had time to report and had time to think about what he was writing, or she was writing, they were mostly men in those days, think about what they were writing, carefully edit it and send it over. So you got, you didn’t get instant news but you got really good considered reporting. Well now as we moved into electronic cameras and availability of satellite, instantly, the impetus became let’s get it on today.

However, along with the speed at which transmission can now occur, costs have also been reduced. Ben Rayner (Editor, ITV) explained how reduced costs are linked to the size of today’s technologies while making reference to the coverage of the famine in Niger:

Two or three years ago you would have to have flown in a satellite dish on a chartered plane. It would cost a fortune. Now you take it in 2 or 3 suitcases. You just pay excess baggage fees. And this is one of the most inaccessible

places in the world. ... Now you can do a proper 'live' and it looks like it is around the corner.

This increasingly smaller kit is approximated by Daniel Morin (Supervising Technician, CBC) to cost \$10,000 CAD whereas the preceding kit cost as much as \$50,000 CAD. Generally, a video phone, BGAN and Avid editing suite are carried by CBC foreign correspondents when they go to 'big shoots.' Along with sat phones and ISDN technology, these devices make up the new set of transmission tools. Technological developments are geared towards either increasing bandwidth (the amount of data that can pass through an internet connection) or expanding access around the globe. The BGAN is now sometimes used as a replacement for satellite uplinks, as Morin explains:

We had a shoot in Ethiopia a few months back and there was no uplink where they were so that's what they did, they used a device called BGAN – which BBC's using extensively, so is CNN. ... So that allows the reporters in the field to check their mail, search the web if may be and of course send files back to Toronto. But it's very slow. And it's not the ideal solution but when it's the only solution, then we go that way.

Additionally, the BGAN is based on a charge per packet of data uploaded or downloaded as opposed to the per-minute charge of the satellite phone. As such the BGAN "becomes a very viable money saving solution" (Morin). He goes on to compare the use of a conventional sat phone with ISDN service for the internet with the BGAN, which amounts to \$16,000 CAD versus about \$3-4,000 CAD for one month of use.

Regardless of cost, decisions made by journalists such as Morin are shaped by expectations of immediacy. When necessary transmission technologies are chosen by sacrificing quality for speed:

I can send it 'live' if I want to with the video phone. Yeah it looks like crap but who cares. I get to move the pictures now. They go on air. Once they went on air, then I can encode<sup>80</sup> them and take an hour to send them so that for the next hour they're going to use this clean version of the same thing. ... You've got the immediacy of it all with the video phone. ... So those decisions are

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80 In other words, the material will be transformed into a format that is optimized for transmission.

made depending on the requirements of the story – if we need immediacy, then of course we'll do the satellite uplinks.<sup>81</sup> (Morin)

Technological developments in transmission are constantly in flux, but decisions regarding their adoption must take into consideration cost, news values and the ease at which they can be implemented into current work routines.

## 5.1 Increased Access

Accompanying the development of smaller, more mobile transmission technologies is an increase in access. Responding to interview questions relating to changes in access, journalists agreed that news organisations have a greater ability to transmit items in more places than ever before: “journalists can now broadcast from virtually anywhere at any time” (Vince Carlin, Ombudsman, CBC). News organisations are thus better equipped to broadcast their show from off-set locations, while reporters and correspondents are able to cover more regions of the world. Heather Hiscox (Presenter, CBC) highlights this shift, pointing out the locations that CBC has had the opportunity to broadcast from:

The National, our flagship newscast, broadcasts from Afghanistan and broadcasts from a ferry in the north of Canada. We can do these things now because we have technology. So it's enabling our show to go to places and be on the ground at news stories that we weren't able to be before.

Similarly, the following journalist expressed amazement with the increase in ‘live’ coverage that was a direct result of transmission technologies: “we came ‘live’ out of Afghanistan every morning this week. We wouldn't've been able to do that like 10 years ago” (Morning Show Unit, CBC).

Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) argues that transmission technologies “helped us hugely to report the world better” while referring to specific news coverage previously unattainable. For instance, the use of sat phones to enable “‘live’ [coverage] from the refugee camps in Pakistan or Darfur” have “gotten so much better since the last two

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81 When satellite uplinks are not available, an internet connection over a sat phone is substituted where possible. However, speed would be significantly reduced.

years in Darfur [with] the increasing use of broadband.” As well, “one of our correspondents is using her webcam in Kiev” (Backhurst). With increasing mobility of the kit, a journalist “can be expected to go wherever and whenever and it is not completely unrealistic anymore” (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). For instance, “It’s easier to climb up to a mountain village to shoot the earthquake survivors” (Paul Hambleton, Executive Producer, CBC). As well, if a journalist encounters a “genocide in the middle of the jungle with no phone lines, boom you’ve got a sat phone, you’ve got a BGAN, you send it out. And you couldn’t before” (Nicolas Spicer, Foreign Correspondent, CBC).

Interview questions regarding the impact on coverage of tumultuous regions of the world revealed that smaller technology enables them to be “less obvious” (Sean Mallen, Parliamentary Correspondent, Global) when collecting material. Older technology was much more conspicuous, as Daniel Morin (Supervising Technician, CBC) describes in reference to coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: “you’d need like 3 vehicles to get [to Jerusalem] and that was not terribly viable. So now yeah we’re a bit more adventurous into where we go because we’re a bit more mobile than we were some years back.” Mallen points out that new technologies may convince officials and other gatekeepers that “you’re just shooting home video or something as opposed to when you show up with one of these big boy cameras, everybody knows you’re there to shoot for big time news operation.” Nevertheless, Mallen admits that “People are catching on to it now though.”

## 5.2 Critiques of ‘Live’ Coverage

As already stated, journalists were overwhelmingly negative towards the growth of an obsession with ‘live’ coverage as a means of attaining immediacy. Nevertheless, there were a few more positive comments associated with this topic. For instance, Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) indicated that he could “understand just from a televisual-infotainment point of view why they prefer to have someone standing in front of a place ... it feels like you’ve made more effort.” Similarly, Daniel Morin (Supervising Technician, CBC) notes that “If you’re in the middle of nowhere there’s a lot of merit to seeing somebody’s face on camera powered by battery in the middle of the

desert – there’s something happening there, it’s great absolutely.” As well, a few journalists recognised that the practice simplifies reporting since it is “easier to do that then to have to chase down somebody, interview them, pre-interview them – a lot of work goes into actually ... interviews, put someone on air who’s never been on before, it takes a lot of searching and interviewing” (John Bainbridge, Deputy Director, CBC).

Despite these comments, journalists widely agreed that an obsession with ‘live’ coverage is essentially harmful to the final news product, as well as to the foreign correspondents who are asked to provide multiple ‘live’ updates. Brien Christie (Foreign Assignment Editor, CBC) began his comments on the subject by saying, “Politically speaking I think that going ‘live’ is a fabulous idea.” After his laughter subsided he argued that going ‘live’ “hurts the product” and is “harmful to the reporters doing the newsgathering.” He goes on to consider how this obsession drains his correspondents:

when they’re in the middle of a busy run of stories, they’re *exhausted*. They’re exhausted. ... So Adrienne [Arsenault] is stuck in this studio *yacking* every hour, right ‘cause, ‘You anchor the show at 1, I anchor the show at 2, you know, you don’t want to use the talk-back, you want *me* to do a talk back’ so she’s kind of stuck there, right? She’s not out interviewing Jeff Brown there about what happened today. It’s a very, very slippery slope for me.

Apart from these constraints, journalists continually referred to the lack of time that is available within this situation for newsgathering, which inevitably plays a large role in the reduced quality of coverage that journalists highlight. As Don Knox (Senior Director, CBC) explains, “Correspondents used to work in a longer, more thoughtful time frame and they can’t do it anymore.” He asks the question, “Where’s the time for real reporting?” and considers it a “crucial turning point in the lives of foreign correspondents.” Former Washington Correspondent Alan Fryer (Investigative Reporter, CTV) admitted that he “was actually getting tired of news because I was getting a bit disenchanted with it.” This is because immediacy is valued within the rolling news cycle; but it results in daily routines that are “like a treadmill, you don’t have the chance to think about what you’re doing that much anymore before they throw you on ‘live’ to talk about it” (Fryer).

Not only is breaking news coverage impacted by the desire for immediacy – more mundane news items are also increasingly covered in a ‘live’ setting with the purpose of

providing an appropriate backdrop. Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) recalls an example where he was asked to cover a news item 'live' by standing in front of the Foreign Office. He describes his 'frustration' at such requests:

There was a good example the other day – oh reaction to North Korea. The call I got in the morning was, 'Can you go to the Foreign Office and basically broadcast from the Foreign Office.' The rationale being: the Foreign Office hasn't responded, its one backdrop if you like illustrating the international response so you've got to stand there. And you don't just do the Foreign Office, you also say what the Americans are saying, Russians are saying. My heart always sinks with that because you're stuck, you're stuck outside of Parliament, you've got no access to anything ... our little satellite trucks don't have ENPS.

Adams was relieved when the satellite van unexpectedly left and he could go back to his office to actually begin the process of newsgathering.

Lindsey Hilsum (International Editor and China Correspondent, Channel 4) agrees that new transmission technologies have "completely changed the nature of news production." She considers her previous work in Africa wherein the limits of transmission technology used to encourage her to spend more time newsgathering before passing on stories:

I used to fly from Nairobi to southern Sudan and spend three weeks in southern Sudan gathering material and then come back and send my stories from Nairobi because [they would have the technology]. And that would never happen now because they want something, you know, everyday because it's possible, because satellite technology is there. And so it means you no longer have that luxury of time, it means that everything is pretty much instant. Or, you know, pretty much so.

Within some 'live' situations, journalists have no time for newsgathering at all, leaving them entirely dependent upon their producers, which often becomes a proxy for wire reports. Journalists also tend to feel 'blind' in the 'live' situation, particularly when it concerns breaking news stories:

For a breaking news story you have to do your two ways blind. You can't look at the wires, and can't phone the police or ambulance since you are in front of the camera. In that situation you depend on your producer in the gallery and

the ear piece in your ear and you just regurgitate. This is when you realise as a journalist how dependent you are on the wires. (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland)

Alan Fryer (Investigative Reporter, CTV) provides a further example where the use of secondary sources and mere repurposing of news from other organisations becomes the norm. He describes how he found it difficult to cover the Iraq War when he was relying on such information because he did not consider himself capable of contextualizing it for the audience:

But when you're sitting in a newsroom half a world away and you're taking feeds and you're getting dribs and drabs from CNN and ABC and APTN and Reuters, you know, they usually have little descriptions with the video but you're never quite sure it is what it says. And sometimes they get video of something that's delivered to them in Baghdad from a freelancer and they'll pump it out to all their clients. Well, you know, I'm getting a video of guys shooting at each other, I don't know who the hell they are. And yet you're supposed to use this video and give it some kind of context that you're really not in a position to give.

Therefore, "the inadvertent, technological push is to be instantly authoritative and that is not a good thing" (Vince Carlin, Ombudsman, CBC). As a result, "you really don't have the sort of time that you used to put in to a story to check and double check and triple check and think about it because the deadlines are just immediate now" (Alan Fryer, Investigative Reporter, CTV). Inevitably, "the inherent danger is you're gonna get it wrong and take stuff out of context. And it happens, it happens all the time" (Fryer). Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC) recalled his disappointment with coverage of the 2006 Israeli-Palestinian conflict where dramatic events were created by CNN:

I think CNN is almost obsessed now in its competition with FOX with having everything, you know, 'live.' I remember somebody who's making the point that Anderson Cooper, with his 10 o'clock show, and at 10 o'clock it's around 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning in Israel, was regularly cutting 'live' to different events. In reality it was the middle of the night and nothing was happening and at one point they were spending minutes covering what was essentially an Israeli tank that was stuck in the mud. And they kind of elevated it to a story of great drama and importance when, you know, it wasn't that at all it was just they were scouring the country for something they could portray in a kind of a dramatic, 'live' sense at 5 or 6 in the morning Israeli time. And I think

that was a reminder of the fact that this whole obsession with being 'live' can get a bit carried away.

With the rise of 24 hour news channels, even more time is available for 'live' coverage and the urge to create an impression of immediacy. While these channels may often generate a lot of revenue, journalists argue that they still do not represent a medium wherein a broader selection of stories can be covered or more depth can be delivered. As Sean Mallen (Parliamentary Correspondent, Global) explains, "to me it means that fewer news stories are reported more repetitively because you have to be on the air all the time." Mallen explains this as "a function of the 24 hour news channels where if something's happening they have to be on the air all the time even if there may have been one little snippet of information two hours ago they're still talking about it and just basically treading water for the time." Peter Kent (Deputy Editor, Global) describes the same phenomenon as "stream of consciousness TV" which leads towards speculation and misrepresentations of reality within moments where journalists must fill the 'lull' that inevitably occurs:

even in 9/11 planes flew into the towers and into the Pentagon and crashed – at a certain point even in the most dynamic developing story there's a lull. Well, you know, the reaction happens or the follow-up happens and with stream of consciousness, when that lull comes, audiences would tend to go away to do other things or to check other news sources. The challenge for the all news stations is to give the impression that the story is still dynamic and developing and that's where you get into supposition, speculation and sometimes misrepresentations of the reality, you know, that's where conspiracy theories are likely to start developing.

Brien Christie (Foreign Assignment Editor, CBC) was also very displeased with poorly-produced coverage and went beyond blaming other news organisations to include his own:

I think that I despair by where it's going, I really do, and maybe I'm just getting old but I think that CNN and places like that are an embarrassment to our business – an embarrassment to our business. ... I've watched a little bit of this stuff when I was away and I'm not going to name anybody 'cause it's summer but I think that some of the anchors were inane – inane questions, it was embarrassing, you know? You're an embarrassing reporter. You know, just, 'How do you feel?' That *stupid* question about, how do you feel, right? This uninformed – so I despair.

Responding to all of the developments that have been facilitated by transmission technologies and encouraged by the decision-makers within the top-level of a news organisation, John Northcott (Video Journalist, CBC) questions the motivations behind these decisions: “despite all the equipment is it not all geared towards going ‘live’? Couldn’t there be a greater emphasis on newsgathering? What is newsgathering anymore? Is it actually going out and gathering the news or is it setting up a ‘live’ and just talking about the news?” Alternatively, CBC’s Editor in Chief describes the challenge from his vantage point, indicating that the difficulties expressed can be resolved: “I think we need to make sure that our journalists are equipped to, you know, deliver that kind of information in as fair, a balanced, an accurate a way as they would if they had more time to reflect on it.” However, the provision of ‘live’ coverage requires a new set of journalistic skills that are deemed to be largely absent: “it’s a whole specific skill that reporters need, to be able to talk ‘live’ to a camera and marshal and summarize a story ‘live’ – being debriefed by an anchor” (Morning Show Unit, CBC). Journalists argued that very little training, if any, is available through journalism schools or news organisations.

Overall, it is very apparent that journalists – even some at the top-level – are dissatisfied with the quality of coverage that results from the high premium placed on the value of immediacy. Peter Kent (Deputy Editor, Global) links this to the impact that these developments have for audiences: “you’re not necessarily getting the deeper analysis and the broader facts that would go into having, you know, the truly informed citizen.”

## 6. Summary

This chapter focused on the occasionally overlapping newsgathering, storywriting and transmission phases of news production. It also showcased the relationship between the varying levels of journalists within a news organisation’s hierarchy, particularly in terms of the constraints that base-level journalists operate under versus the autonomy that they can access during their daily routines. While there exist a variety of categories of base-level journalists as well as different formats for story production (packages, lives, blogging, etc.), supervision by mid-level journalists is generally on-going within these production phases. Nevertheless, base-level journalists – with the exception of presenters – are now increasingly exploiting new technologies, most often the internet

and blogs, within the newsgathering process and thereby retaining a high level of autonomy over their routines. As well, within the storywriting phase, server technology in particular has the potential to engender journalists with greater control over the development of their assigned stories and encourage more creative outcomes. In fact, the impact of technological developments is much more significant within the three phases of production examined in this chapter than in any previous phase. However, journalists vary greatly in terms of their technical skills and resistance towards developing new technologies and the shifting public news-producing behaviours that are facilitated by them. A few technically knowledgeable journalists were eager to exploit the opportunities created by new technologies. Others are self-confessed Luddites and may even fear what might accompany such exploitation. Many others represent the new cohorts of journalists who are arriving with a high level of technical skills simply as a result of the generation that they've grown up in. Finally, transmission technologies have facilitated and perhaps helped heighten the value of immediacy. More of the world is potentially accessible but even locations close to the organisation's headquarters are increasingly covered 'live' in an attempt to create the impression that the news organisation is *there*, on the ground, where the event in question is taking place. Journalists have overwhelmingly expressed their dissatisfaction with the increasing quantity of 'live' coverage and, particularly, the quality of that coverage. This is largely due to the fact that journalists are left with little time for newsgathering and in its place rely on wires, recycling reports from other news organisations in an effort to appear instantly authoritative. During extended periods of 'live' coverage of events that have ceased to develop further, coverage tends to 'tread water' as opposed to offer informative, in-depth analysis.

The final results chapter covers external factors that are relevant to news production. In particular, the changing relationship with audiences is highlighted in relation to interactivity and the greater emphasis placed upon news organisations to achieve credibility. As well, pressures from government and the public relations industry are examined in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Long-standing criticisms of broadcast news as lacking history and context are further developed in relation to the question of whether the online medium should be employed as a means of extending broadcast coverage in these ways.

## **Chapter 8:**

### **External Pressures – Audiences, Governments and PR**

Aside from the constraints described in previous chapters that regularly impact the daily routines of journalists, factors originating outside of the news production process are also influential. This chapter addresses the external factors that arose during observations and were discussed within interviews. In particular, the ways in which traditional external factors have adapted to technological developments will be explored as well as the impact of changing public behaviours relating to demands for interactivity, increased documentation and blogging.

Beginning with an analysis of the changing role of audiences and their relationship to mainstream news organisations, the traditional ways in which journalists judge audience needs and interests is considered as well as new options for tracking online consumption. News values that heighten the craving for ‘immediacy’ are seen by journalists to be tied to growing audience expectations of news organisations. It is assumed that audiences encourage the use of new technologies by organisations to create immediacy, which in turn is purported to strengthen their loyalty and trust. New demands for interactivity are also discussed along with new approaches to incorporate audiences into the production process, which has led towards the development of an expanded relationship between audiences and media. The next section concerns the larger volume of complaints now received by news organisations. As a result of new technologies and audience behaviours, many of these complaints are driven by increasingly persuasiveness campaigns. Also, news organisations are tackling blogger investigations of their news coverage, or ‘Exposuregates.’ In order to remain credible in the eyes of their audience, responses to these exposures are critical. Lastly, external pressures related to governments and the public relations industry are considered. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is taken as a case study to explore the means through which journalists feel pressure from public relations and the appeals by some journalists to resist such pressure. The final section explores reasons for the perpetual lack of context and history in conflict coverage and the means

through which new technologies attempt to fill this gap, particularly through news websites.

## 1. Audiences

Audiences are a fundamental element for any news organisation, regardless of the source of their economic revenue. As such, all news organisations strive for an increasingly larger share of audiences and make decisions in line with this goal. Impressions of audience needs and expectations generally aid the largely top-down decision-making process, which determines the way in which production practices are altered over time. Findings relating to the means through which these impressions are formulated confirm conclusions from previous research: commissioned research is sporadic and individual journalists typically rely on informal inquiries, random encounters, or stereotypical characters as a means of representing the ‘generalized audience.’ Previous research also revealed a lack of genuine interaction and feedback with audiences. Findings diverge on this point, however, with journalists increasingly discussing interactive opportunities and means through which journalism can develop towards a model that bears a closer resemblance to two-way communication as opposed to the traditional one-to-many form of mass communication.

The profession of journalism also now exists within a more competitive news marketplace when compared to 15 or 20 years ago when the bulk of news production research was conducted. There is now a plethora of television and radio channels, 24 hour news channels and of course the millions of potential news outlets that can be reached online. As a result, news organisations are struggling more than ever to retain and expand audiences and consider themselves to be operating within a ‘new age’: “We live in an age now where people use and access news very differently” (Mariita Eager, Editor, BBC). In part this is due to the fact that the public now has more opportunities to select and personalize their news consumption, a process which is aided by technology. The rise of online news and user-friendly news aggregators has enabled more choice for audiences: “The internet is more digestible. People want news when they want it. They have become more selective consumers” (Ben Rayner, Editor, ITV). Effectively, then, audiences are divided in terms of *how* they choose to consume news, *when* they choose to do so and

*what* content they seek. This division and varied consumption of media by different audience segments has meant that initial fears regarding the rise of online news and the potential demise of traditional television, newspaper or radio broadcasts have not come to fruition. Paul Hambleton (Executive Producer, CBC) discusses these initial fears and highlights the routine nature of traditional TV bulletins that continues to attract audiences:

we thought at a point that journalism was dead, you know, that tune in at 10 o'clock for the newscast thing, there was a while there where there was this feeling that that era was done because of the internet. That you could get a story anytime. Well actually people's lives are busy enough that people do enjoy routine enough that they need that kind of structure still, right?

Another reason for the continued success of traditional broadcasts relates to the nature of the content and the behaviours associated with consuming news: "there'll still be a large audience who want to sit back and see a produced story with all of the story elements and analysis and reaction" (Peter Kent, Deputy Editor, Global). Still, many other "news consumers no longer want to wait for traditional appointment television newscasts or the delivery of the morning newspaper or the afternoon newspaper" (Kent). Regardless of the typical consumption preference, breaking news items tend to break the mould, with desire for updates largely overpowering regular consumption patterns typically:

when the building collapses or the plane flies into the skyscraper they want to see that immediately and they want to be able to hit it from whatever PDAs they might have now. Or from their desktop at work or home. And to get updated, to have that story actually advance during the day. (Kent)

In turn, news organisations must ensure they are "constantly adapting [their] product to be where the consumer is" (Mark Sikstrom, Executive Producer, CTV Online). An organisation's website becomes increasingly important as a result. Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC) links survival with flexibility and places a lot of emphasis on websites: "a lot of the large organisations have realized that our reputation and our popularity and our growing importance certainly among young people is directly proportional to how successful we are with our websites." This adaptation is in part an outcome of experimentation, as Peter Kent (Deputy Editor, Global) explains: "it's not just news

anymore but we're sort of having to do some market experimentation to see 1) what news consumers want and 2) how they want it. And what they're willing to tolerate to get it."

Toleration, in this case, refers to the presence of advertisements – which ultimately underscores the underlying economic motivation for private news organisations to expand audiences. As David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) explains, "We need to sell advertising. And we sell advertising by attracting more people to our brand than someone else." Of course this financial dependency on advertisers leads to the potential for pressure to alter or altogether eliminate particular news items prior to transmission. Kent explains how this pressure can operate: "if a major sponsor does something which is controversial and it's covered, advertising can be affected. Either they threaten to pull it to silence whatever they don't like or they do pull it and that hurts the bottom line." Sean O'Shea (Investigative Reporter, Global) described a situation involving an alarm company that was a "huge advertiser" for Global News. While the focus of the story was not the alarm company, it did include a "negative comment" about them. As a result, "the advertiser warned us in advance, 'If you do this I will pull out of the advertising across Canada in every Global station' and they were true to their word, they pulled two and a half million dollars worth of advertising and, you know, I didn't suffer any repercussions out of that" (O'Shea). However, O'Shea goes on to say that such pressure from advertisers is likely more successful when an economic relationship is very valuable: "in small market stations and in many stations they don't want to do that. These advertiser revenues are very, very precious."

Economic survival through advertising is typically not the case for public news organisations since they receive funds from the government. As a result of this relationship, public organisations tend to consider themselves to be "more scrutinized than anyone else" (Kevin Backhurst, Controller, BBC News 24). Nevertheless, audiences remain just as important and an atmosphere of competition with private organisations is clearly present. For example, during observations in a CBC gallery, Ingrid, the Line-up Producer, announced, "CTV is doing a closet organiser story right now everyone. [And then sarcastically:] Scooped again." This was followed by much laughter as it was clear that a story about devices that could help organise closets was not deemed to be very

newsworthy and therefore CBC's coverage was likely outperforming CTV's. Some journalists working for public organisations, like Nicolas Spicer (Foreign Correspondent, CBC), feel "discouraged" by this competitive environment and call for change: "Screw the ratings. Just have the courage to do the job properly. Don't think that we have to compete with CTV, stop competing with private broadcasters. Be a public service broadcaster." From Spicer's perspective, public organisations are "failing if they read a single Nielson rating." Nevertheless, this competitive atmosphere and concern with ratings has a long history and was similarly described within previous research.

### 1.1 Judging Audience Needs

Despite these developments within the media environment more generally, journalists continue to make judgments of audience interest in traditional ways. As such, there is an absence of any systematic analyses of audiences. Similar to conclusions from previous research, Paul Hambleton (Executive Producer, CBC) spoke of informal inquiries as a means of judging audience interest:

I'm always curious to know what – I often ask people what are you interested in – what news story are you interested in. Just to find out what is the first thing that people say because I find that quite interesting because it's often not the lead story or the most important story but it's Boy George sweeping the streets in New York or something like that.

Apart from these small-scale attempts, journalists often make assumptions on behalf of their audience. For instance, during observations at Sky the Executive Producer was concerned about the potential boredom that too much political coverage would bring to audiences, commenting that too many of the headlines he saw on screen were 'too political.' Alternatively, journalists can also become aware of audience expectations and interest via research commissioned by their news organisation. In one case the 2005 CBC News Study was handed to the researcher. Paul Hambleton (Executive Producer, CBC) summarized the findings: "people are looking for, you know, a lot less politics, different kind of politics, they want to hear about family and social issues but they don't want serious things, they have to be entertained, it has to be a good story, it has to be well told." Yet despite doing "a lot of soul searching," Hambleton explains that "it's really difficult to get a whole lot of people to move at the same time." Other journalists

suggested that beyond a journalist's own discovery of audience expectations and commissioned research, the largest push for change trickles down from the top-level of their organisation. These decisions are "probably partly" related to findings from audience research; however Sean Mallen (Parliamentary Correspondent, Global) thinks "it's partly their own impression." He goes on to explain top-level attitudes towards political coverage: "they think people are cynical about politics and they think it's all bullshit. So yeah I think they feel that it relates less to the average viewer and too much guys in suits running for office in halls."

Beyond these traditional means of gaining insight into audiences, news websites now offer new ways to track audience interest in news stories. Online tools such as 'real-time stats' that indicate which stories are the 'most popular' and which are 'most emailed' can measure user behaviour. These cues may influence notions of newsworthiness over time especially since, as BBC Website Editor Steve Herrmann (2006) admits, "the up-to-the-minute rankings by region and section have proved slightly addictive to some of our journalists (and me)." Still, Herrmann (2006) declares that these statistics cannot impose upon editorial notions of "the most important and interesting news around the world" and BBC World News Editor Jon Williams (2006) agrees, referring to the information as "pieces of the jigsaw."<sup>82</sup> Other online tools such as *Technorati*<sup>83</sup> have directly impacted line-ups by enabling journalists to consider what is most popular within the blogosphere (Pearl 2006). Previous research indicated, mostly as a passing thought, that journalists could more actively seek out opinions. Perhaps through the use of these new media tools journalists could begin to improve their knowledge of audience needs and interest.

### *Linking Immediacy to Audience Expectations*

It was clear from findings discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 that immediacy – in the sense of demonstrating to the audience that the news organisation is *there* at the scene of the

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82 News organisations must employ caution as these statistics are composed of 'online users,' not television or radio users, and many are fundamentally flawed as they are self-fulfilling – online users are more likely to click on an item simply by seeing it listed in the 'most popular' section on the front page of the website.

83 *Technorati* is a blog indexing service that, according to its website, tracks 112.8 million blogs and over 250 million pieces of tagged social media (as of 6 April 2008). *BlogPulse* is another website that enables 'automated trend discovery' within the blogosphere.

event – has become increasingly valued in tandem with the technological advancements that have enabled ‘live’ coverage from more locations throughout the world. Along with these developments, most journalists have become convinced that audience expectations have altered along with the new landscape within which they work. Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC) highlights the “growing expectation” of audiences to have “an immediate connection with events as they unfold” and reveals the close link between technological developments, increased pressure to achieve immediacy and audience needs:

But I mean 5 years ago a lot of that would be unimaginable, it’s just quite amazing how we can communicate through video phones, through satellite phones, and I think that that’s created a variety of things. It’s created obviously a real sense of immediacy in terms of getting information, it’s created I think in the audience an expectation that these things can be accessed and watched and listened to with ease and I think it’s placed on the journalist who is in a sense the surrogate observer, the surrogate witness for the audience, a real pressure as to being able to report on a moment’s notice. In some cases incredibly complicated or incredibly powerful scenes and I think that in some ways I don’t think that we as a profession, so to speak, have necessarily caught up with it.

However, the creation of a sense of immediacy frequently goes beyond simply reporting an event as soon as possible. Immediacy is also created in the form of ensuring that a reporter or correspondent can transmit information and undertake interviews while being physically at the location of the event. Heather Hiscox (Presenter, CBC) stresses how audiences now expect this form of immediacy: “They expect that if there’s something going on there will be a television camera there, they won’t just hear it. They will be able to, you know, to see it.”

Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) links notions of the audience and the value placed on immediacy within the 24 hour news environment, suggesting that audiences will *take you seriously* if your organisation takes advantage of technological developments to secure lives and immediacy: “I do think now there’s an expectation for 24 hour news channels, when there’s a very, very big world event, you know, we are going to take you seriously when you’re presenting ‘live’ from the event itself.” Not only do journalists link this form of immediacy with audience loyalty, but a sense that audiences will trust a news organisation that is covering events from the associated location arose in conversations

with journalists. Heather Hiscox (Presenter, CBC) agreed that gaining trust is implicit and explained this connection: “we want ‘live,’ we want people to feel that we’re on top of everything that’s going on around the world. And if there’s something going on in the world they can count on this particular network.” The notion of trust is also linked to an organisation’s credibility with their audience, which is a topic that resurfaces within the complaints section in this chapter.

## 1.2 Interactivity

In contrast to the previous literature’s assessment of news production failing to incorporate genuine interaction and feedback, new technologies are increasingly adapted by news organisations in an effort to fill this gap. In 1987 Schlesinger had concluded that there is “no sense in which one can talk of a communication taking place which is truly alive to the needs of the news audience” (106). Today, the notion of communicating and interacting with audiences has certainly become more popular with journalists and the news organisations they work for.

Of course “there’s all sorts of challenges and issues and problems” but most journalists agree that “it’s a fantastic thing to deepen the relationship with the audience in that way” (Kevin Backhurst, Controller, BBC News 24). Therefore, some journalists applauded these transformations: “You don’t want it to remain the cold medium McLuhan called it, right. Keep everyone participating in the dialogue” (Derek Thacker, Director, CTV Ottawa). However, Alan Fryer (Investigative Reporter, CTV) argued that some news organisations remain cautious and therefore have yet to fully embrace opportunities to interact with audiences:

I think one of the things that we don’t do well, especially network news is we don’t interact with our viewers. I mean this is becoming an increasingly interactive world, right, where it’s not – you know, we always like to think of ourselves, it’s almost one-way communication, you know, we speak and you listen and then, you know, just shut up. But that’s not what people want anymore. They want to be able to interact, they want to have a say and blogs are one way of doing that. There are other ways but I don’t think we’re terribly advanced when it comes to recognizing that. I mean a lot of other people are but we’re slow and plodding and very cautious.

News organisations in the UK typically engaged with these interactive functions somewhat earlier than their Canadian counterparts. As such, UK journalists – especially those involved with online production – are quick to suggest that “the key word in all of this is interactive” (Mick McGlinchey, Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online). Similarly, Canadian online news now also encourages audiences to “react and tell us what you think of what we’re doing. You can even create, you can even send in content yourself” (Mark Sikstrom, Executive Producer, CTV Online). In this way UGC is tied to elements of interactivity and once again the accompanying view that audiences expect these developments and want “to play more of a role in reporting and telling stories” (Kevin Backhurst, Controller, BBC News 24).

While previous research maintained that the world of journalism was largely inaccessible to the average person, increasing interactivity appears to be having a transformative effect. One way in which interaction is emphasized within online production routines is through the identification of news items more likely to provoke discussions. Within the BBC, these items are deemed to be ‘talkers’ and produced with this in mind:

when we’re doing a story often now it’s not just what’s on the surface or just, you know, a headline and a couple paragraphs. We’ll be thinking – that’s a talker, how do we turn that into something that we could create an email forum on. Jack McConnell, the First Minister, said he won’t be supporting England in the World Cup, you know football, and he’ll support somebody else. And there might be a lot of people that’ll go, ‘He’s a British – a senior British politician – surely he should be supporting the only British team in it, which is England.’ ... They’ll be saying, ‘This is high treason you should be supporting England’ and there’s a lot of Scots who’ve got that traditional sort of adversarial attitude that’ll say, ‘Good on ‘em, come on Trinidad and Tobago.’ So it’s that kind of thought process that happens a lot of the time. (Mick McGlinchey, Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online)

Mark Sikstrom (Executive Producer, CTV Online) frames the motivation behind the initiation of professional journalist blogs in the same light, highlighting the interactive, communicative opportunities: “To allow your audience to interact. To contribute. To feel that they are being heard. To be part of a two-way communication, not a one-way communication.” In this way, “people are able to express their opinions so easily now ... [and] become part of the journalism” (Paul Hambleton, Executive Producer, CBC). Political news coverage in particular was deemed to be enhanced in this way. Even within general

news Trina Maus (Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario) would like to see her organisation make use of blogs more frequently, precisely for the comments from the public. Since the production of general news items is typically limited by time constraints, greater interaction could enhance stories post-transmission: “we only had a day to present this massive news story and we only got a small segment of Joe Public” but by enabling online comments “you’ve got a whole base of what exactly the community thinks” (Maus).

While the online medium clearly offers many more opportunities for interactivity, Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) points out that other forms of media are also capable: “We’re receiving interaction with our users whether they be by television, radio or online all of the time now.” Digital television offers interactive options, such as the active vote function on Sky or the BBC’s red button that enables extra viewing functions. News organisations also increasingly solicit questions from the public and incorporate them into news broadcasts as a means of enabling interactivity and allowing audiences to enter the production process:

*Eager:* The other thing is on 24 now we do a lot of, we pick up on a story, whether it’s pensions, child support, whatever, we’ll set up a minister. And they will come on and answer viewer emails on a subject. We’ve got John Hutton coming in to talk about pensions, send us your emails, send us your thoughts. We’ve got Kofi Annan –

*Green:* World TV with Kofi Annan next week and we’re going to put questions to him directly from users and viewers. (Mariita Eager, Editor, BBC; Nicola Green, UGC Hub Producer, BBC)

In this way emails or text messages sent in by the public have the ability to create “a conversation with our users” as opposed to more traditional, static coverage of an item:

Often, it happens very often now where we have a story, maybe a major issue, where that one person sends you an email or a text message and says, ‘This is my experience of it.’ That becomes part of the story, if you like, or they become part of the story. In some cases they become the story. (McGlinchey)

During the course of the Pope’s death and the installation of a successor, as well as during UK general elections, Sky “had someone just doing emails.” The Executive Producer stressed that Sky “wanted to build [audience responses] into the running order.”

Canadian news organisations largely lagged behind their counterparts in the UK: “That’d be cool if we could have some kind of interactive news where if you have breaking news, have someone monitoring email 24/7 but we don’t have that” (Trina Maus, Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario). However, the future appears to be geared towards greater interactivity. CBC’s website team explained that they want to increase UGC online since audiences “love it.”

Online audiences are also engaging with news organisations by correcting any potential spelling errors or concerns over phrasing. As such, John McQuacker (Manager, CBC Online) highlighted the more active nature of online audiences as opposed to what he conceives as the more passive receiver within traditional media:

the fascinating thing to me about the web is you write a news story and within minutes if there’s something wrong or just incorrect or they disagree with how it’s worded, you’ve got email – because we have ‘report a typo’ on all of our news sites, right so people just click on that, you know, fill out the form, hit submit and boom, you’ve got instant reaction. Now you never – on radio or TV you’d have to be so over the top to get people to stop doing what they’re doing to pick up a phone or to go to the web and write it.

Joan Ramsey (Copy Chief, CBC Online) suggested part of this public behaviour could also be in response to a feeling of “ownership” over the material as the audience increasingly becomes a part of news production.

## **2. Complaints**

Motivated audience members wishing to criticize or otherwise comment on news coverage have always found ways of doing so. In the past this typically consisted of written letters and phone calls. The crucial difference for the contemporary relationship between audiences and news organisations relates to both the ubiquity of new media and the general public’s increasingly social use of much of this technology. Not only has the delivery of complaints changed but also the ability of audience members to mobilize others has transformed via email mailing lists, blogs and video ‘evidence.’ The audience’s “genuine” and perhaps “more cynical way to respond” is “just incredibly different than it used to be” (Tony Burman, Editor in Chief, CBC). As a result, news organisations are facing

new realities: “we’re in this hyperventilating kind of stage of our lives, you know, people get very troublesome” (Burman).

However, it is not simply a matter of ingesting and determining whether to respond to audience feedback. Within the overarching climate of a more competitive news marketplace, news organisations are struggling to both gain and retain audiences. To do so, journalists argue that they must focus on remaining credible and accountable when mistakes are made and/or when the public exposes the mistake or any other biased coverage online. This section first considers the transformation of the volume and nature of complaints before examining the consequences of ‘Exposuregates’ for news organisations. Discussions with journalists about credibility and retaining audience trust are also covered here, along with the means through which news organisations are responding.

## **2.1 Campaigns, ‘Evidence’ and Blogs**

While written letters and phone calls remain the means of choice by some members of the audience, their choice of interaction has expanded to include email, text and an abundance of online options. CBC Ombudsman Vince Carlin was able to offer an interesting longitudinal perspective since he had worked in senior positions<sup>84</sup> at the CBC before leaving to become a professor for eight years, only to return in 2006 for the position of Ombudsman. To Carlin, the key developments he noticed upon his return were “the explosion of personal technology” and “the introduction of bloggers and the ability to capture and transmit very easily audio and video.” Considering the former, the change from regular post to email was accompanied by a greater volume of complaints: “before [it] would have been one or two people complaining often by mail, now the complaints are almost exclusively email” (Carlin). As Editor in Chief, Tony Burman (CBC) says he often arrives at his office to find “a hundred or a hundred and fifty emails protesting the use of a phrase in a report the night before.” The increased volume of complaints equate to “more work,” and reading “a lot of mail which is *nasty* and vicious”

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84 Carlin was the Head of National Television News, National Radio News, and Newsworld.

(Carlin). Nevertheless, Burman argued that the merit of the argument is more influential than the volume itself:

I don't think the quantity matters – you know if I get contrived phoney messages through some sort of swarming email swarming, I mean it really doesn't matter if I get 10 or if I get a thousand. It's not going to have any impact on what I feel except my degree of annoyance will be proportionally higher.

Many journalists see “the magic of email and the magic of campaigns” (email or blog-based) as a significant development because of their ability to mobilize audiences (Burman). Organisations that try to influence ‘like-minded’ people to email or otherwise contact news organisations regarding a particular issue have existed for some time, but the introduction of bloggers, combined with the technological ease of collecting ‘evidence’ and attracting visitors to this ‘evidence,’ has dramatically altered the landscape. As Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) says, “In the past we would get some feedback but I would just be like, ‘Ok...yeah’ and then get rid of them. Today it's completely different.”

Two issues are important here: audiences are being driven to act and ‘evidence’ is being used to encourage them to do so. While some journalists argued that “partisan interests” are a large force behind this development Burman insists that some of the people who complain are unlikely to have even read or seen the report at the centre of the controversy:

I remember one case where the majority came from some southern states – from Alabama and Georgia – and there's no conceivable way that these people saw the broadcast they were protesting but it was through a kind of an email campaign that I – I mean the joke I used to tell was I was hearing from people complaining about CBC's coverage, people who probably had not heard of Canada let alone the CBC and certainly had not seen or heard the report that they were allegedly so offended by.

However, the ability to obtain and create ‘evidence’ is now much easier and the likelihood that someone who is not within viewing distance might come across such material has increased. Derek Thacker (Director, CTV Ottawa) considered the online platform *YouTube* to be “just incredible” since it enables “evidence [to be] available to

millions.” Today it is generally very easy to record digital copies of television programmes and post segments onto *YouTube*, *Google Video*, or embed them on a blog, usually via one of these websites. Carlin explains how campaigns can therefore become much more precise since online materials including transcripts can be easily accessed:

The precision of the complaints, 10 years ago if you had seen something on The National, unless you happened to record it, you would have said, ‘Gee, I saw this thing and I think he said X and Y.’ Well now there’s no mistaking. You can find the transcripts for The National and you can view it in various ways. So the complaints can be detailed and precise.

Don Knox (Senior Director, CBC) and John Bainbridge were eager to demonstrate the impact of technology on news production by pointing out a recent incident whereby university student Stephen Taylor used his blog to craft a video<sup>85</sup> as a means of criticizing CBC’s coverage of the Conservative Party’s caucus and the resulting protest against Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s stance toward the Middle East during the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict. His video compared Christina Lawand’s report for CBC with CTV’s report of the same event, concluding that CBC showed bias towards Harper by taking his comments out of context. CBC’s report included a protester’s demands for the end to “burning children and killing [of] innocent people,” followed by Lawand’s statement that “Harper clearly wasn’t swayed,” and then Harper’s apparent ‘response’: “I’m not concerned or preoccupied in any way with reaction within individual communities. I think that reaction is very predictable.” CTV’s report involved a longer clip of Harper’s full response, revealing that it was in fact related to a question about increased support from the Jewish community and negative responses among some portions of the Arab community in Canada, not the protester’s demands made earlier in the day at a different location entirely. Vince Carlin (Ombudsman, CBC) notes how all of the complaints he received regarding the Lawand issue appeared to be initiated by Taylor’s video:

almost all of them made reference to the Stephen Taylor blog. And making the double reference to *YouTube* where they had posted the video not only of Lawand’s report but of the broader press interview with Harper and the

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85 See the blog entry here: <http://www.stephentaylor.ca/archives/000645.html>.

background. So it gave them fertile material. So people writing in, many of them had not actually seen the report on the air but they saw the blog and so wrote in.

The end result of these email or blog-based campaigns is sometimes simply frustration as more genuine feedback is overshadowed. Others feel that this heightened atmosphere has created more opportunities for the public to respond to issues within their communities in general. Sean O'Shea (Investigative Reporter, Global) suggests that complaining has become more democratic: "it's really democratized the ability to complain. Because you don't need to have a big ad budget to be able to complain about anything. You set up your own blog." He goes on to describe a story he did for Global's investigative programme based on a blogger who complained about a car dealership and the impact this had on the company:

I had one guy I did a story on who did this exact thing, he was an internet developer and he had a problem with Chrysler, he had a problem with his van, it started very small thing and what started from a complaint about the way his van was leaking and the treatment he got at the dealership, led to a huge blog that was updated regularly – very professional looking – and he had hundreds of thousands of hits every year and it really was the bane of Chrysler because, you know, this guy's information was widely read.

O'Shea describes how this type of activity is in stark contrast to the pre-internet and pre-blogging world: "used to be I mean you as a consumer would get angry, might write letters, might file a complaint, extreme circumstance somebody might drive their car over with a big sign on it – like a big lemon – and park it in front of the dealership."

The next section explores the impact of these types of activities on a larger scale where bloggers investigate and then expose an issue to the general public. The reactions of the news organisations that are involved become crucial if they intend to retain credibility.

## **2.2 Exposuregates and Remaining Credible**

News organisations have become the potential target of members of the public whose pervasive documentation and investigative behaviours lead to what may be called 'Exposuregates.' As a result, news organisations are increasingly reacting in ways that

they hope will retain the trust of their audience. In general, these developments relate to the nature of information flow. New technologies that enable pervasive documentation combined with the speed at which information can spread through the internet and the large audiences that can be attracted equate to the conditions under which image management becomes increasingly vital. Trina Maus (Video Journalist, CTV Southwestern Ontario) explains how both public figures and journalists “have to censor a lot of what [they] do because of the flow of information.” Maus pointed to the example<sup>86</sup> of US President Bush’s microphone going ‘live’ during the 2006 G8 conference in Russia which revealed a candid chat with former UK Prime Minister Blair:

Well normally that would just stay with that local news but because of the internet, boom! Because of our gateway systems, CNN threw that up on gateway, we could access that, every single news org. – wildfire, whereas before where there wasn’t this flow of information and technology to allow the flow of information, stuff like that wouldn’t happen.

However, the more influential developments relate not to ‘live’ microphones and unguarded chats but to the investigative actions of bloggers and their rolling impact on both public opinion and news organisations. Sean Mallen (Parliamentary Correspondent, Global) describes this impact in relation to American bloggers and candidates running for election:

There was a blog, a democratic party blog and it’s just a young boy who helped bring down, helped cost Joe Lieberman in Connecticut, the former Vice-Presidential candidate, helped cost him the Democratic nomination in the primary for when he was running for re-election in the Senate. So he lost the nomination; he ended up winning it as an independent anyway. But it was bloggers like this guy who thought that he wasn’t hard – strong enough – against the war, who helped turn people against him. So there’s no question of their influence.

Most of the influential actions of bloggers and subsequent discussions within the blogosphere have occurred in the United States. As Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC) points out, the same degree of influence from bloggers has yet to occur in many other regions of the world: “I don’t think a lot of blogs have the direct impact on political

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86 For a transcript of this conversation, see BBC News Online (2006)

activity that they would have in the States.” Other journalists, like David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV), are quick to point out that professional journalists are also in the business of exposing issues and impacting public opinion: “Everyone always throws up, ‘Oh but the bloggers discovered some, pulled down Mike Wallace on that George Bush thing ... or Rathergate, great good but, you know, there’s mainstream journalists that get paid to do that every day.”

Nevertheless, most journalists consider the rise of bloggers to operate as “a litmus test for mainstream journalism” in the sense of “introduc[ing] a new level of accountability into news” (Mark Sikstrom, Executive Producer, CTV Online). One famous example known as ‘Reutergate’ illustrates how bloggers can target mainstream media directly, as opposed to public figures. This example involved the alleged use of forged images by Reuters during its coverage of the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict. Adnan Hajj, a Lebanese freelance photographer, allegedly digitally manipulated extra plumes of smoke onto an image of the aftermath of an Israeli bombing raid on Beirut. In this case bloggers were instrumental in exposing the faked photo and garnering attention to the incident. Reuters CEO Tom Glocer acknowledges Charles Johnson of the *Little Green Footballs* blog<sup>87</sup> as the foremost player in this instance. Of course ‘Exposuregates’ are not necessarily neutral in intention, as some bloggers employed Reutergate as a means of undermining the fact that buildings *had* actually been bombed, which is essentially equivalent to the practices of established lobby groups that have always sought influence over the larger narrative of a conflict, even with the use of ‘old media.’

For mainstream news organisations, in the midst of pervasive documentation and the ease of online publishing, there is only one issue at stake: retaining credibility. As Richard Stursberg (Executive Vice-President, CBC) explains, credibility is absolutely vital to the survival of a news organisation: “if you find yourself in those circumstances it’s *just devastating*. ‘Cause you’re absolutely – the most important thing that you have is your credibility. There isn’t anything else.” In fact, Stursberg sees the growth of the

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87 Johnson is also claimed to be the impetus behind ‘Rathergate’ – another agenda-setting, citizen-based ‘report’ exposing the alleged errors in Dan Rather’s CBS report criticizing President Bush’s US National Guard service – along with the three lawyers who author the blog *Power Line*. See the ‘Reutergate’ blog entry here: [http://www.littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/?entry=21956\\_Reuters\\_Doctoring\\_Photos](http://www.littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/?entry=21956_Reuters_Doctoring_Photos).

information producing strata as an impetus for any mainstream news organisation to “reinvigorate the organisation with respect to fundamental news values.” In his opinion, audiences are finding it increasingly difficult to determine credibility in an age of such multiplicity of choices and therefore depend on news organisations to work hard to maintain their credibility:

I think people more and more, what they want is fair-minded, you know, sources that they can trust. That they can trust to try to get it right. In a fair-minded, objective way to get it right. And I think that people’s desire for that increases with this overwhelming, you know – all this blogging and spinning and PR and all the parties that want you to go their way.

As such, news organisations are now much more likely to react quickly when they are exposed for some ‘wrongdoing.’ Stursberg argues that in the past, corrections in newspapers tended to be buried and in small print: “In the past they would pretend that they weren’t wrong even when they were wrong or to hush up the fact or to make a little apology somewhere on pg B76.” In today’s media environment, Stursberg considers a swift, direct and public post-exposure reaction to be very important: “it’s so fundamental to the credibility and integrity of the news organisation. When we’re wrong we have to suck it up and say ‘*wrong*.’ ‘Sorry, we’ll try to do better.’” In line with this view, Reuters Editor Paul Holmes responded to the Reutergate claims that Hajj doctored images during an interview on BBC’s *Newsnight* (8 August 2006), commenting on the role of the blogosphere in these revelations:

I welcome, and Reuters welcomes, the scrutiny we come under from bloggers. We will consider criticism from any source and we will take it seriously. I think it has to be said, as well, that because of the blogging community, many of the more egregious breaches of journalistic ethics have been exposed. It makes the media much more accountable and much more transparent.

Moreover, the issue was also dealt with via professional journalist blogs, an outlet that increasingly appears poised to not only attract more audiences but showcase a semblance of ‘transparency’ as a means of securing trust. In one example, CEO of Reuters Tom Glocer (2006) took to his blog to describe the “soul-searching” his organisation went through during the aftermath of Hajj’s photos:

So when after 155 years of building up a reputation of trust, we found it challenged, we acted swiftly and directly.

I had seen what happened to other media organizations like the BBC, CBS or the New York Times, and I wanted none of that. Instead we moved quickly to admit the mistake, take disciplinary action, and reaffirm our commitment to the highest standards.

Reuters' post-exposure reactions clearly reflected their desire to re-establish trust with audiences. Similarly, Vince Carlin (Ombudsman, CBC) describes these new approaches to gaining trust: "I believe that to be credible we have to publish, we have to be out there and people have to see – we not only have to do the right thing we have to be seen to be doing the right thing." Carlin touches on a palpable point: to be *seen* to be doing the right thing. To Peter Kent (Deputy Editor, Global), professional journalist blogs do just that: "convince people that yes we're great people and you associate with us in this way then you'll buy our news information product because we're trusted."

While news organisations have always dealt with flak, more recently they are bombarded with complaints and tackling investigations from within the blogosphere – both of which are largely initiated by members of the public as opposed to the public relations industry or lobby groups. However, the final section looks more closely at the more traditional external pressures from governments and the public relations industry.

### **3. Government and PR Pressures**

Journalists have always been subject to external pressures, particularly in relation to broadcast news as it has frequently been a point of political control. These traditional pressures have certainly not disappeared as a result of new technologies. Governments have influenced the production process in varied ways; for instance via the economic dependency of public organisations, the decision to withhold information or issue publication bans or the attempt to control the spread of information within the context of conflict coverage.

Public organisations can be vulnerable to the notion that their independence is hampered by their economic relationship with the government and previous research provided

examples of why this vulnerability could be valid. Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) indicates that sections of the public tend to view the BBC in this way:

But we get that all the time – the British Broadcasting Corporation with the big, you know, we’ve got a big shield and all the rest of it. But we’re not. We’re not the government. We’re not anybody’s poodle. Unfortunately we find that out at cost on the occasion as well with Hutton and stuff and Iraq.

Canada’s counterpart, CBC, also contends with this issue. Paul Hambleton (Executive Producer, CBC) explains how coverage of politics becomes “tricky,” particularly when a political party does not favour the continued existence of their organisation:

The party that’s currently in power right now is on the record, well not the party, the leader – they are on record as musing that they would rather not have the CBC, right. So for us to be reporting on this party immediately raises the question of conflict of interest, right? Our survival depends on the Liberal swing and so we’ve always been tarred with being Liberal, probably for that reason. ‘Cause the Liberal government, the Liberals have always been more open to the CBC.

As previous research has also shown, in a more direct way, governments can interfere with news production by issuing embargos and publication bans to suppress coverage of events. The following is an example from an editorial meeting at CBC:

The bail hearing – it’s now one of the young people around the terror plot. Jamie is going to sit and listen but as usual we probably can’t say anything more than a piece of copy because of the publication ban.

However, some rules “do not always have to be followed,” as an Executive Producer at Sky explains in relation to an incident involving Tony Blair when discussing politics in a ‘private room’: “Blair was being hassled by questions and shown to be quite human at the end of his tether. Some media organisations would say, ‘Fuck it, put it on air’ if the piece was really good. Or they might say, ‘Oh ok, you said it was private.’” Ultimately, though, governments maintain many ways through which they can apply pressure. For instance, they can “slow you down” by making the process of obtaining visas particularly long or “call you last – which is as good as freezing you out” (Executive Producer, Sky). In other instances, censorship rules could prevent the transmission of material from abroad;

however, new technologies can sometimes resolve this issue. As Nigel Baker (Executive Director, APTN) remarks, “You also can transmit video over the internet or phone line so that skirts around the traditional uses of censorship.” Still, such actions could “undermine your long-term position,” however, “if you have a fantastic exclusive, then it is worth breaking all the rules” (Baker).

Clearly particular news items are more sensitive than others but the realm of conflict coverage is almost certain to guarantee careful consideration by governments involved in the crises. Lindsey Hilsum (International Editor and China Correspondent, Channel 4) highlights the issue of access in relation to coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: “the fact that the Israelis have built a bloody wall means that increasingly you need to use satellite.” As well, coverage is complicated by the fact that “the Israelis are pretty good at making your life difficult when they want to – you know, checkpoints, access and all the rest of it” (Paul Adams, Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24).

In general, the techniques through which government control has operated within the theatre of war and conflict have altered over the course of journalism’s history. Within the most recent Iraq War which began in 2003, journalists were embedded with the US and UK military. In this way, governments have been able to trump technology while maintaining control over coverage:

the key thing was our cameras [in Iraq] could have seen this but in fact because they were embedded they saw this. So they saw only what circumstances, I’ll put it as nicely as possible, circumstances permitted them to see. So you had this odd thing of a medium capable of blanket coverage of the world, from anywhere, seeing very little, both in the first Gulf war and in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. (Vince Carlin, Ombudsman, CBC)

However, as mentioned in Chapter 5, citizen journalist bloggers from within Iraq as well as the few unembedded reporters were able to provide coverage that was not put through military filters. When Alan Fryer (Investigative Reporter, CTV) was in Iraq he “didn’t want to be embedded” since “you’ve got to play by their rules, which I understand. It’s not fun and games, it’s a war.” Fryer goes on to explain how debilitating such rules can be:

when they lay down certain rules you've got to say, 'Yes, Sir' and you have no choice but it severely limits your ability to report on what's going on in the country I mean you're seeing things from one point of view. It's like looking through a straw and trying to give some broader context, you can't do it.

The theme of conflict coverage continues within the rest of this section, focusing specifically on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Apart from government control, external pressure originating within the public relations industry becomes particularly important while efforts to resist such pressure as a means of limiting its impact on production processes are just as vital. Finally, a frequent difficulty that arises within coverage of this particular conflict is the necessity of including contextual and historical information within reports as a means of aiding audience understanding, despite the time limitations that inhibit this practice. The question of whether the online medium should be adopted as a venue through which this information can be supplied is also considered.

### **3.1 Public Relations: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular is somewhat unique due to the large number of groups and individuals who are intensely invested in the outcome, whether it is a physical, emotional, political, or economic investment. As a result, news organisations tend to be carefully scrutinized by these groups and individuals and receive a large volume of complaints and other forms of flak in relation to their coverage. It is not simply one 'side' of the conflict that produces this response. In fact, the same news item can receive flak from groups and individuals who base themselves on opposing sides of the debate. For instance, in relation to the 2006 conflict that extended to include Lebanon, Vince Carlin (Ombudsman, CBC) remarked that CBC received "a lot": "Sometimes on the same report, accusing us of being rabidly pro-Israel and rabidly pro-Hezbollah." Previous research argued that this scenario is considered by journalists to signify 'empirical proof' of their impartiality. Complaints may centre on the contentious language of 'terrorism' – "the Israeli lobby has been on us for years, accosting me, 'How can you not call them terrorists?'" (Paul Hambleton, Executive Producer, CBC) – or relate to the production process itself. For example, even though CBC was "the only network in Canada [that] reported from the two capitals ... it still doesn't satisfy the Jewish lobby groups"

(Hambleton). Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC) argues that this process of dealing with flak and PR material is largely irrelevant, particularly for experienced journalists:

I think we're just conscious of the fact that in most cases one side or the other would probably have a greater mastery of how to get through to us and that's life. There's nothing wrong with that, you know, they just know how the game works and they may know my email address more readily than the other side. Again I think that many of us, and certainly in positions like mine, are experienced enough that we just basically, you know, hold that as being irrelevant, you know, like that's not really the issue.

The CBC was an interesting example within the sample because they were deemed to be “particularly hard hit by the Mid East issues” (Hambleton) and “CBC’s coverage has been called ‘pro-Palestinian’” (Richard Stursberg, Executive Vice-President, CBC). At the same time, the proportion of Jewish versus Arab employees at the CBC and their relative position within the hierarchy was arguably skewed: “The number of Jewish people who hold important posts at the CBC is absurd how many versus Arabs. Like we don’t have any Arabs who hold any position of any real authority at the CBC and we have many, you know, Jewish people who work here” (Hambleton). During interviews, responses to questions regarding journalist’s evaluations of the public relations efforts of either side revealed that top-level journalists were more likely to subscribe to one position while base-level journalists subscribed to the opposing position. Therefore, top-level journalists were more likely to argue that the PR operations of the Palestinians were more effective:

The Palestinians have been more successful in their public relations than Israel ... if you look at the Jewish state over the last 20-25 years and you add up what the general current of public opinion is there it seems to me in Europe, for example, the Palestinians have won it hands down – hands down! That’s a measure of success of public relations. Obviously they’re doing a better job – despite their great difficulties. (Richard Stursberg, Executive Vice-President, CBC)

However, these comments confuse what people believe with the quality of public relations efforts. Alternatively, the base-level employees considered the Israelis to be more effective: “Yeah the Israeli side. They’re much much much better. For sure. Yeah” (Nicolas Spicer, Foreign Correspondent, CBC). Similarly, Paul Hambleton (Executive

Producer, CBC) described the pressure received from the Israelis as one of the “biggest challenges” faced by journalists:

Oh the Israelis are far better. At PR? Oh my god, oh yeah. They're so much better organised. They've recognised the power of public relations in a way that most people don't understand and I would say like I don't think there is a lobby group that's more powerful than the Israeli lobby group.

Journalists from other organisations largely tended to argue that the Israelis were more effective at PR on account of their better access to resources, higher level of sophistication and organisation and superior use of PR techniques. For instance, Lindsey Hilsum (International Editor and China Correspondent, Channel 4) considered the Israeli PR machine to be “much more sophisticated” and Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) claimed they are “far more organised.” Adams argued that “there's no competition” since individuals and groups that promote the Israeli agenda are “infinitely more effective.”

Alan Fryer (Investigative Reporter, CTV) added further nuance to this issue, considering the distinction between resources and effectiveness: “I think in terms of resources the Israelis win hands down I mean they've got a very sophisticated PR machine but in terms of effectiveness the Palestinians beat 'em every time.” For Fryer, effectiveness relates to images and their visual impact:

There's no question about it in terms of PR because in the end, you know, look these are two people who've been at war, you know, since 1948, right. And it's an awful situation on both sides but in the end the Palestinians are worse off and in the end, you know, pictures of bleeding, crying Palestinian babies are gonna trump, you know, a rocket that landed in a field in an Israeli settlement every time.

The specific techniques used by each group influence their effectiveness. Fryer further explains his point regarding images in relation to the behaviours of Arabs within the Iraqi context: “the Arabs especially are very good at doing that. I mean when I was in Baghdad and something went off somewhere, the first thing they'd do is, you know, bring you around to the morgue and show you pictures of mutilated bodies and crying widows ... It's great television, right?” On the other hand, Israeli techniques involving “sharply

dressed Israeli PR flak saying that we're acting reasonably and with restraint" were considered less effective by Fryer. Alternatively, Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) tends to view these same PR techniques by the Israelis as effective measures since they are also relentless and determined:

at times when they know that they're likely to be criticized, rather than just retreating into a shell and kind of holding everyone at arm's length they embrace the media, they give access, they give pictures, they have spokespeople. And they just keep it up, relentless. Because they know that at the end of the day some of what they've had to say gets across. Just by sheer will power and the amount of time and resources they devote to it they know that some of the message will get home.

While Israel sends "their best, most eloquent ministers around the world," Adams points to the "severe logistical difficulties in getting [Palestinian spokespeople] where they need to be":

there's now a studio for example in Ramallah where we get Palestinian officials to come and be 'live' in front of the camera. Before that was very difficult, you had to try and, either you'd send a truck to Ramallah with all the delays that are inherent with that or you try to convince one of them to come through to the Jerusalem studio but they might not get in. And this has a serious effect on the amount of air time we are able to give to the other side.

Along with this difficulty, language and passivity represent other major reasons for their ineffectiveness: "they have a much lower quotient of English speaking people. ... They've [Fatah] got quite a good office here but they're not exactly proactive" (Adams). A final issue relates to the volume of PR material that is sent to journalists. Adams argued that more material comes from the Israelis:

I would say about a 100 times more from the Israelis. ... Actually that's not quite true, but that's, I mean I get tons – I'm on the Jerusalem Bureau's mailing list ... And it's just a massive amount of material. Digests of Israeli media translated into English, likewise with Arab media, human rights organisations, secular groups, the actual government itself.

Responding to interview questions regarding the impact of technological developments on public relations efforts, it became clear that not only do PR professionals increasingly use email but mobile phones are another avenue through which material can be

delivered: “guys who go to Israel and give their cell phone numbers to the Israeli information ministry get SMS messages like non-stop for years. ... Because they’re organised ... send and bang, they’ve got 500 foreign correspondents knowing this and that and how to think” (Nicolas Spicer, Foreign Correspondent, CBC).

While journalists vary with respect to their opinions towards the effectiveness of PR within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the more critical issue is how they deal with the pressure they are under.

### *Resisting Pressure*

While it is clear that journalists reporting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict feel pressure as a result of the extensive networks of individuals and groups who are invested in the conflict, what is not clear is the way in which journalists react under these circumstances. When the issue of attempting to maintain objectivity, balance and fairness when producing a story was covered in Chapter 7 it became apparent that journalists can employ their autonomy within storywriting to ensure that a particular message is transmitted.

David Akin (Parliamentary Correspondent, CTV) recalled a story he filed in France about the Canadian Prime Minister’s comments regarding the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war. At the time, Harper had used the “fairly loaded” words “measured response from Israel.” In relation to the other political figures Harper was meeting, it was clear that his comments placed him in a different position from former UK Prime Minister Blair who “was sort of trying to be in the middle – bad on both sides” and one that was further right than US President Bush. Akin explains that the decision by Harper to “come quite firmly down on the side of Israel” was further convoluted when “2 days later [Israel’s actions] kill[ed] 4 Canadians from the ‘measured response’ that were just ‘caught in the crossfire.’” Since CTV was reporting from Lebanon and Damascus as well, Akin saw his role as one that largely revolved around letting Harper speak for himself since within this context, the audience would likely understand the relative position of Harper’s comments: “you just, get out of the way and let the guy talk because what he said will give our viewers some of the story.” In this situation, there was not a great deal of external pressure to resist since

Akin's approach led him to depend on direct quotes from the figures who were involved and chose not to actively offer further clarification. In this way he was employing the technique of letting the 'facts' speak for themselves, which was one means of attempting to achieve a sense of objectivity mentioned within previous research.

However, in many circumstances relating to coverage of this conflict journalists are faced with more difficult choices relating to the information they are receiving, their own direct experience of the situation and the knowledge that their coverage will be watched closely by flak-producing groups. Both Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) and Lindsey Hilsum (International Editor and China Correspondent, Channel 4) stressed the need for journalists to resist the pressure they are under. Hilsum argues that "you just have to be clear with yourself that you're not going to be intimidated. ... part of your skill as a journalist must be to resist that pressure. And just to keep going and to constantly stand back and think, 'Well what do I really think is going on?'" The perspective advocated by Adams inherently reveals a degree of autonomy that journalists have the potential to access if they so wish:

My view is that if you are sent somewhere and you're a correspondent and you see enough and you learn enough you're going to start to reach your own conclusions. And if at that point you're still saying, 'On the one hand the Palestinians say this and on the other hand the Israelis say that' then frankly you're completely wasting your time and your viewers' time. I think there comes a time when you start actually saying, 'This is what is true.' Not always but sometimes. Call a spade a spade. Don't be afraid – because it is the part of the world that is most scrutinized ... I just think you shouldn't be intimidated by the knowledge that you're being watched. Have the courage of your convictions and occasionally say what is right and wrong. Let the viewers know that you've seen something that you think is shocking.

By highlighting the issue of not being 'afraid' Adams demonstrates that even within traditional constraints of news production and while enduring intense external pressures, at least in theory there is a level of autonomy that journalists can access while producing stories about this conflict.

### 3.2 Lack of Context and History

One of the most common complaints regarding broadcast news is a perennial lack of context and history, which in turn results in a diminished ability for audiences to understand news events. This general issue was highlighted within the aforementioned 2005 CBC News Study wherein audiences expressed frustration at the compression of international coverage, hoping for more context, background and history that could increase their understanding. Coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular has been shown to exhibit the same difficulties. For instance, in April 2006 a report was released by the Independent Panel for the BBC Governors which was a review of the impartiality of BBC coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The report encouraged the BBC to “remedy the well attested incomprehension of the generality of viewers and listeners” (BBC Governors 2006: 7; see also Philo and Berry 2004). Journalists suggested that it is “a valid criticism” that news organisations overestimate and make assumptions about the “level of sophistication” of viewers (Morning Show Unit, CBC). In fact, there are some occasions where journalists themselves have difficulty comprehending the issues involved in a story:

I know that there’s stories we’ve talked about in our story meetings and in our newsrooms where even us, we don’t fully understand it. And we’re like, ‘Wait a second, we need further clarification.’ We clarify it but then we go on, we present the story as a here you go. And I know that viewers don’t fully understand it. (Morning Show Unit, CBC)

Using coverage of an AIDS conference as an example, Paul Hambleton (Executive Producer, CBC) suggested that he and his team overestimate interest while underestimating “how smart people are.” This can lead to “really stupid reports about what’s going on, like really basic stuff” yet also at times a far too serious approach where reports become “really intellectual,” which is ultimately detrimental to the news value that organisations “have to be entertaining” (Hambleton). Despite these difficulties, on at least one occasion during observations it was clear that the Executive Producer attempted to ensure that some measure of explanation was included for the sake of the audience in relation to the 2006 Israeli-Lebanon conflict and the status of Hezbollah: “That’s all I’m asking. I just think that most people would still find this ... like a jarring thing” (Editorial Meeting, CBC).

However, attempts to resolve the persisting lack of context and history are derailed in multiple ways, through: time constraints, the nature of TV and assumptions about audience attention spans, which is linked to the resulting top-down impulse to ensure base-level journalists produce coverage that will appeal to audiences.

### *Time Constraints and the Nature of TV*

The obstacle most frequently cited by journalists was time constraints, which was also a common complaint within previous research. First of all, general news reporters typically do not have much time to produce a story within the context of one news day: “for instance I was doing a story yesterday where I had to drive 3 hours to get there to do it and then I had ten minutes to turn it around to get it onto a particular programme” (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). Mick McGlinchey (Assistant Editor, BBC Scotland Online) points to structural difficulties relating to institution-driven news which journalists also face on a day-to-day basis: “we really would like to do more on this but hang on a second, you know, John Reid is just going to come out of the Home Office and he’s going to give us a statement ‘live’ about problems there with asylum seekers.”

Secondly, the time available for each news item and interview within the final bulletin is typically fixed: “when we’re telling a news story and we have an item it’s not longer than 2 minutes right. We never do anything longer than 2 minutes. Our interviews are only supposed to be 4 minutes long” (Morning Show Unit, CBC). While demonstrating the issue on-screen, McGlinchey describes how each second becomes critical for broadcast news:

I’ll show you a running order for television news, everything is timed, wordage is timed. If I’m producing sort of 30, well 3 paragraphs of text it’s probably, you know, ‘round about 30 seconds worth. It’s gold dust, you know, in terms of a television news broadcast, everything has to be absolutely to the nth second.

On the other hand, some bulletins are designed to provide more space for news items. For instance, Channel 4’s broadcast is an hour long as opposed to the average 30 minute bulletin.

Some journalists pointed to the “nature of the beast” (Morning Show Unit, CBC), implying that television as a medium is the underlying cause of the lack of context and history. Television requires images and this necessity directs production processes, as Lindsey Hilsum (International Editor and China Correspondent, Channel 4) explains: “if you’ve got more pictures you can explain more because you’ve got more pictures to talk over – and that is the perennial problem with television.” As well, previous research indicated that inherent within images is a ‘holding power’ that can retain audiences. Nicolas Spicer (Foreign Correspondent, CBC) had begun to come to the conclusion that television itself is perhaps simply not the right medium for suitable explanations and the facilitation of audience understanding:

I think it’s just kind of like news movies. Like newsotainment. It’s kinda like motion and pictures and maybe that’s the way it should be. Maybe the visual medium doesn’t really impart as much information as it should, I think we’re better off just going on the internet and reading.

Alternatively, when television is compared to radio, time constraints become more lax since audiences are deemed to consume information differently:

If we were doing radio I think people tend to listen to radio much longer and it involves sort of an active imagination, you can tell a story and people stay with them longer. ... our morning radio show on CBC like The Current. They do 8 or 9 minute interviews. Like if we tried to do that it’d have to be one hell of an interesting person for people to stick with us in the morning for 8 minutes on television. (Morning Show Unit, CBC)

It is clear that assumptions regarding audience interest and attention spans underlie these explanations.

### *Audience Attention Spans*

Journalists fear that the inclusion of context and history in every news item could become tedious for the regular viewer despite being important for the occasional viewer. A CBC journalist describes this in relation to coverage of the 2006 Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

Wasn’t that a whole discussion that we had when that Israeli thing was happening? Should we go and explain what’s happening? But then you have

to go and explain every day 'cause what if the person who doesn't understand wasn't watching on Monday morning at 8 o'clock? So everyday you have to go and explain it to everyone? (Morning Show Unit, CBC)

These sentiments also relate to previous research findings that journalists consider audiences to have a very limited attention span: 20 seconds. Asking Lindsey Hilsum (International Editor and China Correspondent, Channel 4) if it would ever be feasible to include a news item dedicated to the provision of context and history prompted her to highlight the importance of finding a 'peg' or 'angle':

I would never report on the state of the conflict up until now because it's incredibly boring. I would always have to have a news story, a peg, an angle and that's not changed. I mean the BBC always used to do, you know, 'the state of whatever' – that is a very boring way of reporting the news. And so we've tried to get away from it because it's so dull. You have to be coming at things in a way to engage your viewers or readers.

Nevertheless, as previous research on this conflict has shown, audience interest will increase when their understanding of the conflict increases.

### *Top-Down Pressure*

As discussed in Chapter 7, news production incorporates the decisions and wishes of top-level journalists either via explicit directions and rules or the trickle-down effect which typically involves 'guidance' metered out by mid-level journalists to the base-level. Nicolas Spicer (Foreign Correspondent, CBC) provided an example of this process whereby CBC journalists are encouraged to write 'bed-time stories' that focus on the 'characters' in the story and follow a simplistic narrative:

The thing that they're telling us to do now in TV journalism is not so much to go for complexity or density or what's the word I'm looking for – context – they want stories about people, people we care about. Give us characters we can engage with emotionally. They want us to tell bed-time stories.

According to Spicer, the likely reason for the promotion of drama and character development is the desire for high ratings: "Because, I don't know why. They think that's the way to get rates." This encouragement from above relates to previous research that

demonstrated that news organisations seek ‘human interest’ elements and stories that appear in a narrative form, both of which are deemed to draw in audiences. However, the consequence of this top-down pressure is a lack of context and history and a degradation of audience understanding:

I do find the emphasis on, you know, give me a character, tell me a story, we care about a story, give me some emotions and don't get into complicated details, puts the journalist in a situation where it's getting increasingly difficult to fulfil the duty to inform and to instruct. To provide context about history and the intellectual tools he or she needs to make informed decisions in the Canadian democracy. (Spicer)

Spicer goes on to relate the issue to the Middle East conflict and the damage the lack of audience understanding could have on the ability of citizens to participate in foreign policy decisions:

I don't know what they're going to do with bed-time stories when they're debating about, you know, whether we send troops to Lebanon or not when all they get is, oh, you know, so-and-so was so moved, so-and-so was moved too – yeah but when did this all begin? Like does anybody have a date in their mind? What happened in 1982? Or 67. Is that too much detail? Like almost I think it is, it's too much.

Instead of providing context and history to audiences, journalists are encouraged to “be a star” by ensuring that news stories are “memorable” and conflict is generated, which may mean that news production is “getting closer and closer to reality TV” (Spicer). In fact, the previous example regarding the Lawand report and the resulting exposure by blogger Stephen Taylor was also placed within the constraints of ‘bed-time stories’ by Spicer. He suggests that these top-down pressures inevitably lead journalists to aim for simplicity, which is what may have led to Lawand's problematic report:

Well you should say in answer to a reporter's question later, that's honest. But it doesn't work in a bed-time story. The reporter's question later – but that's too complicated. It's gotta be two people, it's gotta be, you know. And I can just hear people saying, you know, why are you introducing this extra character, it's too complicated. And it's not necessarily to manipulate, it's just these pressures, you know, to simplify.

Desire for coverage of two distinct sides of an event is also reminiscent of Bourdieu's (1998) study of television production values. Overall, these top-down pressures can restrict audience understanding.

### *Solutions: Go Online?*

One solution that has been suggested to deal with the lack of context and history in television broadcasts is to direct audiences to further analysis and information contained within the news organisation's website. For instance, the Independent Panel that reviewed BBC coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict offered the following recommendation:

**We recommend the BBC should make purposive, and not merely reactive, efforts to explain the complexities of the conflict** in the round, including the marked disparity between the positions of the two sides, and to overcome the high level of incomprehension among the audience. BBC News viewers and listeners could be directed to the background and analysis pages on the BBC website in trails after transmission of major news reports. (BBC Governors 2006: 9, original bold)

However, interview questions that asked for journalists' opinions of this recommendation revealed that some journalists did not consider it to be very useful. For instance, Paul Adams (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, BBC News 24) responds, "I personally think that's a cheap solution." Others felt that despite the value of their website, only those audiences who are particularly interested would be likely to use the resource:

it's unrealistic to have people say, 'For more information go here.' 'Cause it really is in-depth and it's a lot of reading and I just don't think that a lot of people are going to – every time there's a new conflict that comes up they're going to study it. So I don't think it's all that helpful unless people are really interested. (Morning Show Unit, CBC)

Still, it must be noted that the nature of the online medium offers two important elements: unlimited space and hyperlinks. As such, the principal obstacle for television – time constraints – is effectively eliminated: "There's no 'Oh we ran out of space, I have to cut your story.' We are limitless. We have enough space as we can use" (Joan Ramsey, Copy Chief, CBC Online). Kevin Backhurst (Controller, BBC News 24) also highlights this

advantage: “the website is a really powerful tool, you know, the BBC’s Middle East website is fantastic and it’s more information you could ever hope to give on any, certainly on a news bulletin, even on 24 hour news.” Also, the use of hyperlinks offers online audiences a wealth of information and options that they can employ within their own investigation of news:

So we’ll do the story, we’ll provide more quotes, more information, more background, we’ll update the story regularly as it develops. Plus we offer them all of the joys of broadcast. If you want to see someone’s report on this story you click the spot there, you want to hear this report on the story click the spot. (Ramsey)

Apart from the online medium, alternative solutions are also increasingly available as a result of new technologies. For instance, as mentioned earlier, the rise of digital television has offered new opportunities: “There is increasing use of the ‘press the red button on your remote for more information’ technique” (General Assignment Reporter, BBC Scotland). During observations at Sky this technique was used when covering President Bush’s visit to Latvia: “it covers those who say, ‘Oh you didn’t cover this political event or that one’ – you can cover a bit and have this option available” (Executive Producer, Sky). Additionally, the solicitation of UGC has also been employed as a means of providing opportunities for further understanding. The following CBC journalist describes this solution in relation to the 2006 Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

But I think you came up with a really good solution, on one week near the beginning of the war we were asking people to write in their questions and then on the Friday they had like a resident expert come in and answer people’s questions. (Morning Show Unit, CBC)

In general, then, the problem of audience understanding persists for those who continue to use television as their main source of information and do not play an active role by providing UGC or pressing the ‘red button.’

#### **4. Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to examine issues relating to external pressures that journalists face from audiences, governments and the public relations industry. Audiences

in particular offered an important point of departure since news organisations are currently struggling to keep up with both technological developments and shifting audience behaviours. While the introduction of online news into the already over-crowded news marketplace did not eliminate audiences for traditional forms of media, audience use of new technologies more generally and the opportunities provided by these developments have led to demands for increased interactivity and deeper relationships with audiences. Canada's news organisations were lagging behind progression found in the UK, but both countries offered a context within which journalists recognised the necessity of adaptation. Furthermore, news organisations are grappling with a much larger volume of complaints from audiences, many of which are driven by email and blog-based campaigns complete with easily accessible 'evidence.' Post-exposure responses by news organisations have become the focus of attention, with journalists slowly recognizing the value of direct, open and immediate communication. Professional journalist blogs are gradually becoming an important venue through which such communication and semblance of transparency can be generated. When credibility is at stake and audiences are fragmented and limited, engagement and the provision of space for interactivity appears to be the only feasible solution.

Another sphere through which external pressure is applied relates to governments and the public relations industry. These issues were largely considered in relation to what is often considered the most scrutinized conflict in the world: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While governments employ various means to control information, the public relations industry produces material en masse and any other interested parties produce flak. While both 'sides' of the conflict make an effort to influence media coverage, Israel and 'its friends' were more often seen as acting more effectively. This is a result of resources, sophistication and organisation and the 'relentless' use of varied techniques. However, the crucial point relates to the manner in which base-level journalists can resist such pressures. Some journalists stressed that journalists should not allow fear to be an obstacle but instead exercise the autonomy they have at their disposal. Conflict coverage in general is fraught with problems that relate to audience understanding. A lack of contextual and historical detail has frequently been found within mainstream news coverage. The medium of television presents various obstacles that largely revolve around time constraints but also relate to assumptions about audience attention spans.

On this latter point, top-down 'guidance' tends to constrain base-level journalists by encouraging simplified, narrative storytelling. The online medium has been offered as a means of resolving the deficit in context and history and the resulting lack of understanding by audiences. The main reasons for this relate to the boundless nature of the internet and the ability to incorporate hyperlinks and therefore a greater volume of material for audiences to peruse. However, it may be that the only audiences who take the time to explore these resources are the same ones who would have sought out contextual and historical factors on their own.

As this is the last of the results chapters, the next and final chapter offers a deeper analysis of the findings of this research project and presents the final conclusions. The discussion focuses on three main elements explored within this research project: new technologies, autonomy of base-level journalists and traditional constraints enforced by mid- and top-level journalists.

## **Chapter 9:**

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The aim of this chapter is to summarize the research findings by highlighting the specific locations within the news production process where the introduction of new technologies has had a significant impact on the daily routines of journalists. This impact is examined in reference to two aspects: autonomous practice and constraining factors. The former aspect reflects the underlying interest of this research project and the latter represents the focal point of past production studies. While the introduction of new technologies is the subject of evaluation, this should not suggest that the direction of causation lies with new technologies themselves. Instead, the ways in which particular journalists use new technologies, ongoing top-down organisational-level adaptations to the changing media environment and shifting public behaviours are responsible for the developments highlighted here.

A model has been devised to represent these findings, exploring the points at which technology, autonomy and constraints operate within the production process. As a means of highlighting these three central issues, it has been named the TAC model (Figure 1 below). After providing a general description, there is a section explaining the position of the phases of news production within the model. Following this, the relationship between the location of the production phases in the model and their associated level of autonomy and constraints is explored. To do so, reference is made to a theoretical autonomy-constraint ratio which acts as an indicator of the ideal-typical ratio that can be associated with particular phases of news production. The ratio provides a useful means through which further analysis of the technology-autonomy-constraint relationship is conducted.

At the end of the chapter, the TAC model and final conclusions of this research project are discussed in relation to theoretical debates derived from the initial literature review,

indicating where departures and progressions have been made. Finally, implications for future research are explored.

## 1. Description of the Model

At the centre of the TAC model is a triangle, which is meant to embody the inner structure of news organisations. Three hierarchical levels – top, mid and base – broadly separate the varying job positions, as originally described in the methodology chapter. Two arrows pointing downwards demonstrate how organisational norms and values tend to ‘trickle-down’ the hierarchy. The triangle remains relatively closed off from the surrounding media environment with the exception of the news organisation’s vital relationship with the information-producing strata of society. This strata is largely made up of the traditional set of sources (news agencies, other news organisations, official sources, etc.) while the contemporary set of sources, or the ‘new public’ (i.e. citizen journalists, bloggers and online comments), makes up a much smaller proportion of sources used during news production. The pathways leading from each set of sources to the news organisation (and vice-versa) are of different widths to indicate this difference. Members of the generalized audience slide in and out of the confines of the new public (becoming citizen journalists or interacting on news websites and professional journalist blogs) and are increasingly encouraged to do so by news organisations (via UGC solicitation and expanded interactive opportunities). The dotted line between the generalized audience and the new public represents this movement and also signifies a feedback loop. When members of the generalized audience become part of the new public – for any length of time – and their activities engage *directly* with a news organisation, they are using the feedback loop and the pathway from the new public to re-enter the news organisation. These activities may generate new story ideas, assist newsgathering or simply enable audiences to feel that they are interacting. Members of the new public also produce information that is posted on blogs and websites without the aim of sending it to news organisations. When news organisations use the pathway in the other direction they are intentionally and actively accessing this production. In this situation, activities of the new public are engaging *indirectly* with news organisations. Finally, the pathway leading from the news organisation to the generalized audience represents the transmission of news output. While broadcast news is the central focus of

this research, other forms of output indirectly incorporated into the sample (e.g. radio and online) are also included here. News organisations are increasingly using the transmission pathway in new ways via their websites and professional journalist blogs. In this way, there is an attempt at communication that begins to resemble a limited form of a two-way dialogue that has developed as a means of retaining increasingly fragmented audiences who seek credibility.

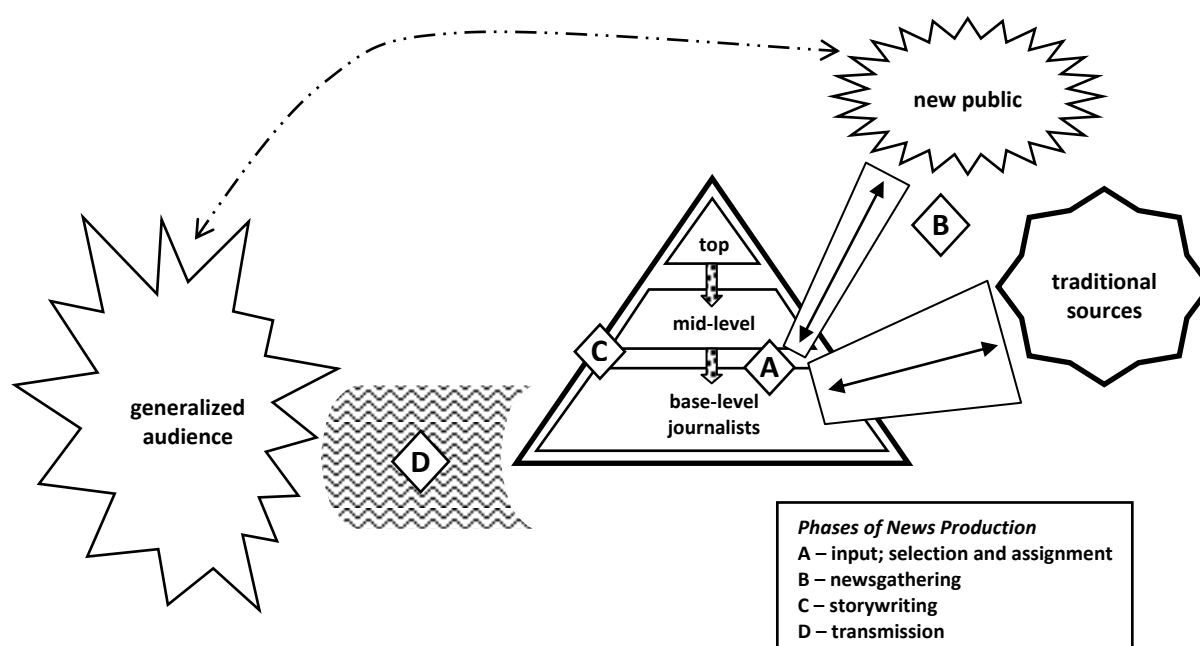


Figure 1: TAC Model of News Production

## 2. Phases of News Production

The phases of news production are displayed in the legend box and refer to the four letters appearing in the model. Indicated by the letter 'A,' the input phase is merged with the selection and assignment phase since the former is ultimately dependent upon and feeds into the latter. Also, both phases are located at the point at which information from the new public and traditional sources enters the news organisation. The 'A' diamond overlaps both mid- and base-level journalists since each group collects information during the input phase and is involved in the selection and assignment phase. The newsgathering phase is represented by the letter 'B' and is located at the opposite end of the pathways leading between the new public, traditional sources and the news organisation itself. Base-level journalists are active during this phase as they gather further information for their assigned story; both contemporary and traditional sources can be contacted here.

The next phase is storywriting, which generally involves a period of time where the base-level journalist pieces a news item together in preparation for broadcast or publication. However, news production does not always follow such a strictly linear sequence; for instance, a journalist may begin planning storywriting during the newsgathering phase or be asked to provide a 'live' report, effectively combining storywriting with transmission to varying degrees depending on the particular context. Therefore, the letter 'C' is placed closer to the transmission phase as a reflection of this potential for non-linearity. The 'C' diamond overlaps with mid-level journalists since interactions with superiors occur during the storywriting phase as a means of editing or otherwise approving the news item before transmission. The final phase (represented by the letter 'D') symbolizes transmission, largely in the form of televised broadcast or online publication.

### 3. Autonomy-Constraint Ratio

Another feature of the model is the relationship between the location of the production phases and the associated autonomy-constraint ratio. A position closer to the bottom of the model is related to a low autonomy-constraint ratio – in other words, a low potential for autonomy and high potential for constraint – while a position closer to the top of the model is related to a high autonomy-constraint ratio – high potential for autonomy and low potential for constraint. The middle of the model is related to a balanced autonomy-constraint ratio. This theoretical ratio represents ideal-typical representations of the various phases of news production. Adopting Weber's Ideal Type theory, as expounded by Cahnman (1965: 269), the concept of the ratio can be deemed "an accentuation, or enhancement (*Steigerung*), of actually existing elements of reality ... to the point of their fullest potentiality." Therefore, the ratio is not meant to be verifiable in each and every instance but instead represents the potential inherent within each phase as a means of enhancing current understanding of the news production process.

The three variants of the autonomy-constraint ratio demonstrate the ideal-typical environment within which base-level journalists operate. This environment is made up of a combination of: (a) the autonomous practices base-level journalists can engage in as a means of exerting control over news content they produce; and (b) the constraining factors that steer news content towards attitudes, values and decisions expressed by mid-

level journalists (who intermittently act as proxies of top-level journalists). Since traditional constraints operating either externally or internally (via mid- and top-level journalists) have largely withstood the test of time, it is the activities of base-level journalists, who are most directly engaged with production of particular news items, that are most significant here. In practice autonomy takes on many different forms but is generally concerned with the control that base-level journalists have over their own work. While autonomy does not necessarily translate into an amplified relationship with the new public, it is assumed that base-level journalists would opt to engage with the variety of voices that exist outside of the traditional realm as a means of operating outside of conventional constraints. It is also assumed that journalists are typically interested in enhancing their output.

#### **4. Analysis Using the TAC Model and Ratio**

New technologies have influenced news production within three spheres: in the newsroom, in the field and in the hands of the public. Each sphere interacts with the phases of news production and each phase operates in conjunction with some element of new technology. The most observable locations at which new technologies have an impact are within the newsgathering and transmission processes. Research has been completely transformed and the accessibility of the contemporary set of sources, or new public, has increased dramatically while transmission technologies have advanced to enable 'live' broadcasts from virtually anywhere in the world. New technologies have also influenced the intake process but have not had much impact on the selection and assignment phase apart from any latent influence on news values. Intake has been influenced by the potential accessibility of contemporary sources to journalists (and vice-versa) and, perhaps more significant within this phase, the transfer to electronic reception of news agency feeds. As well, the storywriting phase has been impacted by server technologies and desktop publishing, along with non-linear editing. In addition to the phases of production, new developments within the relationship between the audience and news organisations have been facilitated by new technologies. The promotion of interactivity, the amplification of complaints (especially via blogs and emails) and an expansion of the notion of a two-way dialogue by obliging media organisations to seek new ways of retaining credibility are some of the outcomes of this

developing relationship. However, what is of principal importance is the means through which the autonomy-constraint ratio operates within the news production process as a result of these developments. The low, balanced and high autonomy-constraint ratios are described below in relation to each news production phase.

#### **4.1 Low Autonomy-Constraint Ratio: Transmission Phase**

The transmission phase has undergone significant changes both in terms of the technology employed and the news values that dictate transmission decisions. An interest in being first among the competition and 'live' on location has translated into a high premium being placed on immediacy in the sense of demonstrating to audiences that the news organisation is to be trusted since journalists are actually *there*, at the scene. However, base-level journalists have been experiencing a very low level of autonomy as a result. The ability to find stories and investigate them is often severely restricted due to the need to be 'live' on location reporting a story, perhaps several times a day for the various bulletins and the 24 hour news channels. The dependency on information from wire reports increases dramatically in such instances and mundane discussions of the news item – of which there is little knowledge – tend to follow. Both base-level and mid-level journalists often voiced a strong dislike of this development, which indicates that the shift towards heightened immediacy and decisions related to its actualization have trickled-down from top-level journalists. While many news items are not transmitted 'live' and not all news organisations have a 24 hour news channel, there is an increasing tendency to achieve immediacy in these ways and coverage is directed towards such ends. While the 'live,' on location component is frequently desired in various settings, breaking news coverage is the prime target of immediacy. Citizen journalists and especially members of the public contributing UGC were found to aid breaking news coverage; however, the base-level journalist who is assigned to the event only benefits in that new information can be reported. This new information typically does not increase their autonomy since they are usually fed the information moments before (or even while) they are on air. Therefore, the major challenge to autonomy stemming from these developments is the severely limited mobility of the base-level journalist.

#### **4.2 Balanced Autonomy-Constraint Ratio: Input/Selection and Assignment Phase**

This segment of the news production process retains a more balanced division between autonomous practice and constraining factors. During the intake phase base-level journalists can access contemporary sources and develop new stories out of feedback mechanisms. As well, citizen journalism has added a new element to news flow but this has largely been limited to breaking news items and images sent to the news organisation. Still, base-level journalists can actively access the new public via blogs and websites. Foreign correspondents likely represent the realm in which the highest potential for autonomous practice could be developed, largely in terms of accessing information within conflict zones and restricted areas. As well, this category of base-level journalist – along with beat journalists – already possesses a higher level of general autonomy over these phases of production than the general assignment reporter. Nonetheless, predictable news is still very common and traditional sources supply the vast majority of news items. The bureaucratic organisation of traditional sources tends to match that of news organisations while economic logic and well-established credibility influences news organisations' continued dependency on news agencies. These factors function to maintain traditional constraints over news coverage while the largest obstacle faced by contemporary sources is concerns over credibility. In addition, collective monitoring of news agency feeds as a result of electronic delivery can occasionally operate as a means of diffusing power over selection, but in the majority of cases selection is determined by mid-level journalists, leaving little autonomy for base-level journalists over story preferences. Within the confines of editorial meetings, traditional news values (as well as subjective preferences) continue to influence selection while specific news angles and source 'guidance' are suggested to base-level journalists by mid-level journalists, all of which further constrains production.

#### **4.3 Balanced Autonomy-Constraint Ratio: Storywriting Phase**

During the process of storywriting base-level journalists potentially have a large amount of autonomy over their work since they are responsible for constructing and piecing together news items. Still, news items generally undergo some form of editing and approval by mid-level journalists. Non-linear editing is likely to increase the speed of

storywriting (although most journalists are still more familiar with linear editing) and enable new editing techniques. Digitization of film and archives also leads to a greater selection of images and less hassle in terms of waiting for others to finish with tapes, which has improved workflow. However more significant developments may be embodied within new technologies such as desktop publishing which is potentially set to facilitate a return to storyboard creation. This new technology could encourage base-level journalists to be creative and propose their own ideas and directions for stories more frequently, working with mid-level journalists to determine outcomes. Base-level journalists can also access autonomy in terms of the feedback loop wherein comments on their professional journalist blog – if they are allowed to have one – help to amplify, correct and steer their journalism. However, base-level journalists are also familiar with the professionalized norms and shared news values of their organisation and may conduct their storywriting accordingly. Post-mortem discussions over previous output can also steer base-level journalists in particular directions and effectively constrain their work. The ‘predetermined control’ instigated within editorial meetings during the selection and assignment phase can also set the tone for a news item, promote particular news angles and request that certain elements are included. As well, base-level journalists feel pressure to satisfy directives from superiors that encourage, for instance, dramatic narratives or ‘bed-time stories’ with a predetermined structure.

#### **4.4 High Autonomy-Constraint Ratio: Newsgathering Phase**

The highest potential for autonomy is located within the newsgathering phase. While not every base-level journalist within this study had taken advantage of the available autonomy during this phase, great potential exists within the exploitation of new technologies. Base-level journalists can access a much wider range of voices through email and blogs than their predecessors could. As well, shifting public behaviours combined with new technologies have led to a massive expansion of production that is either easily accessible online or sent directly into news organisations or specific journalists. Base-level journalists can also improve information management to gain more control over their own resources and alter their interaction with sources when out in the field. For instance, using a search engine, internet connection and BlackBerry within the setting of a scrum can enable quick retrieval of relevant information that can be

effectively incorporated into a question to a politician. As well, research capabilities in general have been revolutionized not only in terms of speed and access but also as a result of the increasing release of official documents online. Journalists referred to the nature of newsgathering before the internet as a phase that involved very different routines, such as physically going to the library to try to search for specific information or requesting official documents and waiting for their release, but the speed of access and quality of information at journalists' fingertips has now improved dramatically. Of course constraining factors have not been eliminated: the internalization of professionalized norms, shared news values, 'guidance' supplied during assignment and the prospect of disapproval by superiors remain constant. Despite the fact that these constraints may be active during this phase of production, the potential for journalists to expand their newsgathering routines is vast.

## 5. Discussion of Key Issues

Two main limitations of previous production studies were highlighted within the initial literature review: temporal and theoretical. To rectify the *temporal limitation*, the TAC model has embedded news organisations within the current media environment, which includes developments that have occurred within the surrounding public. These developments involve technological advancements that have led to the ubiquity of new media and the increasing ease of employment of these tools, whether it is by taking pictures and video with mobile phones that are perpetually accessible or publishing news-related materials and supplementary information online. Technological developments have tended to facilitate or occur in tandem with changing public behaviours, which involve a multitude of social uses of new media and the rise of a culture of increased documentation and voyeurism. Within news organisations themselves, developments include the adoption of new technologies within newsrooms (such as non-linear editing and server technology), out in the field (such as smaller, more mobile kits and a variety of transmission tools) and in reach of journalists (such as the internet, BlackBerrys and the range of other new media tools also available to the public). As well, convergence is another related factor that continues to significantly expand the range of media and locations at which news content can now be found. Developments that overlap both the public and news organisations relate to the increasingly crowded news marketplace,

which includes the increase in traditional forms of media, the rise of international 24 hour news channels delivered across the globe, as well as the dramatic growth of online news choices. This has left consumers with a vast amount of news sources to select from and has ultimately fragmented audiences and potentially led to a crisis of credibility. To rectify the *theoretical limitation*, the autonomy-constraint ratio was developed as an analytical tool that highlights the autonomy of individual journalists who operate within an outer structure of constraints. The aim here was not to rectify by supplanting the current framework atop of the old but instead to complement research frameworks employing a constraint-based perspective with an autonomy-centred approach. Within this research project, the TAC model and autonomy-constraint ratio was specifically developed to enhance understanding of the interrelationships of new technologies, autonomy and constraints within news production processes.

The key aim of social organisational approaches to news production was originally to showcase the manufactured nature of journalism. This argument continued to provide the foundation for the present research since without this point of departure, exploration of the autonomy of individual journalists to shape their own product may have stalled. As well, the conclusion that a “strongly patterned, repetitive and predictable work routine” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 83) drove the production of news was also useful in that new developments relating to the reception of large volumes of UGC tended to be absorbed into the structure and routines of organisations (at least in the case of the BBC where the volume had reached significant proportions). However, in many cases the general orientation towards constraining factors caused arguments to linger within the time frame in which the research framework was initially developed. As such, there was less flexibility to assess news production that could now employ sources that were both traditional and contemporary. For instance, the argument that journalists were rarely able to “penetrate their sources’ informational worlds to establish facts independently” (Ericson 1998: 1) was difficult to sustain in the age of the internet where research has been ‘revolutionized’ and new media tools such as BlackBerrys and *Google’s* Desktop Search can be employed to manage and retrieve information in a timely fashion. In general, the information producing strata is no longer as ‘severely restricted’ as previous research suggested. This development alone has led to a wider range of sources and the

ability to transcend the handful of news agencies that traditionally served as the foundation of information, particularly with respect to conflict coverage.

Findings from previous research that news production is “highly dependent upon the news-producing groups in society” and therefore it is the “values and cultural definitions” of these groups that are “reproduce[ed] and relay[ed]” (Golding and Elliott 1979: 18) now equate to very different conclusions. News-producing groups are no longer restricted to the economically advantaged sector of society nor constrained by political forces since members of the public are increasingly part of such groups. However, the ‘values and cultural definitions’ that are ‘reproduced and relayed’ likely continue to be dominated by traditional news-producers. This traditional dominance has not shifted despite the openness of the information producing strata. Therefore, despite the autonomy that journalists can access within their daily routines – specifically here that which leads to greater accessibility to the more complete range of voices in society – traditional constraints continue to push news coverage in directions that remain limited by perspectives that are largely in line with the status quo. Despite the volume of images of breaking news stories and the coverage by citizen journalists of a wider range of news accounts of, for instance, how the economy is run, the relevance of ‘global warming’ or the narrative structures that dominate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have not been transformed in any meaningful way. The production phase with the least level of accessible autonomy – transmission – cannot entirely account for the persistence of long-standing criticisms of mainstream news (i.e. dependency on official sources, limits upon the boundaries of permissible debate and a perennial lack of history and context).

Considering the dependency on official sources and news agencies in particular (i.e. traditional elements of news flow), three factors that account for their dominance have been identified within both past research and the present study: economic-logic, bureaucratic organisation and credibility. The first two could actually operate in favour of contemporary news-producers, or the ‘new public.’ If the economic-logic of news production has resulted in the use of, for instance, news agencies as opposed to the dispatch of hundreds of correspondents around the globe, it is conceivable that citizen journalists and UGC could inevitably monopolize the source-base for news organisations. This is because the bulk of this production is available at no cost, some of which is even

sent directly to news organisations without the need for any independent research. Granted, the volume of information could trigger (and is triggering) the necessity of resources devoted to management and filtering of the material, which in effect represents a cost to the organisation. Nevertheless, other developments within news organisations are suggestive of the idea that their operations are heading in the direction of increased streamlining and efficiency. For instance, the implementation of server technologies equates to more sharing between news media, both internal and external to the individual organisation, which could inevitably result in more job losses. When the economic-logic of Video Journalists is added to this, the influx of material from contemporary sources may begin to look quite appealing to news organisations that have an eye on 'efficiency' and 'streamlined' operations.

However, economic-logic alone is insufficient: compatible bureaucratic organisation has also been an argument reflecting the dominance of traditional news-producers. By producing and delivering material in a way that coincides with the bureaucratic structure and organisation of news organisations, news agencies, official sources and public relations professionals have secured important positions within the intake phase of production, among others. This factor could also be manipulated in favour of contemporary news-producers, but it would require greater organisation. Still, there are many organisations working towards similar goals of amalgamating and presenting the wealth of information constantly being produced by the new public into well-organised and packaged formats. A good example is *Global Voices*, an organisation that was already actively used by the BBC within this study and has ties with Reuters.

Despite this potential, there remains one more very significant factor: credibility. This is in fact the biggest obstacle faced by contemporary news-producers. Discussions with journalists within the present research did little to understand the processes of credibility assessment besides the finding that such assessments have not developed since the time of the 'severely restricted' information producing strata and if anything, many journalists remain wary and even irritated by the influx of the new public. However, these attitudes tend to reflect the developmental stage at which many journalists were situated; that is, the new public was not yet deemed to be a stable entity within the wider media environment.

Regardless of the eventual stability of the new public, journalism is certainly facing a transformation in terms of its relationship with audiences. The increasingly multiplying number of news sources available to the public has led to an internal struggle within news organisations as journalists question how best to preserve the audiences they have and creatively attempt to attract new audiences. Combined with this is the development of public behaviours that have increased documentation, evidence-building and online publication. As a result, audiences themselves are struggling to assess the credibility of news outlets within this larger environment. Reacting to this crisis of credibility, news organisations are reaching out to audiences in many different forms, the most varied of which is taking place online and particularly through professional journalist blogs. The online medium appears to be an important venue since the potential for audience understanding, and therefore also interest, is potentially higher as a result of the greater space available for unpacking contextual and historical information.

While journalists have traditionally been largely inactive, or at least unsystematic, in their discovery of audience needs and interests, this information may now be increasingly vital to the survival of any news organisation. The online environment offers a means of tracking online audiences through the various tools that can be integrated into news websites. Even previous research suggested that journalists could be more active in their approach to understanding audience needs while today's journalists could do so with much greater ease. As well, researchers also typically advocated for the development of deeper relationships with audiences. On this point journalists in this study reached widespread agreement and were eager to encourage greater interactivity, as opposed to the fundamental separation of audiences from news production in the past. While top-down organisational decisions can ensure that these developments occur and promote activities that result in enhanced relationships with audiences and the new public, it is individual journalists who can make the biggest strides.

One finding within the current research demonstrated that journalists who were most knowledgeable and experienced with new technologies tended to employ them within production processes at a much higher rate than those without such technical skills. What is important about this finding is that the body of journalists more generally is therefore set to develop in a direction that will inevitably lead to greater engagement with new

technologies and hence with autonomous practices. This inevitability is a direct result of the new generations of journalists who will naturally be better equipped with technical skill sets. As such, the potential for autonomous practice – particularly within the realm of newsgathering – is predicted to develop in the direction set out by the ideal-typical ratios described earlier in this chapter.

A number of directions for future research have arisen out of this research project. Two issues in particular are in flux: credibility assessments and new cohorts of journalists. Both of these issues are ripe for research since the position of the new public has not yet been deemed stable by many journalists and the new cohorts of journalists will inevitably have more experience with the new conditions of the media environment (and perhaps also in the sense of acting as citizen journalists or UGC providers themselves). The influence of the development of contemporary elements of news flow for mainstream news content should also be assessed using contextual analysis, which was out of the scope of the current research project. Finally, use of the TAC model and its autonomy-constraint ratio is encouraged for further in-depth analysis of particular features of the interrelationships between technologies, autonomy and constraints. The most significant conclusions from the model relate to the findings at either extreme of the autonomy-constraint ratio: low and high levels. As such, research that explores ongoing developments and influences on news production within the areas of transmission and newsgathering is most crucial.

## Glossary

**BGAN** – Broadband Global Area Network; refers to transmission technology that uses a modem and satellite connectivity provided by Inmarsat.

**bridge** – A transition between different segments of a news item.

**CEEFAX** – BBC's teletext information service (pronounced as 'see facts').

**ENG** – Electronic Newsgathering; used to differentiate the use of tape from the previous use of film when shooting in the field.

**grab** – A pre-recorded news item that is sent to a news organisation before broadcast; also known by other names, such as 'sauce.'

**IFB** – Interruptible Feed-Back; refers to the ear piece worn by presenters and sometimes guests as well.

**Inmarsat** – A satellite service for telephone and data transmission via a dedicated terminal.

**ISDN** – Integrated Services Digital Network; refers to digital transmission over telephone lines of data and voice, usually of a higher quality and speed than analogue transmission.

**package** – A news story produced before broadcast, typically including an introduction, bridge, stand-up and conclusion.

**PDA** – Personal Digital Assistant; refers to any handheld mobile device that can store, retrieve and receive information.

**sat phone** – Mobile phone that uses satellite connectivity to provide telephone services.

**scrum** – An impromptu press conference, typically occurring directly after a meeting.

**server technology** – Refers here to digital media content distribution and management systems that have the capacity to extract content produced by affiliates and other

elements within news organisations as well as content produced by other news organisations via ongoing partnerships.

**signing off** – Concluding remarks of a package.

**squawk box** – A small device with a microphone used to speak to journalists located in different areas within the newsroom.

**stand-up** – On camera explanation of some element within the news item by the reporter.

**teaser** – A short clip produced to advertise an upcoming news bulletin or news items.

**teletext** – An information retrieval service offered through television sets.

**WAP** – Wireless Application Protocol; refers to the ability to access the internet over a mobile phone or PDA.

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