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The immediacy of online news, the visibility of journalistic processes and a restructuring of journalistic authority

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Abstract
Transparency has been emphasized as a new norm within journalism and has received a great deal of attention. The credo of transparency is openness, and the interactive potential of digital media has been identified as one key element in achieving openness. In this essay it is argued that by exposing previously hidden journalistic processes, the high speed of online news plays a part in this orientation towards transparency in journalism.

Keywords
continuous news cycle, interactivity, journalism, online news, transparency

Introduction

Truth-telling is the most essential component of journalism, but the means by which this can be accomplished can change radically in the digital environment. Two important features of online news – user participation and the fast continuous news cycle – are essential in transforming journalistic norms when journalism moves online.

User involvement in news production means that journalism has lost some control over content and that users can increasingly be seen on a stage once predominantly reserved for journalists. Immediacy means that different provisory, incomplete and sometimes dubious news drafts are published. Consequently, both user participation and immediacy have an impact on what is being published. This is an example of how technology alters what is being performed on a journalistic stage (Meyrowitz, 1985).

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Furthermore, Meyrowitz (1985) stresses that when frontstage performance changes, this has consequences for journalistic norms and the authority associated with the role of journalism. Thus, it is difficult for journalists to refer to a 'we get it right' norm when the 'we' part is potentially compromised by users, and the 'get it right' part is compromised by fast inadequate news and a plethora of different voices.

In previous journalism studies, a new journalistic normative guideline of transparency has been proposed (Allen, 2008; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001; Plaisance, 2007; Singer, 2007). Scholars have made connections between transparency and different forms of interactivity (Bivens, 2008; Bruns, 2004; Deuze, 2005), suggesting that journalistic authority is built on openness rather than the old 'we write, you read' dogma. However, the role of immediacy and its relationship to transparency have not been explored. Therefore, the purpose of this essay is to discuss how immediacy and interactivity relate to journalistic truth-telling, the transparency norm, and the potential consequences for journalistic authority.

This article begins with a discussion largely based on Meyrowitz's (1985) account of how technology changes backstage and frontstage performances and has potential consequences for the authority of professions. The second section concerns journalism, truth-telling, trust, journalistic authority, interactivity and immediacy. The article closes with a discussion of how the journalistic frontstage is being altered in online news, and the implications that this has for journalistic authority.

Backstage and frontstage performances

Human behaviour has long been divided into private and public arenas, with different roles adopted in each arena. These roles vary in their degrees of freedom and how they should be performed (Goffman, 2004). The expectations placed on, for instance, the role of a journalist are quite different to those placed on a propagandist. When a journalist is on the job, he or she is required to follow the rules of the journalistic trade, but when off-duty and in a private sphere, this behaviour can be very different with regard to, for instance, misleading, lying or making things up. However, if this private behaviour is incorporated into the journalistic role and such behaviour is revealed, as in the case with Jayson Blair and the *New York Times*, the consequences can be devastating.

What is going on backstage can be used to perfect the frontstage performance. But when previous backstage behaviour is moved to the frontstage, the whole frontstage performance has to be redefined: 'In general, whatever aspects of the rehearsal become visible to the audience must be integrated into the show itself; whatever backstage time and space remain hidden can still be used to perfect the performance' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 47). When backstage performance becomes visible, there is the risk that the authority of that specific person or role declines if the backstage behaviour conflicts with the expectations of the frontstage performance. In other words, what is visible, what is not, and how to control this distinction are unquestionably important issues.

Journalism is a profession that claims authority in its field and traditionally does a great deal of work within a private or non-public sphere, then delivers the results in public. Tuchman (1972: 661) argues that 'the correct handling of a story, that is, the use of certain procedures discernible to the news consumer, protects the newspaperman from the risks of his trade, including critics'. The keyword here is *discernible* as it implies that elements

of journalistic scrutiny and the associated standardized routines and procedures – for instance, quotation marks and separating facts from opinion (Tuchman, 1972) – must be visible in the frontstage arena, otherwise they cannot be referred to in order to serve as a standard.

Authority can refer to formal power and institutions, but it also has dimensions of informal power. Journalistic authority is based on audience trust (Kohring and Matthes, 2007) rather than command, a trust that is deeply connected to journalism's perceived ability to carry out central functions (i.e. truth-telling). If a formal authority is caught red-handed it can always try to resort to command, while that option is not open to an informal authority. Thus, standards are essential whereby performances on the frontstage can be measured (Robinson, 2007). Accordingly, journalism's authority can be viewed as the extent to which the profession's reputation allows it to be trusted to carry out truth-telling.

Traditional models of journalism are being challenged with the advent of a new communication technology that has different properties compared to the old. Interactivity (Hall, 2001; Pavlik, 2001) has the potential of letting the formerly passive and absent audience take part in the production of news. The high speed of online news (Massey and Levy, 1999) is based on very little time between the receipt of information by the news producer and it being forwarded to news consumers. The implication associated with the speed of online news is that it is published instantly in a continuous news cycle. This can have a significant impact on any news outlet's authority to act as a gatekeeper (Singer, 2005). However, losing power as gatekeeper might not be the most threatening aspect of the speed of online news to journalistic authority.

Meyrowitz (1985) points out that the introduction of communication technology changes backstage and frontstage performances. As backstage performances become visible it will be difficult for the authority in question to uphold and maintain an image of perfection. This, in turn, changes the roles, the perceptions of these roles, the self-perception of the performer, the performances associated with that role, and finally the possible credible role of performances challenging the authority of the journalistic role (Meyrowitz, 1985). Both interactivity and the high speed of online news alter the performances made in public compared to traditional media. This is crucial, and to appreciate its significance it is necessary to elaborate further on the relationship between journalism, backstage/frontstage performances, and communication technologies. The following section highlights journalistic processes and their relationship to the backstage/frontstage division in analogue media.

Backstage and frontstage in analogue news media

Journalistic processes can be divided into gathering, processing and distributing news (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1989; Seib, 2001). The gathering process refers to the act whereby the journalist collects or receives the raw material for articles. The processing stage is where the raw material is placed under journalistic scrutiny using standardized routines and procedures, thereby transforming information of varying quality into journalism (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001; Seib, 2001). The third and final stage is when the information is distributed or disseminated to the audience. In the analogue world of the newspaper, the content is generally distributed at predictable, prescheduled and recurring

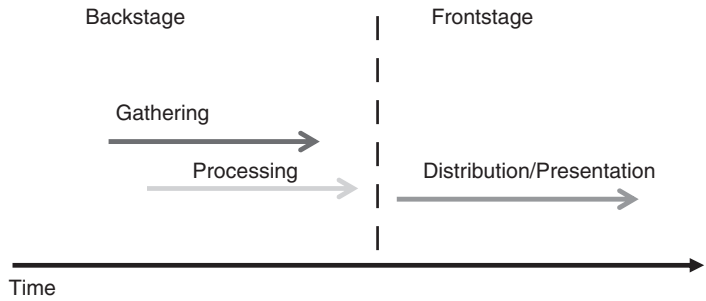

Figure 1. The parts of the news manufacturing process that are visible to the audience in a traditional medium

points in time, which is usually every 24 hours for newspapers, and several times a day for TV and radio news. After the news has been printed and distributed, it is not possible to either add or subtract content to a specific news story since it is no longer under the control of the producers.

Figure 1 illustrates how the three different stages of journalism relate to the backstage/frontstage division in a traditional news medium.

The gathering and processing stages are performed in the backstage area, concealed from the audience. The final product is then distributed, moving it to the frontstage area, where the audience consumes the news product. In analogue news media the gathering and processing of information are separated from the distribution phase. For example, after a newspaper has been printed there is no further work on articles and they remain unchanged indefinitely. TV news is more often than not presented by an anchor who reads the news – the audience is not shown the editing room and how news material has been cut.

Consequently, a sharp line demarcates work in progress and finished news. Journalism will be held accountable by the audience for the quality of the *distributed* material. If an article is dismissed or reworked in the processing phase because it does not stand up to scrutiny, few if any will accuse the journalist of having performed a bad job. If a journalist is attempting to distance him or herself from a poor article after it has been disseminated, the reaction will probably be somewhat different. The trustworthiness of a news item and the journalist is therefore dependent not only on what is stated, but also if it is stated backstage or frontstage.

In traditional news the boundary between private (or non-public) and public has been distinct. The roles of journalist and audience have been clear. The journalist has performed truth-telling and the audience has responded with different degrees of trust. This may no longer be the case in online journalism.

Truth-telling, trust and journalistic authority

All media workers, including journalists, are involved in the gathering, processing and distribution of information (Lazzarato, 1997, cited in Deuze, 2007: 67–8). Journalists

have different standards in their work, but, according to many, what ultimately sets journalism apart from other forms of communication is its obligation to the truth (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001; Singer, 2007, Spence and Quinn, 2008; Zelizer, 2004).

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) call journalistic 'truth-telling' journalism's first but nevertheless utterly confusing principle. It is journalism's first principle as journalism cannot exist without aiming to tell the truth to the citizens. While central to journalism, truth nevertheless appears to be epistemologically elusive (Singer, 2007) and literally impossible to pin down. Despite this, truth still appears to be a central norm for journalists worldwide. A crisp, clear definition of truth-telling seems to be out of the question, but it is closely connected to verifying what has happened and what has not, and not deceiving the audience (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001). While journalism's truth-telling ideal might not presently be subject to change in the digital age, the strategies for achieving these functions might be.

Here, two different truth-telling strategies are discussed: the traditional strategy, already introduced above, where accurate information is transmitted to the audience; and the newer transparency strategy, where truth-telling is created through forthrightness and discourse, and is subject to change over time. The first relies on journalists' scrutiny and the second on openness and user participation.

In the traditional view, journalism describes and defines what is real and important (Reese, 1997) and feeds on the trust of the audience to have faith in journalists to be truthful, honest, unbiased and do a good job gathering and processing information (Hayes et al., 2007; Kohring and Matthes, 2007). Journalistic scrutiny determines what information is true. This information is then passed on to the audience through journalists, who act as neutral transmitters (Reese, 1997). The traditional news refers to the news being true because 'the information has survived the rigorous scrutiny of a journalistic process' (Singer, 2007: 85).

In this view, expert journalists reside in the closed 'fortress newsroom' (Bennet et al., 1985; Deuze, 2003; Smolkin, 2006), where they process information into journalism based on certain criteria. When that process is completed, the results are communicated to the audience. Consequently, the audience is not shown how news is produced – rather, news spontaneously falls out of a 'black box' (Gillmor, 2004). Singer (2005) deems journalism to be one of the most opaque industries, with journalists fiercely opposing any attempt to open it up. Thus, the audience has been at the mercy of news corporations and their employees living up to truth-telling standards.

Information is passed from producers to consumers and the reception of news is dependent on trust. If the public does not trust the news then they will be less likely to consume news (Cassidy, 2007). The one-way mode of communication and the 'we write, you read' dogma have gone hand in hand for the greater part of the 20th century. In recent years the news media have suffered from decreasing trust from the public (Cassidy, 2007; Scott, 2005; Singer, 2005), indicating that the public is not content with the way in which organized journalism is working.

Meanwhile, the new transparent journalistic approach to truth-telling is gaining ground and has received attention from scholars. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) and Hayes et al. (2007) argue that transparency should play a greater role in contemporary journalism. Plaisance (2007) notes that transparency standards are already in use and

are changing the way in which the media businesses do their jobs. Gillmor (2004) is convinced that the trend towards openness is inevitable. Deuze (2003) suggests that the leap from the old to the new media will radically change journalism. Singer (2007: 83) states that 'the recently articulated concept of transparency' is important in the blogosphere, but is also connected to traditional watchwords such as accountability and responsibility. Allen (2008) underscores the dual function of transparency, serving both as a system of accountability and a way of increasing legitimacy with citizens.

The transparency approach to truth-telling is different from the traditional approach as its central concept is openness in communication (Plaisance, 2007; Singer, 2007). While transparency might be new to journalism, it has already made its mark on blogs. Singer (2007: 85; see also Thorsen, 2008) contends that 'The bloggers' truth is created collectively rather than hierarchically. Information is not vetted before its dissemination but instead through the process of disseminating multiple views: truth, in this view, is the result of discourse.' If this practice were translated to journalism it would imply that news was being co-produced with the users and constantly changing.

Furthermore, from a transparency perspective, news organizations are expected to explain themselves and their decisions, which is completely the opposite of how news production normally works (Bennet et al., 1985; Deuze, 2003; Gillmor, 2004; Plaisance, 2007). Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001; see also Singer, 2007) encourage journalists to disclose the methods of their newsgathering so that the public can reach conclusions regarding who is living up to the standards and carrying out good journalism. Allen (2008) stresses that journalists are being transparent about admitting to the manipulation that shapes journalism. Hence, the transparent truth-telling strategy is, using Meyrowitz's (1985) nomenclature, the operation of moving old backstage performances to the frontstage, such as explaining how news is being produced, and introducing new performances to the frontstage, such as user participation.

Strategies of how to achieve truth-telling are also strategies on which to build trust, and consequently the associated authority. If truth-telling is primarily achieved by letting experts (i.e. journalists) mine for truth according to certain techniques or standards and then lecturing the results to the audience, then the experts are going to be evaluated on how well they perform in their pursuit of truth. If they fail to perform according to these standards, journalists will risk losing both trust from the audience and the authority of being truth-tellers. If truth-telling is additionally built on mutual discourse, openness concerning how news is produced, and the continuous co-creation of news then trust and authority will be maintained or lost accordingly.

Thus, truth-telling, trust and authority are closely associated with what is being performed backstage and frontstage. Two key features of digital media that, however, could potentially alter the frontstage are *interactivity* and *immediacy*. The next two sections discuss these concepts and their importance in this context.

Journalism, transparency and interactivity

One feature that has been absent in the journalistic frontstage area is communication from the audience. There are a few exceptions, such as 'letters to the editor', which are carefully separated from the news. If the interactivity of digital media is to have any

significant impact, then audience communication will become visible and will therefore have to be included 'in the show' to a greater extent, as 'journalists no longer control who gets to play' (Hayes et al., 2007: 274). Quite logically, 'interactivity' has been suggested for inclusion in a new definition of journalism (Hall, 2001; Pavlik, 2001). As interactivity enters the definition of journalism it becomes a sanctioned activity, so a prospective new dialogical journalism sees the light of day (Deuze, 2003).

Lowrey and Anderson (2005; see also Robinson, 2007; Smolkin, 2006) point out that interactivity leads to transparency and 'lifting the curtain'; or, in Meyrowitz's (1985) words, 'showing the backstage' of journalism, which challenges its authority:

> Greater transparency could, however, work quite differently than its proponents believe. 'Lifting the curtain' through online journalism could lead audiences to challenge the authority of journalism, and there is reason to believe that Internet use for 'disintermediative' purposes has eroded the authority of other professionals. (Lowrey and Anderson, 2005)

Deuze (2005: 455) connects transparency with user participation: 'the increasing ways in which people both inside and external to journalism are given a chance to monitor, check, criticize and even intervene in the journalistic process'. Subsequently, transparency can be viewed as the process where media producers show and explain how news is being produced and where users, to some extent, can participate openly in the production of news. This general transparency can be made operational in several ways, as researchers have pointed out:

1. Transparency can be achieved by being open in a distinctive manner rather than being constrained by institutional objectivity (Lasica, 2004).
2. Producers can be transparent in the process by publishing links to original material and the sources that are used (Hayes et al., 2007; Lasica, 2004; Smolkin, 2006).
3. Transparency can also be manifested by its forthrightness concerning mistakes that have been made. When making an error, responsibility should be taken by acknowledging the error and publishing the corrected information alongside the original information (Lasica, 2004).
4. Other possibilities could include (Platon and Deuze, 2003) a public discussion with regard to the considerations given when something is published. Or, a similar approach to that of Wikipedia could be used, which makes it possible for others to correct mistakes or introduce their own contributions.
5. Producers can publish early drafts, which can be revised after inputs from users (Deuze, 2003).
6. Users can participate in every stage of news production, from newsgathering to reporting, publishing, analysis and discussion (Bruns, 2004).

If these techniques of achieving transparency in journalism are inspected more closely, it becomes clear that some of them are strongly linked to two modes of interactivity. In a transmission medium it would be literally impossible for an average user to actively contribute, criticize or change news stories. These user activities are examples of interactivity that have been labelled dialogic or conversational communication (Bordewijk

and Van Kaam, 2002). When hyperlinks are used to provide users with more information or the means to explore sources themselves, this is a form of consultative interactivity (Bordewijk and Van Kaam, 2002).

Interactivity potentially means that the way in which news stories are told can be rearranged and challenged, and a greater variety of voices and different competing descriptions of events can be heard. When more than one version of events is made public (i.e. moved to the frontstage), it becomes necessary to demonstrate why one version is better than another – or, as Bauman (2000: 64) puts it, 'Unlike error, truth is one and may be acknowledged as the truth (that is, given the right to declare all alternatives to itself erroneous) only in so far it is unique.' Accordingly, in an interactive medium there might be a questioning of dominant ideas, and the selection and description of news that might be absent in analogue media.

Empirical findings suggest that some of the interactive features mentioned above are indeed used in news media. Singer (2005) notes the extensive use of hyperlinks to source materials. Recent research also shows that other forms of interactivity are rising and that users are invited to participate in the creation of news (Bivens, 2008; Bucy, 2004; Deuze et al., 2007; Domingo et al., 2008; Greer and Mensing, 2006). Furthermore, it appears that news producers view user participation as positive (Chung, 2007; O'Sullivan and Heinonen, 2008; Robinson, 2007), although there are studies that arrive at more negative conclusions concerning user participation in news production (Paulussen et al., 2007; Spyridou and Veglis, 2008). However, the overall trend in the research findings implies that the role of users as co-creators of news is relatively strong and growing.

Interactivity is linked to transparency and is one phenomenon that appears to change the frontstage arena. Another feature of digital media that has not been connected to transparency to the same extent, but has impacted on backstage/frontstage performance, is the high speed of online news.

Researching immediacy: producers, consumers and content

The high speed of information on the internet denotes that news items are basically published before they have been completed (Hall, 2001; Spence and Quinn, 2008). During the last decade, the specifics of online news have been covered by many studies. Although not explicitly articulated, three different approaches towards researching immediacy can be noted: in relation to *producers* of news, *consumers* of news, and the news *content* itself.

Studies on the *producers* of news have focused on immediacy, self-perception and the normative frame within which online journalists work and their preferences in relation to their analogue counterparts (O'Sullivan, 2005; Quandt et al., 2006; Robinson, 2007) reaching to the conclusion that immediacy is a key and valued feature of online news. Other research (Bivens, 2008; O'Sullivan and Heinonen, 2008) indicates that journalists acknowledge the impact of immediacy but feel that immediacy threatens the quality of journalism. A somewhat divided conclusion from these studies is that immediacy is an important and sometimes esteemed trait of the online journalist.

While much research has been aimed at understanding journalists' appreciation of immediacy, there has also been some attention directed at the *consumer's* view of the

issue, reaching the conclusion that users rated continuous updating as the most important feature of online news (Bergström 2008; Chung and Yoo, 2008).

A third research tradition on immediacy concerns the specific *content* of online news. Early research on immediacy indicated that online news content was dominated by 'shovelware' logic (Scott, 2005), which implies that content is shovelled over from the parent medium to the web once a day. Accordingly, in this view, online news will not only mimic the parent medium but also lag behind in terms of publishing speed. More recent research, as indicated below, provides a more dispersed picture. Scholars have taken at least three sometimes overlapping approaches to studying news sites' immediacy of content: *communicating immediacy, consequences of immediacy*, and *implementation of immediacy*.

Several scholars have researched how websites *communicate immediacy* through timestamps (Bucy, 2004) or the use of 'breaking news' tickers (Massey, 2000; Paulussen, 2004) and found low scores.

Previous immediacy research has not been flooded with empirical studies on the *consequences of immediacy* on the content of online news, although many have theoretically pondered what immediacy will lead to (Hall, 2001; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001; Pavlik, 2001; Scott, 2005; Seib, 2001). The discussion is centred on the accuracy versus speed issue, and concerns are raised about the direction that journalism is taking.

Although the quality of online journalism is questioned and there is research on journalists' and news consumers' attitudes towards immediacy, there are very few systematic studies on how the specific content of online news is affected by immediacy (Kopper et al., 2000). When content is studied, the focus tends to be on an aggregate level or using anecdotal evidence. This refers to the *implementation of immediacy* and how immediacy makes its mark on the actual content of the news. Randle et al. (2003) found that 89 US daily newspapers were very slow to update their websites with information about the 9/11 attack, not fully using the medium's potential for immediacy.

In a study comparing the top news item in print and online versions of the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and the *Los Angeles Times*, Mensing and Greer (2006) learned that there was less correspondence between the print and web versions at noon compared to midnight. This demonstrates that online news sites change their appearance over time, indicating that the news cycle is continuous and shorter than 24 hours.

Other research goes into more depth regarding how news stories are affected by immediacy. Hall (2000, 2001) and Seib (2001) provide examples and anecdotes of how content can change over time. Karlsson (2007) shows in a Swedish context that online news can comprise an average of up to seven versions. In an extreme case, a news item was published in 23 different versions on the same website. In that study it was also shown that news stories frequently changed over time, with conflicting descriptions of events (Karlsson, 2007).

Salaverría (2005: 84) carried out an on-the-fly study during the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which illustrated that immediacy had a significant impact on the content, concluding that 'these [online] media show an insufficient editorial maturity that occasionally leads them to commit important mistakes in their news reporting'. Two longitudinal studies found that immediacy had significant impact on the news (Kutz and Herring, 2005; Tremayne et al., 2007).

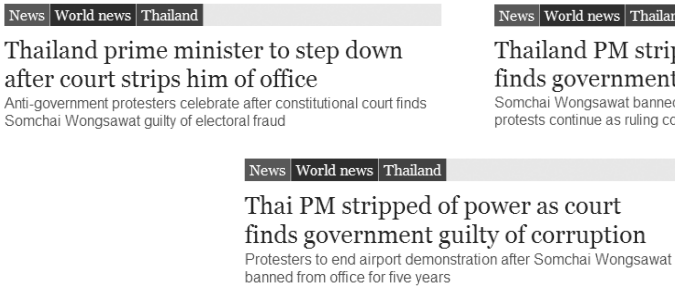

Figure 2. Three screen shots from Guardian.co.uk taken on 2 December 2008. The left is taken at 10.25am, the middle at 11.11am, and the right at 14.09pm. The three versions differ in several ways, including how the protesters reacted and whether the Thai PM was perceived to have left office voluntarily.

To reiterate the research on immediacy, it seems that both traditional producers and consumers of news view immediacy as one of, if not the, key feature and (sometimes) an advantage over conventional media. Furthermore, many scholars have concerns about how immediacy affects the quality of journalism, although there have been few studies investigating whether this is the case or not. These studies indicate that immediacy has a significant impact on news content.

In order to illustrate how immediacy can affect online news, two examples of the phenomenon captured from the Guardian.co.uk website by the author are provided. These examples are by no means adequate in themselves to support the argument, but they are an illustration of what previous studies have found. The first example, depicted in Figure 2, is from 2 December 2008, and reports that the Thai prime minister will no longer be in office and the reactions.

The version published at 10.25 am (left in Figure 2) describes the event as the Thai PM more or less voluntarily stepping down from office. Furthermore, anti-government protesters are portrayed as celebrating this fact. In the version published at 11.11 am (middle in Figure 2) it is understood that the PM was kicked out of office due to corruption, and the protests continue rather than turning into celebrations as the ruling coalition is understood to recuperate. At 14.09 pm (right in Figure 2) the protesters allegedly end their protests and there is no further mention of a potential comeback of the ruling coalition.

The second example was also collected on 2 December 2008 and concerns the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks of November 2008, illustrated in Figure 3.

The second version (right in Figure 3) of the news item is a piece consisting of 732 words, 632 of which are identical to the earlier version (left in Figure 3). The early version

Figure 3. Two screen shots from Guardian.co.uk. The left is from 9.30 am and the right from 11.30 am, 2 December 2008. At first glance they look like two totally different articles, but they consist of roughly 86% identical text.

focuses heavily on US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice and her call for cooperation from Pakistan regarding the Mumbai attacks. The later version still focuses mainly on Rice, but has been complemented with other information that sets the new headline. However, there are accounts in the earlier version that are not included in the later version, including comments from Britain's then-foreign secretary, David Miliband, and claims from Indian press about the origin of the attacks. Thus, while the text remains the same to a large extent, how it is framed and consequently understood changes significantly.

Backstage/frontstage and the high speed of online news

The two examples depicted above and how they unfold is not revolutionary by any means; more importantly, they illustrate how the continuous news cycle affects the content of news items. Thus, news is published while still in the process of unfolding, or as Tumber (2001:98) puts it: 'Journalism is becoming less a product than a process, witnessed in real time and in public.' The traditional way of accomplishing truth-telling was to publish a finished article that was 'right'. In these examples, the descriptions of what is 'right' change continuously.

Early readers will have a rather different picture of what happened compared to later readers and when discussing news with each other readers might discover that they have been exposed to sometimes contradictory descriptions of events on the news sites. Readers following the event over the day will have seen drafts dismissed and the story changed, thus being exposed to the gathering and processing phases of journalism. If users find out that there are different versions of news items it can be crucial to perceptions regarding how journalism works from a user's perspective. At the same time, none of the changes in the news are highlighted or explained by Guardian.co.uk, leaving users to interpret what changes were made and why they were made, either individually, by discussing events with other people, or by reading a media critic blog.

If the authority of journalism has partly depended on news apparently magically appearing from a black box (Bennet et al., 1985; Gillmor, 2004) after being subjected to journalistic scrutiny and then not changing its appearance, this has now most definitely changed. The black box has opened and journalism is becoming rather less opaque (Singer, 2005).

The high speed of online news enables the website audience to literally *see* in real time (as illustrated in the two examples above) segments of the gathering and processing stages of news work. The nature of high-speed online news has caused previously concealed journalistic processes to become visible to the audience, therefore immediacy has, albeit perhaps unwittingly, become a catalyst to an openness in communication that plays a pivotal role in transparency (Plaisance, 2007). Instead of being disseminated as a finished product, online news has to be considered as different provisory drafts that are subject to further alteration (Hall, 2001; Seib, 2001). Hence, the performances that were once carried out backstage or in a series of non-visible drafts, passing through the stages of gathering and processing, have now moved frontstage (Figure 4). This is a shift in what is public and what is hidden from the audience in, for instance, a newspaper environment versus a digital media environment.

In Figure 4 the distribution arrow has been incorporated into the gathering and processing stages. In media systems that use the transmission mode of communication,

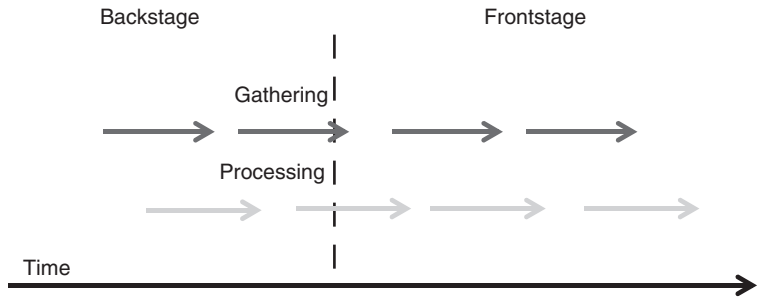

Figure 4. The parts of the news manufacturing process that are visible to the audience on a website

distribution is, by necessity, separated from gathering and processing, but this is not the case in the digital media system. This is due to the reprogrammable nature of digital media (Manovich, 2001) and different modes of communication (Bordewijk and Van Kaam, 2002) that distinguish analogue from digital media. When users surf a website the information never leaves the producer entirely as there is no irrevocable point of distribution. Consequently, news items can be worked on continuously and, as there is no fixed deadline, the news can be edited by the second or by the minute. Accordingly, parts of both the gathering and processing of news material are visible to the audience, echoing Meyrowitz's (1985) suggestion that the introduction of communication technologies changes what is public and what is private.

It is important to stress that neither the journalistic stages of gathering, processing and distributing, nor the standardized routines and procedures have to change in themselves to have bearing on journalistic authority. The most important implication is that parts of the journalistic gathering and processing stages are shown to the public. Tuchman (1972: 661) argues that 'the correct handling of a story, that is, the use of certain procedures discernible to the news consumer, protects the newspaperman from the risks of his trade, including critics'. Here it is important to once again place emphasis on the word *discernible*. The situation in online news is that previously hidden procedures are now discernible to the audience, and user participation has been introduced.

The transformation of the frontstage area and a restructuring of journalistic authority

With the impact of interactivity and immediacy on online news, it is difficult for news media to be in control of their own visibility. What was once hidden or absent in the frontstage area is now in the public gaze, and must somehow be incorporated in, to paraphrase Meyrowitz (1985), 'the show'. The key issue is what should be included in 'the show' in digital compared to analogue media. The traditional truth-telling ideal stresses that journalistic content is produced by experts and should not contain inaccuracies, lies or misinformation when the information is presented to the audience, as this would indicate flaws in journalistic scrutiny, which would have a bearing on trust and authority.

Research on immediacy illuminates how news descriptions of events are moulded during the day. Since the high speed of online news exposes previously hidden journalistic processes, it also produces a loss of control over storytelling. When different and conflicting drafts of the same event are published on the same website there is the possibility that the news will create confusion if not misinformation. This places journalistic frontstage behaviour into conflict with expectations regarding traditional truth-telling, placing the authority of journalism at risk. It will probably prove difficult to convince an audience that the news is accurate if they read conflicting drafts of news or witness a news anchor reading one thing from a script while simultaneously seeing something that contradicts their statement. If this occurs several times a day, it is not difficult to imagine the impact that this can have on the perceived trustworthiness and associated authority of the news outlet. On the other hand, users' appreciation of immediacy indicates that they are willing to trade accuracy for speed, although users' tolerance zone for errors needs to be investigated.

In addition, it is now possible for the audience, by means of a variety of interactive features, to publicly contribute to, criticize and intervene in media organizations' journalistic process through their own websites and/or to discuss issues in various social media (Bivens, 2008; Deuze et al., 2007; Domingo et al., 2008). When user participation is visible and has an impact on the news it also has to be, according to Meyrowitz (1985), incorporated in 'the show'.

Thus, user participation and immediacy have altered the digital frontstage area, not only in theory but also in practice. Combining interactivity and the high speed of internet news, a simplified and bipolar description (Table 1) of the analogue and digital frontstage area can be envisaged.

The frontstage area in the analogue era was characterized by disseminating finished news, with only a few participants creating and influencing the news and the transmission mode of communication. In the digital era the frontstage area includes the continuous flow of drafts, many potential participants in the news creation process, a reduction in the transmission mode of communication, and a rise in alternative forms of communication.

This suggests a shift in what is visible on a journalistic frontstage. While journalists themselves have fiercely opposed any attempt to open up their profession (Gillmor, 2004; Plaisance, 2007; Singer, 2005), it is now possible for them to be increasingly questioned by the audience via interactivity or, in the case of immediacy, to have the process of how news is produced online exposed. In either case, both interactivity and the high speed of online news challenge journalistic authority based on the 'we get it right' approach.

Table 1. A schematic of how the frontstage area differs between analogue and digital media with regard to the potential impact of interactivity and the high speed of online news

	Analogue frontstage	Digital frontstage
Distribution	'All-at-once package'	Continuous flow resulting in different drafts
Number of contributors	Few	Potentially many
Mode of communication	Transmission	Increasingly interactive

Not only is the content marked by immediacy and interactivity, but it also seems that both immediacy and interactivity are being accepted, although in some cases reluctantly, by producers and consumers of news alike (Bergström, 2008; Chung and Yoo, 2008; Quandt et al., 2006; Robinson, 2007), indicating the likelihood of tolerance towards this development in news production. While contemporary news producers, content and consumers may be in tune with the online news scenario, it does not harmonize well with traditional methods of truth-telling. Bauman (2000) stresses that truth may only be acknowledged as the truth only in so far it is unique; with different drafts and a multitude of different views, this uniqueness is certainly put to the test.

To maintain journalism as an authoritative source of information or of a higher quality than other types of information, it is necessary to relate to some sort of publicly communicated standard. In the short term, changes in the communication environment can be tolerated within the present normative framework. In the long run, if changes are permanent, normative guidelines must be adjusted to suit the changes (Bennett et al., 1985; Meyrowitz, 1985), otherwise it will be a delicate pedagogical task to explain why outcomes repeatedly fall short of ambition. Consequently, in light of the interactivity and high speed of online news, journalistic truth-telling seems to be in dire need of restructuring.

It is in this case that transparency fits like a glove and could become a new standard. The openness of transparency (Plaisance, 2007; Singer, 2007) is a much better fit with regard to the high speed of online news and the interactive features of digital media. Bloggers' truth is created through discourse rather than hierarchy, and information on blogs is not vetted before dissemination (Singer, 2007; Thorsen, 2008). When established online news sites facilitate user participation and publish different and contradictory drafts they are, in fact, albeit perhaps unconsciously, abandoning vetting before dissemination and moving towards the bloggers' transparent method of creating truth.

Transparency provides a different argument regarding why journalistic content is superior. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) and Singer (2007) discuss the changing media landscape and urge journalists to publicly articulate their norms in order to strengthen them and differentiate themselves from those who do not follow them. If news producers and some researchers (Allen, 2008; Plaisance, 2007; Robinson, 2007) indicate that this is already happening, and the media industry explicitly articulates their commitment to transparency and introduces different transparency activities to be performed in front of, and with, the public, then journalism can be revitalized both as a profession and as an authoritative source of information.

Future research regarding transparency might include investigating, as mentioned earlier, users' tolerance zone for errors. It would be interesting to explore users' appreciation and perception of the respective roles of journalists and users in the co-creation of news. Furthermore, research could to a larger degree examine and compare if and how different online news media utilize transparency in their everyday news production, thus addressing how and to what extent journalism is responding to the challenges posed in the digital era.

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