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A New Paradigm for News

You don't need to understand the meaning of "paradigm shift" to know that the last half of the twentieth century witnessed a world-wide communication revolution. The change was so profound that it changed what it means for humans to communicate with one another, interpersonally as well as in mass communication.

This chapter describes the *paradigm shift*—the fundamental change in information production, delivery, and consumption—that occurred in the latter half of the twentieth century. This shift has been called the digital communication revolution (<http://www.ojcmt.net/articles/23/237.pdf>), the third industrial revolution (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_Revolution), the information age (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_Age), and, as we will refer to it in this book, the digital era (<http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/digital-era/29024>).

The focus of this book is how the creation and consumption of news have changed through this paradigm shift. Examining the changes reveals which practices are mere conventions of this moment in the history of news and which reflect essential values that endure through changes in technology and marketing. By the end of this chapter, users should be able to explain the major ways that the paradigm shift has affected contemporary digital journalism and be able to describe the journalistic values that have transcended paradigm shifts. Users should

also understand that, throughout history, mass communication in general, and journalism in particular, has experienced a series of paradigm shifts as technology has created new platforms.

A paradigm shift (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradigm_shift), according to the scientist who coined that term, Thomas Kuhn (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Kuhn), is “a change from one way of thinking to another. It’s a revolution, a transformation, a sort of metamorphosis. It does not just happen; rather it is driven by agents of change.” Kuhn argues that scientific advancement is not a slow, orderly evolution, but rather is a “series of peaceful interludes punctuated by intellectually violent revolutions,” and in those revolutions “one conceptual world view is replaced by another” (Thomas Kuhn, quoted in *Take the Leap*).

The communication paradigm shift at the end of the twentieth century was as challenging to the status quo as the transportation revolution that changed the world in the first half of that century. In industrialized nations, the first half of the twentieth century saw transition from the horse-and-buggy to trains to planes to at least one automobile in most households. Transportation technologies created a paradigm shift, a change so dramatic that how people behaved in all areas of their lives changed. A 500-mile trip was no longer measured in weeks but in hours. A trip across an ocean could happen in less than a day rather than taking weeks. The new rapid ability to move people and goods expanded commerce, but with the creation of new opportunities, came new problems. For example, people could get fresh foods grown anywhere, rather than consume only those that could be grown seasonally and locally. This resulted in a wider variety of foods available but also created the need to sacrifice taste and ripeness of many fruits and vegetables in favor of their transportability and created a greater carbon footprint per food item. Friends and family no longer needed to live in the same small town to see one another on a regular basis. That expanded career opportunities but separated generations and grown siblings. That limited family members’ abilities to babysit children or care for elders.

Limited-access roads, highways, and turnpikes, designed to get people from one point to another as efficiently as possible, were constructed, changing the experience of long-distance ground travel. No longer did drivers need to think about camping on the side of the road or where to

find the infrequent roadhouses along the route of travel. Now travelers could select from a multitude of fast foods and easy-access exit-located hotels. Isolated, efficient travel experience triumphed over that found in roadhouse boarding, with communal dining among strangers. Airline and train routes reinforced population and commercial centers, attracting more people and manufacturing by their presence, thus stimulating greater population migration and density. The transportation revolution built upon industry and reinforced the industry-induced change from agrarian to urban lifestyles.

In the last half of the twentieth century, computer and satellite technology created a paradigm shift in communication equal in size and significance to that created by transportation technology. Interpersonal communication that was dependent on physically mailed letters and phone calls that happened to catch a person “in” were replaced with instant verbal and visual messaging, notifying the recipient immediately on a handheld or wearable two-way communication device. News that had been delivered to mass audiences in episodic doses at prescribed times of day changed to immediate, user-initiated access to real-time targeted information. Delivery by a few corporate-owned or government-controlled news organizations that operated within geographical borders gave way to a global flood of information providers and direct interaction between news producers and consumers and a blending of those roles, with no gatekeeping required.

In the twentieth century, those who delivered messages via mass communication were generally professionals. The core group of those who laid claim to the label “journalist” were reporters and editors who worked in print media newsrooms.

Some who worked in the production of radio or television news, including some anchors who delivered the news on camera, field reporters, and producers, considered themselves journalists and worked to uphold professional values. Others who did the same tasks weren’t so sure that they were “real” journalists and didn’t think that the professionalism expectations of print journalists applied to them. Newspaper photographers and broadcast video and audio recorders were often considered tangential to news reports and were sometimes called “reporters with their brains knocked out” by text-superior colleagues.

Running a machine that captured images or sound was considered inferior to collecting and crafting words into news packages.

Radio shows were hosted by disc jockeys who played phonograph records and read advertising messages and “rip and read (<http://www.newscript.com/rip.html>)” news bulletins provided by wire services (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_wire_services), with no thought of accountability for the truth or accuracy of the messages that they read.

The notion that stories were best told through a marriage of visuals, text, and sound was still in its infancy.

From the vantage point of today’s digital era, it is hard to believe that citizens or leaders in commerce, industry, or government could function without personal computers in hand to provide immediate access to others along with real-time notification of time, weather, and news. In the twentieth century, everyone had a favorite news source. Whether it was the *New York Times*, *La Monde*, the BBC, or the Australian Broadcasting Corporation depended on location, as each source had limited geographic distribution.

Today, the question, “How do you get your news?” or “How do you know what is going on in the world?” is more likely to elicit the name of a social media app or a dismissive shrug than the name of a legacy news organization. It is disconcerting to anyone with Internet access to consider *not* being able to instantly know what is going on in the world through an infinite variety of sources.

Just as transportation fulfills the goal of physically moving people from one point to another, news production fulfills the goal of giving people information that they need so that they can make educated choices about what they believe, how they can govern themselves, and their role in creating a community that meets their needs and interests. For these goals to be met, essential journalistic values of balance, accuracy, relevance, and completeness must endure.

People seek news for many reasons, including entertainment and interpersonal connection in addition to learning about the world around them. Citizens need to be informed and educated about contemporary events to help them knowledgeably participate in self-governance. But no one wants to study the news all of the time. It is logical and ethically acceptable for individuals to sometimes choose not to be informed, just

as it is just fine for individuals to sometimes wander through a park with no particular goal of getting from one point to another. But it is impossible to engage in civic life without sometimes seeking news and opinion with the goal of being informed and educated on contemporary issues of the day.

First, Some Definitions

Mass Communication: online *mass communication* is differentiated from interpersonal communication by publisher intent or audience access. If the publisher's intent is to communicate to an unrestricted or unknown audience, or if the site is accessible by an unrestricted or an unknown audience regardless of publisher intent, the message, production, and consumption fall within the realm of mass communication. The creation and consumption of news is one type of mass communication. One may communicate with many different intentions, such as persuasion, sales, or simple expression of opinion. *Ethics for a Digital Era* focuses on the core informational intent and function of journalism: providing and consuming the news.

News: Information counts as news because of a combination of three factors. *News* is a cluster concept (<http://itisonlyatheory.blogspot.com/2010/01/cluster-concepts.html>). The more elements from each factor a particular piece includes, the more that the particular piece of information counts as *news*. While some pieces are clearly “hard” news and some are clearly pure entertainment or advocacy communication, many examples fall somewhere on the continuum of “more news” to “less news.” Opinion pieces, for example, will often contain a few elements from one or more of the three factors of news but will mostly be an argument designed to lead users to share the opinion of the producer. News, on the other hand, tells people what to think *about*, rather telling them what they should conclude. The three factors of news in the digital era are: (1) *publication intent*, (2) *properties of the product*, and (3) *user perception*.

(1) *Publication intent:* the producer of news seeks, synthesizes, and publishes information with the intent of creating an informed and politically literate populace—people who can use the information to make

better-informed choices. Journalistic intent does not imply that all producers of news are objective or have no opinion on the matters that they present. Rather, mass communicators with journalistic intent always have reasons for why they share what they consider to be news. The primary communicative intent, or agenda, for news producers is the belief that “the people” need to know what the producer is about to share. According to media scholars Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, “For all that the face of journalism has changed, indeed, its purpose has remained remarkably constant, if not always well-served, since the notion of ‘a press’ first evolved more than three hundred years ago....The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2011, 12). The principles that separate those who have journalistic intent from those who don’t are the values of verification, independence, and accountability.

(2) *Properties of the product:* News is information that can be used for self-governance. Information that can be used for self-governance can be as pragmatic as being told that a bridge over which one drives home is closed for repair. It can be as complicated and multidimensional as various views from policy makers and topic experts on health-care or defense strategy or immigration policies. It is as relevant, or irrelevant, to the individual voter as the religion or sexual orientation of a candidate for public office. These properties are commonly considered to differentiate news stories from other types of informative nonfiction writing:

- a. Significant impact on the user;
- b. Alerts users to events or issues that have significant impact on other people;
- c. Geographical closeness to the user;
- d. Timeliness, in that recent events are more newsworthy than less-recent events;
- e. Conflict that is person-to-person or person to nature, government, or organization;
- f. Peculiarity or unusualness;
- g. Prominence, in that better-known people are more likely to be newsworthy.

Every production that is intended to be an example of news will include one or more of these properties.

(3) *User perception*: In the twenty-first century, the user's perception matters in a whole new way in determining what counts as news. In the pre-digital past, news was dispersed to the broadest possible audience. As different audience members started out with more knowledge of a subject than other audience members, some people got far more detail than they needed and some got far less than they needed. Now, individuals can easily seek information from a variety of sources, so news producers can target a more defined audience and repackage news to meet the needs of different users. No one can know everything, but adults living in community have both the need and the responsibility to seek out information that allows them to engage in civic life. The expression, "That's news to me!" has taken on a more literal meaning than ever before. Self-governing citizens need to be on the lookout for bits of information that may be insignificant to some people, but that, nevertheless, can change that individual's overall world-view and ways of functioning. Citizens now have the ability to easily access what they need to know to engage with others in their communities.

Legacy news organizations: institutions that published news through print, radio, or television prior to the digital age are called legacy news organizations. Major legacy news organizations survived the transition from the "news cycle" to digital publication. The pre-digital age required specific deadlines by which information needed to be collected so that it could be processed and delivered at particular broadcast news program times or in newspapers delivered each morning or evening to audience members at their homes or to stores for single-issue sales. Surviving legacy news organizations have joined the legions of web-based information providers in thinking first of dispersing information as close to real time as possible through their web sites. Some legacy news organizations have retained accompanying print or broadcast editions; others have not. For this book's purposes, web-based communication is assumed to be the sustaining model for twenty-first-century news production, delivery, and consumption.

Ethics: the study of how moral agents do, and how they should, act in regards to other people, non-human subjects of moral worth, and natural systems is called ethics. *Moral agents* are competent, rational adults who can be held accountable for their voluntary actions. The minimal ethical requirement is for moral agents to meet their role-related responsibilities and do so without causing unjustified harm to other people, animals, or natural systems. Ethical imperatives of mass communication in the pre-digital, twentieth-century model were based on a shared acceptance of professional values among those who produced the news. The ethical imperatives of twenty-first-century mass communication must be based instead on how people should act in regard toward one another, regardless of what professional title the producer or sharer of information may choose to use. There is no practical restriction in the digital era between who can provide information with journalistic intent and who cannot.

The New World of News Production and Consumption

The chart that follows illustrates three major differences in news under the old paradigm as compared with the new paradigm. A description of each change follows the table, along with ethical implications of those changes. The paradigm shift from professionally mediated, one-way news to user-chosen, interactive news has necessitated a change in how consumers, practitioners, and scholars think about ethical guidelines for mass communication.

Old paradigm	New paradigm
Physical news products	Virtual, dynamic news production
Practitioner control	User control
Accidental information acquisition by exposure to a collection of unrelated stories	Additional information acquisition through hyperlinks in a particular story

Physical news products to virtual dynamic news production: in the twentieth-century model, news pieces were produced and then held in their print or broadcast form. In the twenty-first century, news pieces are published on the web as soon as they are deemed “ready” by the news producer; they may continue to evolve as new facts become known and inaccuracies are discovered.

Journalistic truth is different from scientific truth in that scientific truths are generalizable and static. The rules of nature are consistent. They apply the same, wherever on earth one happens to be. Gravity works the same now as it did 20, 200, and 2,000 years ago. Gravity is a truth that will not change.

Journalistic truths evolve. News is the sharing of episodic stories. News presents snapshots of events and issues and people. As with snapshots taken over time, the events, issues, and people that populate a news piece may look different in each new presentation. But, once news was delivered in the pre-digital era in archival form, such as a television broadcast or a daily newspaper, the story could be saved in the format published and then found, reviewed, and compared to later editions.

Under the new paradigm, as web-based postings can be easily changed by their publishers, more unverified claims are published, and comparisons with earlier editions are more difficult. The hours between gathering facts and publishing in the pre-digital era provided time for reporting and fact-checking. In the digital era, users are looking for real-time publication, and publishers feel pressure to get out information *now*.

Information may be distributed without fact-checking.

When previous digital versions of a news story are simply overwritten to present the most current, accurate account with no indication of change, two ethical problems arise. First, there may be historical significance in how a situation was first understood that will be lost if previous versions are not preserved and easy to find. Next, even though a story’s publisher can easily extract elements or add new copy to a story without readers knowing of the change, the initial publications will certainly be cached in some recipients’ devices. It may not be evident, when readers access evolving versions of a story, how small facts in the story have changed. Audience members may think that they are looking at the

same story that they initially saw, as it has the same headline and same picture, but there may be significant differences in the textual content. Making significant changes in a story without notice to readers is an ethical issue because readers may believe an earlier version of a story and use it as a basis for action. Acting on false beliefs can cause direct or indirect harms to the user of information.

Practitioner control to user control: Under the old paradigm, gatekeeping was a primary and important function of news production. News producers decided which of the myriad events and issues were most “newsworthy” and how those newsworthy events should be framed. The way that events were prioritized in the publication helped audience members understand how and why the event or issue was important.

Audience members—the users of mass communication—are now their own gatekeepers. Search engines allow users to find information with the entry of a keyword. Users can create their own news packages by picking individual stories from among an array of online offerings, including social networking, reviews, and affinity-focused topic sites, along with sites that deliver more traditional-looking journalistic accounts of events. Users let aggregators and news sites know, through their choices, which topics are of most interest to them. Now, news providers can know, in real time, which stories are having impact and how much impact they are having as their web sites count visitors and measure the amount of time that visitors spend on pages within their sites. News providers use this feedback to determine which stories users think are important, and they may choose to expend additional reporting resources on those topics that matter most to users. Users also have the opportunity to provide content-rich feedback by offering reader comments to the news producer. They can participate in discussions with other readers on news or social media sites and offer their own perception to the stories of the day. The rich variety of news sources creates an ethical issue because users have a new level of responsibility to seek out important, accurate information. Just as food diets need to include appropriate nutrition, information diets need to include exposure to fact and a diversity of opinion so that citizens can understand what is

really going on in their communities and the world. Otherwise, they are likely to act on false beliefs.

Change in accidental information: under the old paradigm, professional journalists laid out a newspaper in different sections, with stories prioritized by location and length. On the front page, readers could expect to find what the gatekeepers determined to be the most important stories of the day. On the inside, they found interesting, but less urgent, stories. Readers were exposed to information that they would not have known or cared about simply because it was there. In looking for stories that matched their interest, they would see headlines about matters that they might not have known to look for. Television and radio broadcasts followed a similar format, with the most important stories being the longest and nearest to the start of the program. Viewers and listeners knew when to expect the broadcast of what journalists believed to be the most important stories. People “accidentally” acquired information because it was published near something in which they already had interest.

In the new paradigm, users may customize their news feeds so that they get no international news or no news about politics. On the other hand, they may easily dig deep into context and research beneath the reporting of surface facts. This is an ethical issue because of the role-related responsibility of citizens to engage with the community in which they live. Digging deeper into a subject of interest may make an individual knowledgeable but not broadly informed. Making good decisions for self-governance depends on citizens being informed about the contemporary events and situations likely to affect them. That means that individuals must look beyond their initial interests and work intentionally to learn the important news of the day.

Under the old paradigm, users were exposed to stories that they didn’t expect. The front page of a broadsheet newspaper had headlines and at least a few hundred words that introduced between four and eight stories; the stories were then “jumped” to an inside page.

Now, users may be delivered stories in the categories of their interest. They may not be exposed to stories outside of their interest. However, through hyperlinks or keyword searches, they can easily explore available background and context.

Under the old paradigm, exposure was broad but shallow. Audience members had only the information that was offered by the news provider. Under the new paradigm, exposure is narrow but deep. News seekers are less likely to be exposed to a rich variety of topics or a variety of opinion unless they purposefully seek these out. While news seekers under the old paradigm could depend on a news organization to provide exposure to important contemporary issues, now they have to responsibility to seek those out. Citizens have both the opportunity and the responsibility to be more active in seeking out information that educates them for self-governance.

A Brief History of Journalism Ethics and Paradigm Shifts

Discussions of responsible mass communication have gone on for as long as people have relayed messages to groups. From early cave and cliff carvings and paintings, it is safe to say that humans from a very early time had an innate need tell their stories in a way that could be shared broadly and preserved. But for thousands of years, human growth and development took place without widely shared, mediated knowledge. Mass publication was limited by the hand or block lettering or pictorials required to produce it and by illiteracy of the general populace.

In an early treatise on the topic, *Gorgias* (<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/gorgias.html>), a dialogue written by the Greek philosopher Plato, we find the philosopher Socrates in roughly 400 BCE stating that those who have the power to persuade others must do so with intent of leading those listening to truth and goodness. Socrates says, “So this is what that skilled and good orator will look to when he applies to people’s souls whatever speeches he makes....He will always give his attention to how justice may come to exist in the souls of his fellow citizens and injustice be gotten rid of, how self-control may come to exist there and lack of discipline be gotten rid of, and how the rest of excellence may come into being there and evil may depart” (Plato). Socrates points out that the character of the speaker matters as well as the message. He asks rhetorically, “Shouldn’t we then attempt to care for the city and its citizens with

the aim of making the citizens themselves as good as possible? For without this...it does no good to provide any other service if the intentions of those who are likely to make a great deal of money or take a position of rule over people or some other position of power aren't admirable and good" (Plato). Some might argue that informing the public is different from the notion of people of good character providing messages that are intended to create "the good" in others. We return to the notion of ethically ideal journalism later in this book.

Acta diurna, translated from Latin as "Daily Proceedings," was a hand-lettered public notice tacked up in locations within the Roman Empire beginning as early as 60 BCE. *Tching-pao*, Palace News, a wood-block printed official publication of the Chinese T'ang dynasty appeared in public locations before 1000 CE. These are examples of early printed versions of mass communication. While expensive and slow to create, printed news had a permanence that made it superior to the oral tradition that had previously sustained mass communication.

A paradigm shift in mass communication occurred in Germany in the mid-1450s, when Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. News delivery became entwined with technology and marketing forevermore. While the printing and mass distribution of newsheets transferred power from government officials to citizen publishers, the first evident transfer of power through communication technology was in the tightly controlled religious structure of the time in Europe.

Before the invention of the printing press, important religious books, such as hand-lettered Bible, Torah, and Koran, available only to the wealthy and religiously approved few, were read to the faithful and interpreted by religious leaders. With the invention of the printing press, cheaper, printed copies of these important books became available for direct reading and interpretation by individuals. Print communication's new reach challenged the systems of economic and ecclesiastic control held by religious organizations. For example, the Gutenberg press destroyed the system of paid "indulgences" that brought significant income to the church. Indulgences, which required days of careful hand-lettering by monks, were bought by Christians to secure the passage of recently dead relatives from purgatory to heaven. Suddenly,

with the new technology, printing presses could create, within hours, hundreds of indulgences.

Once indulgences were produced mechanically and quickly, the church lost money. Hand-lettered missives were no longer required. Printers made money. The cheaper indulgences were handed over to the church to save souls, at a financial savings to the penitents. It is not a coincidence that religious leaders stopped selling such passages from purgatory to heaven when such sales no longer resulted in financial gain for the church (Eisenstein 1979).

The first newspaper produced independently of government or religion was probably the *Gazette de France*, published in Paris in 1631. In both Germany and France, as reporting was produced by entrepreneurial press owners, the fourth estate was born. When London's *Daily Universal Register* published dispatches from reporters at the site of conflict during the Napoleonic Wars at the turn of the nineteenth century, citizens were able to read, for the first time, news about military battles that did not come from governmental sources. A similar tradition simultaneously developed in the North American Colonies in the late 1700s, as James Franklin and his brother, Benjamin, published the *New England Courant* and *Pennsylvania Gazette*, respectively, telling stories from the Colonists' point of view, rather than from that of the King of England. The importance that such newspapers played in successful revolutionary rhetoric led the founders of the newly formed United States to guarantee press freedom as part of the First Amendment to the US Constitution.

Print journalism enjoyed 200 years as an activist, revolutionary pursuit in Australia, England, Europe, and the United States. The oral tradition of credible or eloquent leaders telling the stories of important events and issues to mass audiences gave way to the superiority and consistency of stories created by reporters who observed the relevant action and told stories without the garnish of governmental spin. Printed news showed its ability to stimulate public action and response. The role-related responsibility of news organizations was born: the special job of journalism is to ignore the pressure of special interests, including government or even the journalists' own biases, in order to provide citizens with accurate, verifiable, and independently produced information that they need for self-governance.

Throughout the 1800s, the proliferation of printing press owners provided vehicles for advertising by local businesses. Advertising set off the costs of production, which allowed publishers to lower their prices to reach a mass rather than elite audience. The penny press (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penny_press) was descriptive in that news was now available to everyone at the cost of a mere penny. News providers worked to appeal to larger, less-elite audiences, with greater circulation used to increase their charges to advertisers. The accessibility of these newspapers increased literacy and provided a shared, mediated knowledge of important events in the community, nation, and world.

However, a symbiotic relationship between publishers and advertisers quickly formed, creating an early conflict of interests as publishers struggled to meet the needs of audience members and fulfill the demands of advertisers. Publishers wanted to separate editorial content from advertising, but advertising got the bigger and better display. Advertisers exerted pressure to control editorial content so that it did not threaten sales of their goods or services. Publishers sometimes stood up to these economic pressures—and sometimes adjusted their editorial standards to keep the advertiser money flowing.

The penny press was dismissed as “yellow journalism” by the elite press. These inexpensive newspapers induced the more-elite papers to highlight their higher standards and professionalism.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the professionalism of journalism was about to begin. The University of Missouri (<https://journalism.missouri.edu/jschool/>) boasts the oldest journalism school in the country, dating back to 1908. Joseph Pulitzer, founded the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbia_University_Graduate_School_of_Journalism) in 1912. Journalists from elite newspapers, such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, formed the first professional guild, first called the Sigma Delta Chi fraternity, now called The Society of Professional Journalists (<https://www.spj.org/>).

The invention of the telegraph at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century provided another convergence of technology, economics, and the ethics of journalism, creating the first major paradigm

shift in mass communication in 500 years. At the time that these technologies were in development, the industrial revolution and unending series of scientific discoveries gave people a new sense of control over their environment. Causes and effects and solutions to problems could all be discovered, if only enough talent and resources were dedicated to the problem. Truth was believed to be external, certain, and knowable. These beliefs about the world and human ability to control nature through knowledge reverberated in the twentieth-century journalistic paradigm.

The elite news organizations, which had financial and human resources, were quick to capitalize on the telegraph's ability to transmit news to multiple destinations across long distances. Individual news organizations pooled their resources to create co-ops, called wire associations, which sent material to the members first via telegraph, then using telephone lines, then satellite. The wire associations, which United Press International (UPI) (<http://www.upi.com/>) and Associated Press (AP) (<http://www.ap.org/>) exemplify, hired journalists to transmit information (first text, then photographs, then audio and video) from distant scenes to the multitude of member news organizations. Transmitted product had to have true mass appeal; the stories could not be targeted toward audience members with particular political ideologies or regionally cultural perspectives. But the focus was often to reach the readers to whom advertisers marketed—those in wealthy dominant society.

As the audience members that advertisers most wished to reach were members of the wealthy dominant society—Euro-Americans serving as the prototype—journalists and news organizations produced news to appeal to these consumers instead of reaching out to diverse citizens. The blander-the-better, appeal-to-the-wealthy news products made the best economic sense. Prompted by technology and marketing considerations, not ethical principles, the “objective” news stories nevertheless became the ethical standard for journalism, standing in comparison to the sensationalism of the local, popular, tabloid press.

In 1923, the American Society of Newspaper Editors created the first Code of Ethics for Journalism (<http://ethics.iit.edu/ecodes/node/4457>), exemplifying the technical and scientific view of people in

the industrialized nations in the new century. Journalists were expected to have “natural and trained powers of observation and reasoning.” The primary role of the journalist was that of “chronicler.”

Newspapers’ codes of ethics echoed that belief through mid-century, including the *New York Times* in the 1960s, “Although total objectivity may be impossible because every story is written by a human being, the duty of every reporter and editor is to strive for as much objectivity as humanly possible.... presenting both sides of the issue is not hedging but the essence of responsible journalism,” and the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* and St. Paul *Dispatch*, at around the same time, said it this way, “One of a newspaper’s major functions is to be a mirror of the society in which it exists.”

The principle of objective reporting contrasted with biased, sensationalized, and sometimes blatantly false reporting in the penny press of the 1800s, which was carried into the 1900s by the tabloids. The process of objective reporting was found to create a barrier that interfered with journalists’ ability to meet their role-related responsibility of telling citizens what was needed for self-governance.

Reporting on World War II and the reporting that followed through the latter half of the twentieth century illustrates this. World War II was not a controversial war, from the point of view of Australia, the British Commonwealth, and the United States. The UK and Australia had been involved in direct combat since the late 1930s. When the United States finally entered the war in response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, its military base in Hawaii, all but one US representative voted approval. Few citizens questioned the legitimacy of WWII. As there was perceived to be only one “right” perspective on that war, reporting was relatively uncontroversial. The war reporting also allowed for the application of new technologies.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, America’s entrance into the war was a radio news exclusive from 2:22 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, when the first wire service report described the destruction of air force carriers, fighter planes, and the military that manned them. This was the first crisis broadcast for the American public in real time. Longer, explanatory newspaper stories were not available until daybreak the following day.

As the war progressed, CBS correspondent Edward R. Murrow gave listeners minute-by-minute descriptions of life in the war zone, mostly reporting from Europe. He experimented with new reporting techniques. Listeners were introduced to what we now call “natural sound”; they could hear the bombs falling for themselves. They heard what was going on at the scene while Murrow described and interpreted it for them.

For the three years and nine months that the US military fought in WWII, hundreds of US reporters on battlefronts around the world created radio, print, photography, and motion-picture reports for an eager American public.

Within a decade of the war’s end, however, objectivity and the news came under serious attack. The United States returned to peacetime secure in its military strength but not as sure of the country’s ability to withstand the more subtle threat of anti-democratic politics.

Communism was an intellectual curiosity to some and a viable political alternative to others. But the concern that Communists were plotting to overthrow the US government grew, particularly among those in government. The House Un-American Activities Committee and Senator Joseph McCarthy’s permanent Senate subcommittee on investigations in the early 1950s drew media attention through the drama of unsubstantiated political claims.

McCarthy exploited the conventions of objective reporting. The news cycles of the time revolved around daily deadlines for newspaper publication. McCarthy’s claims of Communists infiltrating the US government, the press, the armed forces, and the entertainment industry gained credibility thanks to the “chronicle” style of journalism that was prized at the time.

Day after day, the senator announced his new set of allegations just before newspapers’ deadlines. There was no time for journalists to find an equally credible source who might give an opposing view to McCarthy’s claims. The news convention of the day was that journalists reported only what they were told by named, credible sources. The senator provided the illusion of expertise and knowledge. Thus the journalists repeated what the senator said. They could include denials from those he charged in the next day’s or in the next week’s publications, but

those denials did not have the same impact as the publication of the senator's continual, unanswered charges.

Thoughtful journalists were troubled that their conventional style of reporting did not get the truth out to citizens. Journalists knew, but could not find a way to say in the news columns, that Senator McCarthy's allegations of communist ties were often false and his pronouncement of the sweeping Red Tide of Communism was dramatic but not true.

It took the maverick television reporting of Edward R. Murrow to provide context to McCarthy's allegations. The just-born television documentary had not yet developed norms of conduct, as had printed news publications. The television story was different enough from a newspaper story that television journalists didn't think that they had to follow the same rules. Rather than be dependent on what credible sources had to say, as were the newspapers of the time, the content of television news was controlled by the producer. Television documentaries included taped interviews with sources, but the producer who wrote the full script for the story and the reporter/anchor who verbally wove the sources and visuals together did not hesitate to clarify or interpret for the television audience. The *See It Now* piece that demonstrated the falsity of McCarthy's charges aired in early March 1954. In the end, McCarthy fell victim to the reporting process that he had himself exploited. The *See It Now* program provoked public disgust at the senator's misuse of power and of news media. McCarthy's denial and explanation, aired four weeks later, could not rally attention or belief that could stand up to Murrow's exposure of him. It was also clear that Senator McCarthy, as passionate as he was about his crusade to rid the United States of Communists, did not have the charisma or credibility of the well-known, well-loved war hero and broadcast celebrity, Edward R. Murrow. McCarthy was disgraced, and the journalist as credible source was born.

The Civil Rights movement followed in the 1950s and the 1960s. As the events and issues of desegregation erupted on the streets of Birmingham, Alabama, as well as in the halls of the US Supreme Court, journalists realized that they often could not find a matched pair of equally prominent sources who represented opposite points of view.

There was the powerful status quo of some Southern statesmen declaring that “separate but equal” was good enough for African-Americans. And there were the voiceless and relatively powerless African-American citizens, led by an eloquent minister, Dr. Martin Luther King, asking for what the US Constitution seemed to guarantee for all citizens: equal protection under the law. The principles of objective reporting do not play out so easily with this complicated public policy story. Simply presenting external events and what people involved with the events said did not produce adequate reporting. Issues and events needed to be explained. Visuals, like law enforcement officials blasting demonstrators with fire hoses and K9 units allowing their dogs to threaten young children in the street, told a story that could not be “balanced” by presenting a view that such actions were justified. Journalists found that the real story was found in the how they wove together who was saying and doing what.

The war in Vietnam, too, signaled problems for the reporter-as-conduit style of reporting. Reflecting national ambivalence and ultimately amplifying anti-war sentiment, news coverage undoubtedly promoted a lack of public support for US military actions. Television coverage of the battlefields brought the scenes of death and destruction to American households just as citizens prepared their evening meals. Whether intentionally or not, journalism played an important role in the formation of public policy and public action relating to the Vietnam War.

The assumptions that sustained the old paradigm of journalism were crumbling. Among those assumptions was the belief that a balanced story is one that equally represents two opposing points of view. This ultimately reduced the reporter to striving to be nothing more than a clear channel for sources who had polarizing points of view. The framing technique used—an attempt to balance of perspectives—was based on the misperception that every story had two equal sides. News organizations often lost a story’s nuance by framing controversial topics as competitions between powerful points of view. Most stories have many sides; some have only one. There are no opposing perspectives when reporting on the devastation caused by a hurricane. When stories are framed to provide polarized opposing points of view, the true story is often lost.

Any hope that journalism might return to some mythical earlier day and settle for unobtrusively relaying easily discoverable news items to readers and viewers disappeared in the two years of reporting on Watergate. This was a story in which reporting intentionally intruded into the story's development and creation. It was one of investigative reporting's finest hours.

The ever-evolving news story that culminated in the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon on August 9, 1974, was rich with political importance and filled with the twists of a good crime novel. The story could not have been told if journalists had stuck to reporting within the old paradigm.

Two novice reporters for the *Washington Post*, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, did not wait for official pronouncements or for on-the-record credible sources to tell the nation what was happening and why. Woodward and Bernstein obtained information however they could, tricking telephone company clerks and pressuring witnesses called before the grand jury into disclosing information to them.

Woodward and Bernstein were not the first reporters to find that they could produce more accurate reporting by stepping outside the lines of conventional professional values and practices, but they were the first to do so in such a sustained, public, and successful way that generations of journalism students wanted to follow in their footsteps, regardless of the lessons they learned in ethics classes.

Rather than searching for, finding, and then reporting some indisputable truth, the Watergate reporting included the creation of a story constructed like a jigsaw puzzle from a confluence of perspectives emerging from White House statements, leaked audio tapes, insiders seeking to expose corruption, those seeking to cover it up, those changing sides, illegally leaked grand jury testimony, testimony before the US House, and files from local law enforcement pieced together with others obtained from the FBI.

Journalistic lore holds that Woodward and Bernstein established and held to a "two source" rule—they would never report anything unless they had that information verified by two independent sources. It is unlikely that they always followed this rule.

If every claim published during the reporting of Watergate had the backing of two independent sources, one would be forced to conclude that, after President Nixon and then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger knelt together in prayer in the Oval Office in the presence of only one another during the Watergate crisis, either one of them or close confidants of theirs, confirmed this intimate moment for the journalists. It is far easier to believe that Woodward and Bernstein drew conclusions from a conglomerate of sources “close to the matter” and constructed a narrative that best fit the pieces that they were able to collect.

Remnants of the old paradigm could be seen through the end of the twentieth century, despite the undeniable pressure to move to a different kind of journalism. For example, the attempt to establish a national health-care system in the United States in 1994 was reported by mainstream media as a political debate between the administration of President Bill Clinton and the Republican-controlled Congress. The story of the need for uninsured citizens to access needed health care was overpowered by the win-lose style of the policy story’s presentation. It took more than another decade before the public issue of developing a new health-care policy could be discussed without the goal of providing health care to uninsured citizens getting lost in media’s attempt to frame the story from an either/or perspective.

The pillars of the new paradigm are immediacy and interactivity. The challenge for credible news media is to retain standards of reporting that separate them from self-interested or less-competent information givers and to use new technology to enhance the important journalistic voice.

Owing to the availability of a constant stream of information from many sources, with consumers adding pieces to the information puzzle or providing commentary as the story evolves, a news story can become a never-ending story, with little financial investment by the news organization. Credibility is found in the judgment of the news managers publishing in the virtual and physical world, as they choose among the variety of voices and video and add in their own professional perspective to create a comprehensive, but constantly changing, narrative. Those that consistently tell the accurate story of the moment gain credibility and the trust of their users.

Marketing, as well as technology, helped construct and sustain the ethical principles that supported the old paradigm of journalism; similarly, a new technologically-driven and market-driven set of possibilities and objectives are helping to define the ethical principles that support and sustain journalistic practice within the new paradigm.

The world has changed through the information revolution. Responsibilities for producers and users of news have changed. Journalism ethics can no longer be based solely on ideals of professionalism. As we are all in this together now, journalism ethics that serves current and future audiences is, like that of the distant pre-printing-press past, based on the precepts of common morality. Whatever their title, people who have the power to communicate are ethically required to do so responsibly.

Questions for Reflection

- 1 *Identify how the digital era has created a paradigm shift for interpersonal communication.*
- 2 *How have forms of mass communication other than journalism (such as persuasion, advertising, entertainment) been affected by the communication revolution?*
- 3 *Describe some ways that news providers can be transparent about changes that they make to web-published articles.*
- 4 *How can citizens encourage one another to become informed about important contemporary issues of the day? Where would you look to get exposed to issues that you might not otherwise know about? What makes that source of news a credible source?*
- 5 *How is Wikipedia different from the printed encyclopedias of the past? Does edited crowd-sourcing result in more accurate and complete presentation of information as compared with professionally written pieces? Why or why not?*

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