Journalism and Democracy: Towards a Contemporary Research Strategy in Mexico.

Professor Natalie Fenton
Goldsmiths, University of London
Department of Media and Communications
New Cross
London
SE14 6NW
UK
T: +44(0)20 7919 7620
Email: N.Fenton@gold.ac.uk

Section 1: News Journalism and Democracy: why it matters and the issues involved

A *healthy* news media is often claimed to be the life-blood of democracy. This is because news provides, or should provide, the vital resources for processes of information gathering, deliberation and analysis that enables citizens to participate in political life and democracy to function better. For this to happen we need the news to represent a wide range of issues from a variety of perspectives and with a diversity of voices. It requires a journalism that operates freely and without interference from state institutions, corporate pressures or fear of intimidation and persecution. In an ideal world this would mean that news media would survey the socio-political environment, hold the powerful to account, provide a platform for intelligible and illuminating debate, and encourage dialogue across a range of views. However, this is an ideal relationship hinged on a conception of *independent journalism in the public interest* – journalism as fourth estate linked to notions of public knowledge, political participation and democratic renewal. The reality is often quite different. Identifying the gap between the admirable aspiration of a fully functioning public sphere and the conditions of practice and production of news media and then understanding why this gap exists is critical to understanding how our democracies can function better.

However, the relationship between media and democracy is not a straightforward one and depends not only on the *existing* state of the media but also on the nature of the market and indeed on the state of actually existing democracy in each individual context – where context is likely to be state-led because of the prevailing dominance of state legislatures but not state-bound due to globalisation. Thus, this relationship also depends on political culture and media policy; the nature of the economy and the market; media and communication technologies and formats as well as globalisation and social and cultural issues such as literacy, poverty, religious differences and daily rituals (Curran, Fenton and Freedman, 2012). Each of these factors will have an effect on media circulation and on media consumption and they will also bear influence on how democracy can function effectively.

Hence, it is key in any research to begin for the position of what currently *is* – what is the existing state of the news media in Mexico; how are its various elements funded and regulated; how is the practice of journalism supported and protected? Then, in assessing the relationship of the media to democracy, one must also attend to the current state of actually existing democracy in Mexico itself before beginning to address how one may relate to the other. Even a perfect news media is unlikely to solve a democratic crisis if the political systems of democratic governance are broken.

Systems and states

In 2004, Hallin and Mancini's seminal work *Comparing Media Systems*, attempted to classify national media systems into regional political/journalistic models – a North Atlantic "liberal" model; a Northern European "democratic Corporatist" model and a southern European "polarized pluralist" model. In an earlier publication Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) referred to media systems in southern Europe and Latin America as *clientelism* in which 'access to social resources is controlled by patrons and delivered to clients in exchange for deference and various kinds of support' (2002: 184-

185). Hallin and Mancini (2004) outlined four dimensions of media systems that need to be assessed in relation to applying the various models and understanding the role of the media in various contexts: (1) historical development of a strong or weak mass circulation press; (2) the extent to which the media system reflects the major political currents; (3) journalistic professional training and tradition; and (4) type and extent of state intervention in the media sector. But such models, while useful, are also criticized for operating from an overtly Western liberal premise and for being too prescriptive and so failing to account for other types of media found in Latin America, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. Notably, for contemporary application, they were also constructed without any account of the role of the internet or broader consequences of the digital age in breaking down international differences or otherwise entrenching them. Indeed, news media have been beset with many challenges over the last decade that have had considerable impact on how they operate and the sorts of news they produce that require detailed investigation and analysis that the Hallin and Mancini models struggle to take full account of.

Benson's (2010) approach is more sophisticated. He takes a structural field theory perspective on journalism arguing that news content is shaped primarily by its positioning in relation to other powerful fields, namely the political and economic fields and secondly by factors internal to the journalistic field itself such as the cultural logics of practice and social class differentiation. Each field overlaps to an extent but can also be usefully distinguished apart for analytic purposes.

The political field exerts structural influence when the state powerfully "constrains (or enables) the diversity of voices and views in the press, as well as the amount and types of criticism and critical reporting, through its power to regulate or subsidize the media, provide official information to the press and shape the system of parties and elections" (2010: 616). The economic field refers to commercial constraints that encompass a range of elements such as concentration of ownership (Klinenberg, 2007; Baker, 2007), profit pressures relating to types of ownership (Cranberg et al., 2001); types of funding such as advertising or paying audiences (Baker, 1994); and level and intensity of market competition. While the political and economic field establish the foundations for news and journalism, the cultural logics of journalism practice from nation to nation are also important (see Section 2 below). These include assumptions that have emerged over time about what constitutes "news" and the purpose of journalism; practices of news gathering and sourcing; norms of objectivity and impartiality – the ethics and practice of journalism that contribute to the news ecology in any one place at any one moment in time. Cultural logics will also be influenced by class stratification and organizational formations that will imprint upon the amount and types of news and journalism and the economic and professional relationships between news organizations.

The classic free market argument present in historical accounts of the emergence of the free press in Western democracies emphasizes the political constraints on news media. Here we find debates that highlight how authoritarian states control the media through a mixture of funding, law, taxation, sponsorship, appointments etc. The argument is that there needs to be alternative forms of media to challenge state information and that this can only come about through a media that exists in the private sector. In most Western democracies the existence of a free-market media alternative is taken for granted but such independent media sectors are often a crucial element for systems in a state of democratic transition. Media funded through ordinary sales and commercial media does not risk

losing its income each time it is critical of the state. Commercialisation thus brings: decentralised media, new spaces of expression, operational autonomy and freedom of expression. This model has long been celebrated by the US and UK liberal models that were reacting against state sponsored journalism of authoritarian regimes but often, in the process, disregarded anything in-between (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956).

A neo-liberal critique of this argument frequently adopts a largely economic perspective in pointing out the problems of free-market media under a Western model. Corporate conglomerates have been shown to exert pressure on news organizations that impact upon their structures and content through advertising, sponsorship and board-level pressures to produce ever more profit (Baker, 1994, 2002). Corporate media are profit-led not guided by public good considerations. Thus, they are not obliged to fund unprofitable news production or cater to all groups and interests in society. They are prone to draw ratings and offer entertainment or tabloid/infotainment forms of news. Media corporations can also grow so big that they are difficult to challenge. Winseck (2008:37) has noted that in Mexico, media corporations 'are so powerful that they have been able to, for all intents and purposes, write the new laws that were supposed to drastically reform the communications and media business'.

Frequently, the political and the economic fields impact on each other. Regulation or deregulation relating to media concentration may emanate from the political field but it clearly has ramifications for the economic field. Some of the key features of these constraints are outlined in more detail below.

Regulation

Government regulation can set out the limits of legally acceptable journalistic practice as well as limit or increase the range and nature of concentration of media ownership. Restrictive laws may at times be seen to constrain journalism through definitions of defamation and libel that prevent full and frank discussion of government officials for example. Constraints can also be placed on journalistic practice through an increase in police or state powers of surveillance over journalistic investigations that can endanger journalists' sources and put news-gathering activities under legal jeopardy. Certainly, in the UK there is currently much debate about the Regulatory and Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) that enables state surveillance of citizens and journalists (and their sources) and is justified under an 'anti-terror/national security' banner but argued to seriously impinge on the news media's ability to operate in the public interest.

On the other hand, laws can offer entitlement for journalists to access confidential government or other public sector information and hold such powers to account. Regulations regarding press freedom, freedom of information and public interest defences are often important protectors of the journalistic endeavour. Regulation can also protect the general public's right to privacy from a hungry news media desperate for a scoop. So, regulation can enhance plurality of the news environment, help temper the worst excesses of corporate news media and ensure that journalism that operates as a commercial practice does not lose sight of its relationship to democratic practice.

In June 2013 Mexico passed its own raft of constitutional amendments that could change substantively the regulation of radio and television. With the formation of a new regulator, the Federal Institute of Telecommunications (IFT), that is independent of the Presidency

and Congress, the hope is that legislative reform will inhibit the often-corrupt relationship between media moguls and government officials. The *2013 Telecommunication Reforms* are not designed purely to prevent corruption and protect the public from abuses of media power; they are also enabling and position the state as responsible for the establishment of a plural and diverse media landscape (Abraham-Hamanoiel, 2015).

Concentration of Ownership

Concentration of media ownership has often been allowed to develop unchecked as a result of governments exerting influence over news media. In these cases, the quid pro-quo is one that lays expectation of positive or at least not-negative coverage of the government in power in exchange for media corporations being left alone to do as they please commercially. Hence, certain media corporations grow in wealth and dominance of the market. This has been the case in Mexico where "by the mid-1970s, a handful of corporations […] owned most radio stations in the country and the Azcárraga family had total control over most television stations. In 1990 Emilio Azcárraga Milmo, father of Emilio Azcárraga Jean, current CEO of Televisa, famously declared himself to be 'a solider of the party' (Fernandez and Paxman 2013). […] These links allowed the company to fend off any attempt to modify the archaic laws which supposedly regulated their industry" (Abraham-Hamanoiel, 2015: forthcoming).

When control of the media lies in so few hands and too few media corporations decide what the public get to see and hear these corporations often begin flexing their political muscles yet further. Media concentration creates conditions in which wealthy individuals can amass great social and political power. If a nation's media becomes too close to powerful vested interests then it is less likely to hold that power fully to account. The literature available tells us that the larger and more concentrated media empires become, the more concerned politicians are to maintain good relations with owners and senior executives and editors (Davis 2002). As such, a media system that may have many platforms and points of distribution but is dominated by one owner or organization is not conducive to democracy.

Media owners have been shown to influence the sorts of news their organizations publish and so have some bearing on public debate and political opinion. Sometimes this is evident in *direct* intervention with Rupert Murdoch for example, happy to state that he has 'editorial control on major issues' (House of Lords Select Committee, 2008). Editors of national newspapers have often said, usually when they have left the newspaper itself, that Murdoch made it clear what he expected of them and the news they produced. But owner influence is more likely to come through *indirect* means such as the appointment of like-minded editors, emphasizing particular business approaches, or influencing the journalistic ethos of a news organization that then impacts on the processes of news production (Barnett, 2012).

When news proprietors accumulate excessive power and influence the problems associated with this power are exacerbated. A thoroughly marketised and deregulated newspaper industry in the UK is argued to have led to unchecked media concentration over several decades allowing some media groups to accumulate vast amounts of revenue along with social and political influence with adverse consequences for ethical journalism and democracy. Such market dominance of news media that can be found in very many places around the globe including Mexico, results in an excess of media power and unruly

political influence that breeds fear. This fear is manifest in politicians scared of their careers being wrecked and lives ruined by negative publicity along with their parties chances of re-election (Davis 2002). In the UK, 4 successive Prime Ministers gave evidence to the Leveson enquiry into the Press admitting they were "too close" to the big media players because the political stakes were so very high. In such circumstances, political parties, the police and other institutions are reluctant to investigate wrong-doing in the news media, hinder the expansion of large media conglomerates or introduce new regulation of news organizations and journalistic practice. Such patterns and relations have resulted in certain public policy areas being avoided for fear of either hostile reporting or media owner conflict (Davis, 2002; Dean, 2011). And, for the same reasons, politicians are more likely to discuss populist policies.

Fear also affects journalists who are increasingly on insecure employment contracts and can become too intimidated to stand up to a bullying culture where market-oriented managers place commercial priorities above journalistic responsibility and integrity. But it is not only journalists whose freedom is circumscribed by corporate compliance. Our ability to exercise our own democratic freedom as ordinary members of the public is premised on the basic fact that governments are not distorted by private interest of multi-media conglomerates (Fenton and Freedman, 2014). When governments as well as journalists are beholden to concentrated corporate power then freedom is hard to come by for all but the most powerful.

Types of funding

Ownership of news media is connected to the funding mechanism that underpins it which in many political economic accounts is frequently attributed as causal to the dysfunctional relationship between news media and democracy. Funding of news organisations is fundamental to their practice. Good journalism does not come cheap. Public service broadcasters funded by the state through various mechanisms such as a licence fee or taxation are often seen as being too dependent on the government of the day and therefore less likely to be overtly critical of it. Similarly but in reverse, greater dependence of news organisations on advertising as a means of funding is likely to contribute to pro-consumerist media content (Baker, 1994), corporate-sponsored content; more positive coverage of business and corporate bodies, more critical coverage of the likes of labour unions and thus an ideological narrowing of the news (Benson, 2010). Furthermore, in the digital age newspapers have seen their business model broken with circulation levels plummeting in the shift to online news and the loss of classified advertising to on-line sites like Craigslist or Gumtree. Some newspapers have found solace in an online pay wall (*The Times* in the UK) or digital subscriptions but this will only ever be appropriate for particular and often more specialised markets in an environment where information is now expected to come for free at the click of a button.

Commercial media organizations and industry associations representing them occasionally claim that public support for the media (in the form of public service broadcasting for example) undermines the viability of market-based models by constraining private enterprise and crowding out commercial players. Comparative research suggests this need not be the case and that, for example, targeted subsidies for minority newspapers in Finland, discounted rates for postal delivery in Italy, paying the salaries of 60 young journalists in the Netherlands and subsidised provision of newspapers to young people in France have all helped ensure 'the press increase its reach,

helped smaller publications survive, and helped bigger ones increase both their profits and their potential to do public good.' (Nielsen and Linnebank, 2011:9). It is important to note that even very strong license fee funded public broadcasters such as those found in Germany, the Scandinavian countries, and elsewhere in Northern Europe have been able to co-exist with sizable advertising and pay-TV commercial television businesses and ensure a more diverse and durable media environment than a more exclusively commercial model such as the one seen in the United States.

In fact, media organizations commonly seen as market-based, like private for-profit newspapers, have historically and in virtually all democracies been at the receiving end of considerable amounts of indirect public subsidies through extensive tax exemptions and other forms of regulatory relief. This suggests public support does not preclude private media, but can in fact underpin them and incentivize them to innovate in both their business practices and journalistic enterprises and encourage them to emphasize their public role as part of democratic politics. Public policy can, in the media sector as elsewhere in society, work with commercial enterprises and need not exist at their expense.

The revenue attached to existing forms of subsidy is considerable. Total indirect support for US newspapers and magazines via a range of tax breaks and reduced postal rates is at least $1.2 billion a year while in the UK over half a billion pounds (£594m) is provided in public support in terms of VAT exemptions for newspapers alone. Indirect support is far more popular than direct subsidies but nevertheless the latter are still significant in countries like France and Italy making up 10 per cent and 13 per cent respectively of total public support.

Furthermore, public support need not privilege particular viewpoints nor marginalize others. Public support for the media that operates through a series of mechanisms including subsidies, tax exemptions and promotion of public service has the 'clear advantage of being able to be instituted in a viewpoint-neutral fashion that does not give politicians or government bureaucrats ways of discriminating against particular publishers.' (Nielsen and Linnebank, 2011:12). Any use of the public purse, however, must also be transparent and open to effective challenge. Public money must be properly accounted for and not simply a means of making more private profit. Interventions should ensure that the end product of public support of news media is to enhance diversity of expression in the country and not simply to prop up failed business models.

Types of Ownership

Instability of funding models as well as concern over purely commercial or solely public sector models of ownership has turned attention to a range of alternative ownership models - both in terms of organizational structure and revenue generation - that may be better suited to delivering independent journalism in the public interest and be more sustainable. These include fresh proposals for co-operative, community and charitable structures as well as new methods of funding that may include levies and other subsidies to ensure that journalism's ability to contribute to robust democracy does not fall victim to a short-sighted commercial determination to cut costs and boost profits. Three main types of ownership structures are highlighted in the literature that may help to deliver these public purposes: trust, charitable and co-operative ownership.

Trust ownership, such as that found at the *Guardian* (UK)*, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), and the *New York Times* (USA) is a means of placing ultimate control in the hands of trustees who are obliged to fulfil specific remits and adhere to certain values. A Reuters Institute report from 2011, *Is There a Better Structure for News Providers?*, gives a full assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of trust ownership. It concludes that trust structures are more commonly found in larger commercial organizations and that, while they may be used to preserve a certain journalistic ethos and can be particularly significant during times of intense commercial pressure on news media, they are not a panacea either for economic difficulties nor for challenges to core professional values.

Charitable ownership is largely discussed in relation to local news providers with a more easily defined charitable purpose. There are a number of examples that demonstrate the successful work of charities in media, notably Prison Radio, TV for the Environment, faith-based media, hospital radio etc. Charitable models usually come with the additional benefit of further tax concessions and the ability to accept funds from foundations and grant making trusts with charitable aims. Furthermore, charitable ownership can promulgate closer connections of the news organization to the local community with the scope to tap into a legacy of voluntarism and enabling more local participation in the structures of governance.

Co-operative ownership operates on the basis of mutualisation where the organizations are effectively owned by and run for their members – in this case, journalists. Co-operatives are businesses not charities and share any profits they make amongst their members rather than rewarding outside investors. As news cooperatives, journalists are the owners and have an equal say in what the co-operative does, helping to shape the decisions the cooperate makes. Hence, the problem of meddlesome media owners who want to influence what the news outlet publishes vanishes.

Level and intensity of market competition

Across the globe media and technological change has impacted on the news environment. A huge growth in the number of news outlets including the advent of and rapid increase in free papers, the emergence of 24-hour television news and the popularization of online and mobile platforms, has meant that more news must be produced and distributed at a faster rate than ever before. The level and intensity of global market competition combined with technological change and broken business models has meant that in a corporate news world it is now difficult to maintain profit margins and shareholder returns unless you employ fewer journalists (Fenton, 2010). But fewer journalists with more space to fill means doing more work in less time often leading to a greater use of unattributed rewrites of press agency or public relations material and the cut and paste practice now known as churnalism (Davies 2008; Lee-Wright, Phillips and Witschge, 2011). Original and investigative newsgathering has suffered as a consequence.

In a bid to maintain a competitive edge, journalists now spend a large amount of time monitoring other media online, the news wires and user-generated content. Rewriting stories gained through this constant monitoring is the main task of many journalists (especially in online newsrooms). As such, the same news often circulates in slightly adapted forms for different brand outlets. The great treasure trove of information online has done little to minimise these negative consequences. Research that has analysed the

content of mainstream online news has revealed that much of the abundant news online is the same: news organizations often cover stories from the same angles and different news organizations repeatedly present the same information in their stories (Redden and Witscghe, 2010). Furthermore, because journalists are under so much time pressure, ready made fodder from tried and tested sources takes precedence over the sheer difficulty of dealing with the enormity of user generated content or the overload of online information (Fenton, 2010). This research points to a news environment driven by the principles of commercialism wherein news organizations foreground rationalization (by cutting back on journalists) and marketization (through the increasing commodification of news) at the expense of ideal democratic objectives in a way that has led to the homogenization of content rather than the increased plurality promised of the digital age.

If you combine the faster and shallower corporate journalism of the digital age with the need to pull in readers for commercial rather than journalistic reasons it is not difficult to see how the traditional values of professional journalism are quickly cast aside in order to indulge in sensationalism and deal in gratuitous spectacles and dubious emotionalism. Esser (1999) notes that national press coverage of politics is more "tabloidised" (defined as more oriented towards scandal and more cynical towards politicians) than in Germany partly because of the UK's more intense competition among national newspapers. Set this alongside the fact that in many places around the world there are an ever-smaller number of global media institutions dominating the media landscape; then, the simple notion that more media in a digital age means better democracy starts to look rather tenuous.

Conclusion:

If we taken Benson's three dimensional list of potential influences on the news broadly categorized as political, economic and cultural/journalistic (see next section) this leaves us with the tricky question of how these factors combine such that the news contributes to democratic desires?

An *independent* news media free from interference from government and free from the pressures of commercial practice would seem key. Such democratic media are said to promote diversity of content and include a wide range of voices enabling citizens to reach their own understandings and judgment on public issues. But in certain circumstances, democracy needs legislation that both supports independent journalism in the public interest and legislation that frees the market of destructive concentration that chokes the independence of journalism and inhibits other media from existing or aggressively forces them out of business. A media concentration that has become too powerful for democracy to tolerate.

Section 2: Journalism and Ethics: Media regulation and journalists' accountability

The balance between private freedom and public responsibility as regards journalism is a complex matter and a crucial facet of the news media's relationship to democracy. Freedom of the press has always been associated with the ability of news journalists to do their job free from interference from government (Muhlmann, 2010). Clearly this is crucial for independent news production and a healthy public sphere. But even in developed

democracies the practices of regulation vary greatly and critiquing how various degrees of regulation or non-regulation support democratic practice is far from straightforward. Those nation states that have adopted a largely free-market position in relation to the news (as outlined above) often rely on the cultures of journalism to support ethical practice through self-regulation rather than legislative mechanisms.

Self-regulation via codes of conduct is often the form of journalistic accountability associated with the freedom of the press because it excludes governments from having any role in how journalism should be practiced. However, self-regulation does require a strong ethical framework (Phillips, Couldry and Freedman, 2010). Ethics refer to a shared sense of equity and justice, rooted in something deeper than obedience that enables a group or community to set standards which its members freely agree to abide by. To this extent, ethical frameworks can only be enacted fully if market pressures or owner preferences are also absent. News organizations have differing interests and very different ways of operating and do not necessarily have a shared ethical sense to which they can all refer. Journalism is divided between, on the one hand, those editors and journalists who have the freedom of action and conscience to operate ethically and, on the other, those who operate within a highly structured and competitive environment in which they are under heavy pressure to deliver stories by any means possible and often without the protection of a trade union. The influence and power of a corporate culture can wreak its own havoc and set its own agenda far more blatantly than any democratic government would ever dare.

Ethical journalism requires protection from pressures that might prevent investigations of abuses of power from taking place. Journalism that is under pressure from its commercial environment may require firmer rules to prevent the abuse of journalists' power (and desperation to grab market share) to traduce innocent people. Those individuals working for highly competitive news organizations also need protection from their editors and managers if they feel they are being asked to do something unethical. In other words they should have the right to exercise their conscience. In a very recent high profile case in the UK, a senior political journalist resigned from the Daily Telegraph because of alleged non-reporting of the encouragement of tax evasion schemes by the bank HSBC who happens to be a prominent advertiser in the paper. The journalist, Peter Oborne, felt that the only option available to him was to give up his job. If you are relatively powerless (say a journalist in relation to an editor) then self-regulation can be meaningless, especially when the person in power does not share your views. Most recently, with the threat of compulsory redundancies at the Independent newspaper, Michelle Stanistreet, General Secretary of the UK's National Union of Journalists has commented that a workforce that is paid "bargain basement salaries […] is fearful and compliant" (Press Gazette, 2 August 2013).

Understanding the role of the news as an industry and news organizations as corporate entities in these relations is crucial to our understanding of how 'freedom' can be more easily claimed by some to the detriment of others. 'Freedom of the press' as an ethical practice does not somehow magically transcend the market it is part of. Rather, it is embroiled in the particular political-economic system it exists within. For example in certain neo-liberal democracies such as the UK regulation of the press is seen by some as tantamount to authoritarian rule – deliberate interference with and inhibition of the freedom of the press and profoundly anti-democratic. Yet this approach that has existed in the UK for over 60 years has done nothing to protect the public interest in the provision of

news and its contribution to democratic life and everything to encourage commercial news malpractice that contributed to the phone hacking scandal.

Journalists also bring their own personal ethics that have developed through upbringing, religious belief (or lack of), political affiliations and social and cultural contexts, to their roles as journalists. Class, race and gender divides have long since troubled journalism (Benson, 2010; Chambers and Steiner, 2010). And those white, middle class men are more likely to have more freedom to practice a certain type of journalism they deem appropriate than others who may struggle to gain positions of relative power or authority within news organizations. As such, understanding the socio-demographics of the people employed as journalists is important in interrogating what this thing called journalism ethics is and how it impacts on news and democracy.

So is it possible to regulate for the freedom of the press in the public interest and enable genuinely independent journalism to flourish? What might it mean to replace the pursuit of profit to the detriment of all else with a focus on the public interest and democratic life?

Many countries have legislative frameworks that apply to the practice of journalism. These may include "criminal laws of official secrets, obscenity, blasphemy, sedition…and civil laws of libel and breach of confidence; and by the judge-made law of contempt of court" (Belsey and Chadwick, 1992: 6). These laws may operate alongside those that seek to guarantee press freedom (as in the First Amendment of the US Constitution) and freedom of expression (as in the European Convention of Human Rights). Such 'rights' do not override the law of the land and exist in association with rights of privacy for individuals. It is often in the conflict between the rights of press freedom and those of privacy where difficulties arise. Insisting that democratic purposes are at the heart of journalistic practice is one way of evaluating such conflicts. To these ends 'public interest' defences have been developed, but these are also fraught with contention.

It has been argued that a clearly defined 'public interest' defence in law can help deal with the central contradiction of journalism—the fact that ethical journalists require defence for rule breaking if they are to do their job, whereas unethical journalists attempt to use a 'public interest defences' to protect themselves against criticism (Barnett, 2012). The public interest is a concept that is recognized by both the public and journalists. The European Human Rights Act already embodies the concept as a reasonable defence for intrusion. The word 'public' in this instance embodies the notion of a whole society. For something to be in the 'public interest' it must affect the way in which we live together as a social group (Phillips, Couldry and Freedman 2010: 52). It should be information that will help us to live better together, or that will prevent us from being harmed. The BBC (2011: 7.1) has framed guidance of its own in relation to the 'public interest':

- Promoting accountability and transparency: gathering and presenting information to enable public scrutiny of government and those with authority or influence over audiences' lives
- Informing public debate: gathering, providing and testing information on key issues to help the public understand and debate decisions made on their behalf
- Preventing deception, fraud and corruption - providing audiences with the means to avert being misled by some statement or action, especially when public money is involved
- Crime and anti-social behavior: exposing criminal or significant anti-social behaviour,

particularly by public figures
- The world - reporting from parts of the world where there are conflicts, where issues of major significance (e.g. climate change, human rights) require understanding, or where the policies of the UK and its allies are having significant effects.

With a clear public interest defense in place it should be possible to ensure that codes of ethical conduct are upheld and that those who choose willfully to ignore them will face some form of legal censure.

Conclusion

The problem of privacy, how to define and defend it and its relationship to freedom of the press has become one of the key concerns of journalism in developed democracies. Deciding whether journalistic codes of conduct that support ethical journalism are enough to protect the public from gross intrusions and also protect journalists from over-zealous editors desperate for the next scoop, has become a hotly debated issue. Digital technology has complicated this yet further introducing other ethical concerns regarding the practice of journalism and the whole concept of privacy.

Section 3: News Organisations, new technology and the business of making news

Many commentators have claimed that journalism is undergoing a fundamental transformation. One of the key reasons cited for this transformation is the changing nature of technology, which is claimed to impact directly upon the practice of journalism. The nature of this transformation is considered variably as a negative and a positive development. The judgments made are usually based upon the perceived contribution of news media to fully functioning modern democratic systems and hence upon journalism's role in contributing to the public sphere (Habermas, 1989) and hence to democratic gain.

Within the last decade, web-based operations have come to be viewed as essential for newspapers – national, regional and local – and for all major broadcasters and news agencies. Debates feed into the concerns and dilemmas expressed in the preceding sections and raise critical questions: Has new technology revitalized the public sphere or become a tool of commerce for an increasingly un-public, undemocratic news media? In what ways have economic and social change contributed to this process? Has technological, economic and social change reconfigured the job of the journalist and the production of news in terms of enquiry (including media-source interactions), observation, research, editing, and writing? Who are the journalists and how do they exert influence on one another? Does this influence support or challenge economic and/or regulatory constraints within the newsroom? In what way is technological, economic and social change influencing the prospects for and nature of online news and participatory journalism as well as increasing the role of citizen journalists and NGOs as news sources?

Of course, there has always been 'new' technology in one form or another and it has usually been accompanied by eulogizing on its democratic potential, its ability to become a tool of the people wresting power from the elite structures of society. These debates echo the celebrations of plurality, accessibility and participation. Likewise, journalism and journalists have faced a long history of criticism. Hargreaves (2003: 12), a former

journalist, writes: Journalism stands accused of sacrificing accuracy for speed, purposeful investigation for cheap intrusion and reliability for entertainment. 'Dumbed down' news media are charged with privileging sensation over significance and celebrity over achievement. It is no surprise that new media has offered a fresh means of anxiety and an extension of these concerns but the hopes and fears of new media are not new. These concerns do not arise because of the technology per se or indeed because of the diminishing ethical behaviour of journalists. Rather, they are part of a more complex socio-economic, political and cultural history.

Since the mid 1990s a number of studies have explored the implications of the internet for journalistic practice (for example, Reddick and King, 1997; Miller, 1998; Singer, 1998; Deuze, 2003; Garrison, 2000, 2001, 2003; Rivas-Rodriguez, 2003; Gillmor, 2004). They have looked at the nature of news content, the way journalists do their job, the structure of the newsroom and the shifting relationships between journalists, news organizations and their publics (Pavlik, 2001). In their quest to make sense of the impact of new media on the news they have considered the interactive nature of the internet; the complexity of its content in volume and variety as well as its accessibility and its convergence across previously distinct media. The majority of these studies report that the internet brings new ways of collecting and reporting information into the newsrooms. This new journalism is open to novices, lacks editorial control, can stem from anywhere (not just the newsroom), involves new writing techniques, functions in a network with fragmented audiences, is delivered at great speed, and is open and iterative. In this manner the technology of the internet is said to have reinvigorated democracy.

The sheer space available online is said to open up new possibilities for news presentation that cannot be found in hard copy form. Through archiving facilities the ability to provide more depth of coverage is increased exponentially. Similarly the ability to update regularly is vastly enhanced. The space for multimedia formats also allows news to be presented in innovative and interesting ways (Gunter, 2003). Space is also linked to geographical reach. Some theorists believe that the web is capable of linking communities of interest across the globe, thereby creating greater political participation. Reach is further enhanced by speed. The speed of the internet enables journalists to get to data without having to leave the newsroom (Quinn, 2002). Reports can be downloaded in seconds, public databases interrogated in a fraction of the time it would have previously taken. These changes signal potential improvements in the relevance and timeliness of news and journalism.

The space available also gives rise to the potential for a plurality of news providers that threatens the monopoly of provision from major transnational corporations, opening up news production to all citizens able to get access to a computer and the right software. The internet is claimed to provide a many-to-many model of information dissemination, putting the smaller and the smallest news providers on an equal footing with the transnational conglomerates (Rheingold, 1993). This in turn, unlocks the possibility for smaller online news providers providing spaces for minority views and news that do not make it into the dominant news media because of their apparent lack of appeal to amass audience (Rivas-Rodriguez, 2003).

McNair (1999: 213) states that a proliferation of news platforms calls into question the notion of the public as a single, monolithic construct 'defined and serviced by a metropolitan elite', and encourages its replacement with a vision of 'multiple publics, connected in key ways'. As a result, online journalism is claimed to offer audiences a view

of the world that is more contextualized, textured, and multidimensional than traditional news media. In this space it is more difficult for journalists to claim privilege and for anyone fully to control its flows. The internet provides a space where interested readers can check the validity of one news report against another and even access the news sources referred to. The nature of newsgathering is exposed like never before, placing notions of journalistic objectivity and impartiality, the holy grail of professional journalism, under scrutiny. In online journalism these normative anchors become dislodged in favour of the acknowledgement of the impossibility of objectivity and an increased awareness of subjectivity. The multiplicity of views and voices from a diversity of cultures and viewpoints is claimed to keep the mainstream news 'on its toes' and render its construction more transparent. The omnipotent voice of the journalist is diluted and journalist–audience distinctions blurred (McCoy, 2001).

In stark contrast, others (e.g. Phillips, 2014) denounce the impact of new media on the news environment largely from a position of criticism of commercial news practice more generally. Often these are the same voices as those that take a dim view of the present concentration of ownership and dominance of market imperatives. Here, the characteristics of speed and space of online news translate into 'speed it up and spread it thin'. Researchers describe how established news organizations are encouraged by the speed of the internet to release and update stories before the usual checks for journalistic integrity have taken place (Gunter, 2003; Silvia, 2001); how the increasing emphasis on immediacy in news coverage is frequently satisfied by reporters working for news agencies (Ofcom, 2007) to the detriment of original reportage (Scott, 2005; Davies, 2008), turning journalists into 'robohacks' (Hargreaves, 2003) practicing 'churnalism' (Davies, 2008), rather than reporters and editors.

Furthermore quantity is argued not to be equated with quality and multiplicity to not always translate into diversity. Content analyses of online news have found that mainstream newspapers with online versions use a fraction of their print stories in the online edition (Singer, 1997); use mostly the same news stories with similar news judgments (Redden and Witschge, 2010) and operate under similar financial constraints. In other words it is more of the same only in a less extensive manner. The major news sites online are said to provide little by way of original material and have a heavy reliance on the limited news spread of the major news agencies. Paterson (2005) discovered that major news organizations simply provided almost verbatim foreign news reports from Associated Press (AP) and Reuters 43 per cent of the time. The major internet portals like Yahoo and AOL provided unaltered Reuters and AP material 85 per cent of the time. Far from providing a diversity of views these researchers argue that we are left with a public discourse that is largely homogenous. The consequences of these developments appear to be particularly stark for original newsgathering, investigative reporting, foreign and local news – none of which can provide the necessary economies of scale to buck the financial down-turn. New technology may hold the potential for expanding news, increasing it's depth and range, bringing more sources to more journalists thereby offering up the possibility of an enhanced public sphere. But this potential may well be left firmly in the starting blocks as commercial priorities dominate the direction mainstream news takes.

Conclusion

The argument that in a digital age, the relations of power remain on the whole the same to the increasing advantage of global media conglomerates is difficult to dispute yet similarly

simplistic. It is true that analyses rooted in models of media ownership and control show nothing more than a deeper entrenchment of corporate power. News media are (mostly) businesses and the news is a product. The economics of news remains stacked against newcomers on the national news stage be it in traditional or new media. Concentration of ownership is likely to filter ever outwards to the internet – and how to make online news profitable is still a puzzle waiting to be solved. As mainstream news providers plough more resources into online operations that are generally loss-makers, commercial pressures are likely to increase the temptation to rely on cheaper forms of newsgathering to the detriment of original in-depth journalism. Voices on the web become dominated by the larger more established news providers that duplicate the same commercial interests according to the same understanding of how news fits those commercial concerns, leading to anything but increased diversity.

But we should equally be wary of economic reductionism. The frameworks of news on offer in the digital age are articulated by the nexus of interests producing them. This is neither a straightforward nor direct relationship between wealth and power. The codes and conventions of professional journalism are being challenged as they are being reinstated. The cultural dynamics of capitalism and markets are concerned not only with economics but also with questions of representation, identity and meaning. A straight political economic analysis misses, or cannot account for, the possibility that under certain conditions 'journalism or journalists' (whoever these may be) may transform power relations both within their own domain and in others. The increasing presence of non-professional or 'citizen' journalists is suggestive of a type of journalistic autonomy that may be able to disrupt and change institutionalized journalism in particular ways in certain circumstances (although currently these instances are rare).

Clearly however, the internet has modified things in positive and productive ways. New voices have found expression; new means of brokering intelligent dialogue across nations have emerged. It has enabled established communities of interest to be more efficient in their circulation of communication and sharing of information with one another. Alternative interpretations of news and current affairs have found space and voice online (Redden and Witschge, 2010). And as a repository of information and knowledge the internet is unparalleled. But the utopian vision of a brave new world with everyone connected to everyone else, a nonhierarchical network of voices with equal, open and global access, is also far from true. This latest 'new' world of 'new' media has not yet destabilized the ascendancy of dominant news brands; it has not transformed news values and traditional news formats sustained by tenacious journalistic cultures – news is, what news always was.

The arguments are multi-faceted and contradictory because the terrain of their discussion – new media, journalism, news and democracy – is uneven (across many different types of news industries and news platforms and in countries with differing democratic systems), and often in uncharted territory (what do people do when they are given the ability to challenge the 'facts'?). Research is required to investigate these issues in all their complexity.

Section 4: Citizens and/or Audiences?

News is nothing until it is read or listened to by someone. In order to ascertain the reach of various media and the possible influence it may have on the national conversation basic data is required on news media consumption – who listens/reads/watches what, when and why? The digital age is altering the way the public get their daily news and what they are reading or listening to. Although traditional media such as the television and radio are still often the main source of news, younger people are increasingly going to online news sites as their first or main form of news about the world and the assumption is that over time, all generations will be online-first news users. Consequently, information abundance on the internet is claimed as a democratic gain. In this debate access to the internet (both as a producer and a user) is fore-grounded as the means to communicative and democratic freedom. The internet, we are told, not only delivers a profusion of communicative possibilities but also brings power to the individual enabling them in Castells' terms to engage in self mass-communication. This liberation of the self comes via a form of creative autonomy (Castells, 2009: 136) unleashed online. Castells argues that a new form of communication has emerged "where self-generated messages created by individuals can reach global audiences" (pp. 58-71) giving rise to unprecedented levels of autonomy imbued with emancipatory possibilities.

Similarly, in Benkler's (2006) analysis, the Internet has the potential to change the practice of democracy radically because of its participatory and interactive attributes. He argues that it allows all citizens to alter their relationship to the public sphere, become creators and primary subjects engaged in social production. In this sense the Internet is ascribed the powers of democratisation. In terms of news, this means that with the interactive and participative nature of the web everyone or anyone can be a journalist with the right tools. Civic journalism is increasing and access to public information and government services is expanding (Pavlik, 2001). Citizen journalism is said to bleed into mainstream journalism and vice versa. The blogosphere has also been credited with taking on the major news corporations through instant feedback that is often lively, openly subjective and highly critical. In the online environment, it is argued readers can have a greater impact on the news through an increase in the intensity of their exchanges with journalists and, for example, the presentation of their own views in online papers. News online is thus open to a higher degree of contestation than is typical of traditional news media. This demystification of journalism is claimed to break down the barriers between audience and producer facilitating a greater deconstruction of the normative values embedded in the news genre and a re-imagining of what journalism could and/or should be.

But although citizen media is undoubtedly growing it is still overshadowed by the major international news organisations. The large traditional news organizations with strong market positions and extensive and established news production infrastructures have responded to the current climate by investing heavily in online platforms. UK citizens predominantly use online news sites that are run by existing news providers further asserting the already significant dominance of the major players. Furthermore the organisation of web search tends to send more users to the most popular sites further entrenching the dominance of mainstream media. It seems ever likely that the voices on the web will be dominated by the larger more established news providers, rather than any form of citizen media, in a manner that limits possibilities for increased pluralism.

The economics of online 'eyeballing' – literally how many eyeballs can you attract to your online site has to be understood as a fiercely competitive business. For the news audience,

finding information can be an ever more difficult task as they attempt to navigate their way through a morass of search engines and news sites. Many have argued that the sheer abundance of news across a range of different media is nothing more than sophisticated marketing and the ever-increasing commodification of the news product. This raises important issues for news and information in a world of social media where genre categories are also blurred and often difficult to tell apart. How do you distinguish between the facts – albeit contextualized and problematised - and the noise and increasing and ever expanding volume of comment, opinion and propaganda? This, it is argued, leads us irredeemably down the path of tabloidization and infotainment. More simply means more opportunities for the news-market to sell its wares – in a manner that maximizes audiences (and hopefully profit) rather than public interest. Issues of political discourse become assimilated into and absorbed by the modes and contents of entertainment. The citizen is then treated as no more than a consumer.

The sheer abundance of information available to us has also been argued to breed misinformation and lack of understanding (Patterson, 2010) because the daily habits and rituals of news seeking have changed. People are no longer required to sit in front of the television for a set period of time each day or to read the newspaper over breakfast. Instead we do news snacking. But there are so many other more tempting treats on offer that 'healthy' news snacking is rapidly replaced by the more immediately gratifying tasty tit-bits of entertainment. Even more worryingly Patterson identifies a pattern whereby in a high choice media environment the less-well informed are more inclined to opt for entertainment while the better informed include the news junkies leading to increasing inequality of knowledge between the more informed and the less informed. Patterson (2010:20) also argues that speed "increases sensation but decreases learning" noting that about 60 per cent of those who regularly read a daily newspaper spend at least half an hour doing so compared to only 40 per cent of those who read an online daily newspaper.

Also, in a fragmented news environment with the most popular online interfaces being situated in social networking sites (such as Facebook and Twitter) personalization is on the increase and is argued to have a negative impact on the processes of rational, democratic thought processes. Sunstein (2001: 192) writes that 'a market dominated by countless versions of "Daily Me" would make self government less workable [and] create a high degree of social fragmentation.' News, we are warned, will be transformed further into a discourse of personalization, dramatization, simplification and polarization. And for many, the open and iterative world of online commentary in these new online spaces is not seen to be taking journalism to new heights. Rather the limitless opportunities for anyone to have their say on anything, is decreed to result in opinion and vitriol replacing the hard-won gains of investigative journalism. One-off fragmentary commentaries are the norm rather than sustained analysis. 'Old news' values are argued to be replaced by populist ranting, trolling or flaming or those more interested in self-publicity than the ethics of public value. Spaces for online discussion blur into the wider provision of news. The lack of accountability and anonymity of those responding online also introduces concerns of verification, accountability and accuracy. There are criticisms of the blogosphere as doing nothing more than opening the floodgates to unverified, de-professionalized gossip (Silvia, 2001). Similar concerns are voiced regarding consumer-generated video and audio material. Worse, it is feared that this new interactive multiplicity threatens to economically undermine traditional professional journalism with grave consequences for politics and public life (Singer, 2003).

Neither should we forget that research on the digital divide notes that internet users are younger, more highly educated and richer than non-users, more likely to be men than women and more likely to live in cities (Norris, 2001; Warschauer, 2003; Shradie, 2011). These concerns do not just refer to access to the internet and the huge gaps prevalent between the global North and South; they also refer to online activity within developed nations and to traditional divides between the well educated middle class who dominate public discourse and those on the peripheries or excluded altogether (Hindman, 2008). Online news audiences tend to replicate these patterns of privilege and social stratification (Blank and Groselj, 2015).

Civil Society and the news

The digital age has also brought with it increased possibilities for civil society, including groups related to equality issues and minorities, to campaign and publicise their work. However, in the rush to be heard, resources (financial and staffing) have become more rather than less important (as claimed by many new media evangelists). Many large and well-resourced civil society associations have been able to respond to a media saturated environment through a growth in press and public relations offices increasingly staffed by trained professional journalists. These professionals apply the same norms and values to their work as any mainstream newsroom albeit with different aims and intentions. They use their contacts and cultural capital to gain access to key journalists and report increasing success in a media-expanded world.

The resource-poor, however, find it much more difficult to keep up with changes in technology and the explosion of news space and much harder to stand out amidst the countless voices online that all compete for journalists' attention. Early exponents of the advantages of new communication technologies proclaimed that new media increase access and create a more level playing field. In reality, however, resource-poor organizations have been forced to rely on long-standing credibility established by proven news-awareness and issue relevance. They find it much harder to keep up with changes in technology and the explosion of news and information spaces, and much harder to stand out amidst the countless online voices competing for journalists' attention.

To be noticed, civil society associations are now expected to embrace all of the opportunities available to them in the digital world — from blogging, podcasts, and social networking sites to their own online news platforms and beyond. Servicing these different communication channels and technologies requires investment of time, money and technical skills, resources that are not equally available to all. Certain organizations, and particularly those that are resource-rich, may be getting more coverage (often online). But even in these cases, to better secure coverage, civil society associations must modify their content to fit pre-established journalistic norms and values — a media logic that has led to what I have called "news cloning" (Fenton, 2010).

Conclusion

Theories of democratic political participation have long since recognized the roles the media play in activating political citizenship and participation. Media coverage plays a significant role in creating awareness and engagement. News matters at a fundamental level to society. But a simple abundance of news, one that just assumes that the more news we have the more democratic our societies are, speaks to a naïve pluralism that has

been shown to be blatantly false. More news does not necessarily help democracy, even if consumption is high, if the nature of news content serves the interests of the news industry over and above the public's information needs. In such cases contemporary coverage can actually lead to a mood of anti-politics, thwart political participation in the public sphere and diminish democracy.

Understanding the daily habits and rituals associated with media use is crucial to analysing how the abstract possibilities of all technologies develop into everyday culture. Accounts that offer no analysis of actual media use, also fail to address the question of *context*. The experience of living in mediated worlds involves being part of the wider framings of social and political life, wider myths of social order specifically in relation to the particular types of framing and practice of news and democracy at particular historical moments.

Once we have taken account of the depth and breadth of contextual factors and situated them in a broader understanding of prevalent framings of meaning and practice, then as researchers we must ask ourselves - has the networked communication of the digital age integrated people better into a public sphere and increased transparency and democratic accountability? The news audience therefore, is a crucial aspect of any research strategy on news, journalism and democracy.

Section 5: A Contemporary Research Framework

If we think news media are the lifeblood of democracy or even that they are connected to each other in any way, then at the most basic level as social scientists we need to ask:

- Who is saying what to whom? What types of issues are, in this new media landscape, favoured or given legitimacy as subjects of news, and what subjects are dis-favoured, or marked as illegitimate subjects of news? Is there a genuine plurality of voices and views in the news?

- What types of people can regularly be agents and actors in news journalism, and what types of people are able to be journalists/news professionals/citizen journalists – in what roles and in what areas of media?

- What are the conditions under which the means for political participation by everyone could be realized and what is the responsibility of the media in this?

- Does the digitization of the media landscape have the potential for more distributed cultural production and exchange that would enable the emergence of new *communities of discourse* that would, in turn, contribute to new ways of institutionalizing democracy?

- How much freedom do the media have to operate in the interests of democracy as opposed to the interests of commercial practice and/or government? How much freedom do journalists have to operate in the interests of democracy as opposed to the interests of their editors or owners?

In order to address such questions we need rigorous data and analysis of the news

environment, to foster a better understanding of the changing nature of journalism, including the management and governance of news organizations, news content, ownership, business models, consumption patterns and public attitudes to news media. We need reliable economic data on investment in original newsgathering, on changes to the size, viability and ownership status of media companies, on the closure of existing news operations (such as newspapers, magazines or online sites) as well as new launches at both local and national level. This will include collecting information on and evaluating the impact of regulatory changes relevant to the economics of news production.

We also need a comprehensive analysis of news output across all news platforms, including TV, press, online and social media platforms, and to reflect on the ways in which news content is changing across different news media. We need to evaluate changing sources of news and news agendas, the impact of 'information subsidies' such as PR handouts, NGOs, and news agencies, and offer insights into qualitative changes in style and presentation.

We need to provide a detailed account of the employment patterns of journalists, together with their attitudes and experiences in relation to working practices, ethics and professional values and generate vital, longitudinal information on journalists' perceptions and use of social media, the changing nature of newsroom pressures and, data on training, job security, and casualisation within the journalism workforce.

Along with all of the above we need systematic long-term surveys of changing attitudes and behaviour amongst citizens and news consumers to provide insights into how new and old news sources are interacting, to track levels of public knowledge and their relationship with news output.

To thoroughly interrogate the relationship of media to democracy also requires a consideration of power – who has it and how is it used? Who can be political actors in a digital news age and who amongst these becomes most powerful and why? What sorts of resource do they need? To engage with a full consideration of power requires media scholars to embrace fully the social dimensions of mediated life and the political consequences of our actions and those of others. If we inject an analysis of power into the relationship between media and democracy then we are encouraged to take account of those who hold it and those who seek to claim it and then to critique how each is accountable to the other. Democracy cannot be considered without the political and this in turn, cannot be understood outside of relations of power or without the social.

Journalism and Democracy Project: Guidelines and Recommendations

Democracy functions best when its citizens are politically informed and properly equipped to hold power to account. Access to a wide variety of well-resourced, trustworthy news sources, outlets and platforms allows citizens to make responsible, informed choices and facilitates watchdog and representative roles that are vital to a well-functioning and dynamic democracy (Curran 2011). Recently, however, news institutions throughout the world have faced financial difficulty and scandal prompting searching questions about journalistic ethics, accountability and plurality. Understanding the changing landscape of news media - their role, efficacy, content, quality, impact, funding and contribution to

democracy - has never been more important and requires a longitudinal and multi-faceted research endeavour motivated by a commitment to develop a rigorous and scientific programme of activity that theorises, maps and evaluates the dynamics of the contemporary news environment and its role in informing citizenship. The best way to ensure the systematic and ongoing analysis of such a complex field is to establish a *Research Centre in News, Journalism and Democracy*. The purpose of the Centre would be to provide a central authoritative source of information on the news media within Mexico for the benefit of scholarly research, professional development, public debate, community and citizen empowerment and informed policy-making.

Through the comprehensive collection of relevant data and rigorous data analysis the Centre would aim to foster a better understanding of the changing nature of journalism and its contribution to democracy, including the management and governance of news organizations, news content, ownership, business models, consumption patterns and public attitudes to news media. Coordinated and conducted by leading specialists in the field, the Centre would provide a comprehensive survey in a vital area which currently lacks any clearly defined programme of research.

The Centre's main work would involve an annual survey that would produce data and analysis across media platforms on ownership, revenues, regulation, governance, business models, technological developments, investment flows and resource management, staffing, working conditions, journalistic culture, consumption, public knowledge and attitudes, and, crucially, on content. Alongside these vital longitudinal studies, contemporary snapshots on key issues would be a feature of the Centre's work. The Centre would thereby produce short reports that respond to pressing issues within the news media sector, determined through continual engagement with key stakeholders and users to ensure relevance and currency. In this manner the Centre would generate a wealth of reliable information that would allow news media organizations, ordinary citizens, policymakers, regulators, researchers and civil society groups to understand better the changing dynamics of Mexican news and journalism.

Data and analysis generated by the centre would be presented on a dedicated Centre website that would be open to the public and make complex datasets accessible through innovative visualization techniques. Research findings would also be provided to relevant government departments, regulators, industry groups, civil society organizations, political parties and the academic community in order to facilitate more informed debates and policymaking concerning the future of Mexican news media. The Centre would also seek to empower new journalistic actors, including third sector organizations and individual citizens, to use new technological possibilities in order to articulate new and emerging perspectives and to find an outlet for distinctive voices. The research centre would also, over time, build a network of research nodes across Mexico that would enable the study of local and regional news media in more depth.

Objectives

The overarching aim is to stimulate informed discussion about the news sector that is based on firm evidence and scholarly rigour and to create, for the first time in Mexico, a comprehensive annual survey of the news environment within an analytical framework which prioritises news media and democracy. There are eight specific objectives:

1. To generate reliable economic data on changes to the size, viability and ownership status of media companies, on the closure of existing news operations (such as newspapers, magazines or online sites) as well as new launches at both local and national level. This will include collecting information on and evaluating the impact of regulatory changes relevant to the economics of news production.
2. To provide a comprehensive analysis of news output across all news platforms, including TV, press, online and social media platforms, and to reflect on the ways in which news content is changing across different news media. Research will evaluate changing sources of news and news agendas, the impact of 'information subsidies' such as PR handouts, NGOs, and news agencies, and offer insights into qualitative changes in style and presentation.
3. To provide a detailed account of the employment patterns of journalists, together with their attitudes and experiences in relation to working practices, ethics and professional values. This part of the programme will generate vital, longitudinal information on journalists' perceptions and use of social media, the changing nature of newsroom pressures and a database on training, job security, and casualisation within the journalism workforce.
4. To develop a systematic long-term survey of changing attitudes and behaviour amongst citizens and news consumers to provide insights into how new and old news sources are interacting, to track levels of public knowledge and their relationship with news output.
5. To facilitate new, cross-disciplinary and critical ways of thinking about journalism and the relationship between news, citizenship and democracy at a time of technological transformation. To this end, the Centre will exploit the many digital tools now available to make news and journalism more transparent and accountable.
6. To stimulate innovative practices in journalism and journalism research that serve the citizen's interest and to empower new journalistic actors, including third sector organizations and individual citizens, to exploit the potential of new technologies in news production.
7. To ensure that research about the news is made accessible and relevant to policy makers, regulators, news industry executives, parliamentary committees and think tanks as well as scholars in media, journalism and politics and, additionally, to ensure that all data are collected, where practicable, at local, regional and national levels so that relevant information about the state of the news media is applicable to nation-wide.
8. To create career development opportunities for postgraduate students and early career researchers and to generate a sustainable model of industry and academic collaboration.

The Project

As noted above, the news industry is undergoing unprecedented transformation that raises a number of empirical questions which are central to securing the news media's role in a democracy both nationally and locally, but on which there is very little reliable information. Issues such as the changing nature and quality of news content and consumption patterns, the number of journalists entering and leaving the profession, the transforming role of intermediaries such as Google, Facebook and Twitter, the efficacy and

contributions of online local news start-ups, and the evolution of new business models in the light of both cyclical and structural changes.

This information lacuna needs to be remedied within an intellectual framework that is focussed on addressing the needs of citizens, policy makers, industry and enterprise. Such a framework requires an integrated approach to media production, representation and reception—in which the three fields are seen as dynamic, distinctive and inter-related.

Models for such a project exist elsewhere. In the United States the Pew Centre's Project for Excellence in Journalism produces the annual report on the *State of the News Media*, which regularly provides a rigorous ongoing survey of US journalism.

Research questions

Production
- What are the central developments in the ownership, economic conditions and practices of journalism in Mexico, in print, broadcast and online, and how does this vary at national, regional and local levels?
- How are technological and market changes impacting cultures of news production?
- How are employment patterns changing, and how are they distributed between local and national; online, print and broadcast, independents and conglomerates?
- What role do ethical codes and standards play in news production in Mexico, and how does this vary between platforms and size of news organizations?

Content
- How is the content of news media changing and what new genres are emerging?
- What is driving the news agendas of print, broadcast and online media and is it possible to track information flows between different types of media as well as between media and the public relations industry?
- Does news content provide a platform for informed citizenship in Mexico and how does this vary both regionally and across different types of media outlet?
- How are the business models for delivering news content evolving?
- How is the shift towards digital distribution affecting investment flows and resource allocation in the Mexican news media industry?

Reception
- How and why is news consumption changing at national, regional and local levels?
- What are citizens' attitudes to news content and in what ways are they shifting?
- To what extent does news foster citizenship by cultivating public knowledge of issues and public affairs?
- How and why are attitudes changing to issues such as trust in news organizations, definitions of the public interest, public funding, ownership and regulation?
- What are the implications for citizenship of emerging modes of news consumption?

The Centre will produce a comprehensive annual digest of data, trends and analysis and will also routinely produce special reports on emerging issues, informed by the involvement of users such as news professionals, regulators, and civil society groups.

Methods and framework

News Industry: The Centre will collect and compile data on staffing, circulation, audience share and traffic, revenues, ownership, mergers, regulatory developments, etc from company statements, annual reports and accounts, industry analyses and relevant news sources. These secondary sources will be supplemented by a biennial survey of journalists together with a series of in-depth interviews with managers, decision-makers, editors, journalists and other key personnel at all levels of news to investigate how company structures and strategies, investment flows, business models and production processes are evolving in response to technological and market changes. This survey and interview material will collect reliable, anonymised information on the everyday practices and cultures of journalism in all its forms. It will explore attitudes to codes of professional practice, newsroom pressures and their impact on everyday practice, the perceived impact of proprietor, editor, institutional or corporate values, experiences of training and working conditions, employment terms, pay and job security, and emerging forms of journalism.

News Content: Two forms of content analysis will be conducted. The first will be a systematic, quantitative analysis of the nature and subject matter of news coverage across all platforms, and will explore news sources and approaches to news analysis and interrogation (Lewis and Cushion, 2009). Analysis of online content will also incorporate research into native digital forms such as linking strategies and opportunities for interactivity. The second will incorporate more in-depth qualitative analysis of news sources (the use of PR, reliance on agency copy, cannibalization of existing media, mobilization of big data sources) to establish the key drivers of news agendas and generate insights into plurality and changing trends in of original newsgathering (see, for example, Lewis et al 2008).

The research team could also mine traffic-tracking sites such as Alexa and GoogleAnalytics, digital media monitoring tools such as Newsmap, Media Cloud and Issue-crawler, and social media analytic sites including Tweetminster, DataSift, Technorati, Topsy and Klout to analyse and visualise the volumes, patterns of circulation, timeframes and rates of access, and repurposing of diverse news forms (Murthy 2012). Specific competencies would be required on the research team to work with these tools and to conduct this analysis.

News Audiences and Public Knowledge: The study of audiences would incorporate survey research, based on an annual nationally representative sample of participants, which would collect data on a number of media-specific knowledge, consumption and attitudinal issues. The survey's job will be to monitor changing attitudes to news sources and different media institutions; opinions on privacy, journalistic ethics and the public interest (Barnett 2012); attitudes to issues around taste, decency, harm and offence; opinions on public funding and subsidies for journalism; consumption patterns of social media, including issues of privacy. Since the focus is on the relationship between news media and citizenship, the survey will build on research (Lewis, 2001; Curran et al 2009) that correlates media systems with levels of public knowledge. At relevant periods of the election cycle, it will include questions about civic knowledge, party preferences and media consumption.

This annual survey will repeat identical questions in order to generate a valid longitudinal dataset, and will be supplemented by ad hoc surveys designed to address issues of immediate interest. Finally, a wide range of focus groups comprising broadly

representative groups of ordinary citizens across the UK covering different socio-demographics and news media landscapes will provide more in-depth analysis of public understanding, knowledge and attitudes at both national and local levels.

The research centre will have an Advisory Board consisting of a range of representatives of stakeholder groups including editors of national and local newspapers, leading figures in broadcast news; relevant Trade Unions and citizen journalists from established citizen-journalism online sites. The survey and any other major reports produced by the research team will be subject to rigorous peer-review.

While the project derives from an academic setting, it will work very closely with a range of stakeholder partners who will be encouraged to commission and/or sponsor individual pieces of research or sections of the annual survey and share data of their own.

This research is crucial to understand better Mexico's news ecology and ensure that it supports a democratic public sphere. In particular, the following groups will benefit from the establishment of such a Research Centre:

- News media organisations, including commercial broadcasters, newspapers groups, digital intermediaries and news aggregators, which, at a time of unprecedented economic and technological change, will welcome new insights into how digital delivery mechanisms are shaping journalistic practices and affecting consumption patterns. The Centre's research will assist decision-making in resource allocation and associated economic opportunities made available by digital technologies.
- Senior executives at public service broadcasters, where arguments about the democratic value and significance of news and current affairs are interwoven with more complex arguments about fragmented audiences, disengagement of young people from political participation, impartiality, internal plurality, and editorial accountability.
- Civil Society Groups, NGOs and citizens groups such as the Mexican Association for the Right to Information (AMEDI). Such groups will be assisted both in their own understanding of the changing news environment and in their representations to policy makers.
- Policy makers, politicians, policy advisers and think tanks which are obliged to address issues around media power, diversity, and new approaches to funding journalism. Further policy initiatives will be essential on issues around convergence, media ownership, plurality, access to reliable information, broadband rollout, privacy, copyright and, crucially, new funding and ownership models for newsgathering.
- Journalists, editors, bloggers and others involved directly in the creation or distribution of news who will have a better understanding of the changing role and democratic significance of their own profession.
- Scholars in the field of media, communications, journalism and politics who will benefit not only from a vast database capable of further interrogation, but from new methodological approaches to data collection and to new and creative thinking around the role of news and journalism in society.

References

Abraham-Hamanoiel, A. (2015, forthcoming) 'A Perfect Storm for Media Reform. Activist's Strategies and Socio-political Circumstances behind Telecommunication Reforms in Mexico.' In: D. Freedman, R. McChesney et al. (eds.) *Strategies for Media Reform: International Perspectives*. Fordham University Press

BBC (2011) *Editorial Guidelines*. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/page/guidelines-privacy-introduction/#the-public-interest.

Baker, C.E. (2007) *Media Concentration and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baker, C.E. (1994) Advertising and a Democratic Press, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Barnett, S, (2011) *The Rise and Fall of Television Journalism.* London: Bloomsbury.

Barnett, S. (2012) 'Public Interest: The Public Decides', *British Journalism Review*, 23 (2).

Belsey, A. and Chadwick, R. (eds) (1992) *Ethical Issues in Journalism and the Media*, London: Routledge

Benson, R. (2010) 'Comparative News Media Systems: New Directions in Research' in S. Allan (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*, London: Routledge pp.614-627

Benkler, Yochai (2006) *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom.* Yale: Yale University Press.

Blank, G. and Groselj, D. (2015) 'A Weberian approach to understanding internet use' Paper presented at the MeCCSA Conference, Northumbria University, January 2015.

Castells, Manuel. (2009) *Communication Power*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Chambers, D. and Steiner, L. (2010) 'The Changing Status of Women Journalists' in S. Allan (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*, London: Routledge pp.49-60

Couldry, Nick; Phillips, Angela; Freedman, Des (2010) 'An Ethical deficit: Accountability, Norms and the Material Conditions of Contemporary Journalism.' Natalie Fenton (ed) *New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age*, London: Sage pp.51-69

Cranberg, G., Bezanson, R., and Soloski, J., (2001) *Taking Stock: Journalism and the Publicly Traded Newspaper Company*, Ames IA: Iowa State Press.

Curran, J., Fenton, N. and Freedman, D., (2012) *Misunderstanding the Internet*. London: Routledge

Curran, J. (2011) *Media and Democracy*. London: Routledge.

Curran, J., Iyengar, S., Lund, A. & Salovaara-Moring, I. (2009), 'Media Reporting, Public Knowledge and Democracy', *European Journal of Communication*, 24 (1).

Davis, A. (2002) *Public Relations Democracy*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Davies, Nick (2008) *Flat Earth News*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Dean, M. (2011) Democracy Under Attack: How the media distort policy and politics. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Deuze, M. (2003) 'The web and its journalisms: considering the consequences of different types of newsmedia online', New Media and Society, 5(2): 203–30.

Doyle, G (2013) *Understanding Media Economics* (2nd Edition). London: Sage.

Esser, F. (1999) '"Tabloidisation" of News: A Comparative Analysis of Anglo-American and German Press Journalism', European Journal of Communication 14(3): 291-324.

Fenton, N. (ed.) (2010) *New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age*, London: Sage.

Fenton, N. (2010a) 'NGOs, New Media and the Mainstream News: News from everywhere.' in N Fenton (ed.) (2009), *New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in a Digital Age,* London: Sage.pp.153-169.

Fenton, N. and Freedman, D. (2014) 'The Politics and Possibilities of Media Reform' with Des Freedman (2014) in T.Miller (ed.) <u>*Routledge Companion to Popular Culture*</u>. London: Routledge

Freedman, D. (2010) 'The Political Economy of the "New" News Environment' in N. Fenton (ed) *New Media, Old News*. London: Sage.

Fernández, C and Paxman, A. (2000) El Tigre. Emilio Azcárraga y su imperio Televisa. Mexico: Raya en el Agua-Grijalbo

Garrison, B. (2000) 'Diffusion of a New Technology: Online Research in Newspaper Newsrooms', *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 6(1) 84-105.

Garrison, B. (2001) 'Diffusion of online information technologies in newspaper newsrooms', *Journalism* 2(2): 221-239.

Garrison, B. (2003) 'How Newspaper Reporters Use the Web to Gather News', *Newspaper Research Journal*, 24(3): 62-75.

Gillmor, D. (2004) *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*, Sebastopol: O'Reilly Media.

Gunter, B. (2003) *News and the Net*. London, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: Polity

Hallin, D. and Papathanassopoulos, S. (2002) Political clientelism and the media: southern Europe and Latin America in comparative perspectives. In: *Media, Culture and Society*. 2002 (24). 175-195

Hallin, D. And Mancini, P. (2004) *Comparing Media Systems*: *Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hargreaves, I. (2003) *Journalism: Truth or Dare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hindman, M. (2009) *The Myth of Digital Democracy,* Princeton University Press

House of Lords Select Committee on Communications (2008) *The ownership of the news Report*. Vol I and Vol. II: Norwich: The Stationery Office Limited. Available at: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldselect/ldcomuni/122/122i.pdf

Klinenberg, E. (2007) *Fighting for Air*, New York: Basic Books

Lee-Wright, P., Phillips, A., and Witschge, T. (2011) *Changing Journalism*, London: Routledge.

Lewis, J. (2001) *Constructing Public Opinion*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lewis, J., Williams, A., & Franklin, B. (2008) 'A Compromised Fourth Estate?: UK News Journalism, Public Relations and News Sources', *Journalism Studies*, 9 (1).

Lewis, J. and Cushion, S. (2009) 'The thirst to be first: an analysis of breaking news stories and their impact on the quality of 24 hours news coverage in the UK', *Journalism Practice*, 3 (3).

McNair, B. (1999) *News and Journalism in the UK*. London: Routledge .

Meikle, G. & Young, S.. (2012) *Media Convergence: Networked Digital Media in Everyday Life*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Miller, L.C. (1998) *Power Journalism: Computer Assisted Reporting*. FortWorth, TX: Harcourt Brace.

Muhlmann, Geraldine (2010) *Journalism for Democracy*, London: Polity.

Murthy, D. (2012) *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age.* Cambridge: Polity.

Nielsen, Rasmus and Linnebank, Geert (2011) *Public Support for the Media*: A six-country overview of direct and indirect subsidies. Available at: http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/publications/risj-reports.html. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Norris, Pippa (2001) *Digital Divide? Civic Engagement, Information Poverty and the Internet Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ofcom (2007) The Communications Market 2007. London: Ofcom.

Paterson, C. (2005) 'News agency dominance in international news on the internet', in D. Skinner, J. Compton and M. Gasher (eds.), *Converging Media,*

Diverging Politics: A Political Economy of News in the United States and Canada. Lexington: Rowman and Littlefield. pp. 145–64.

Patterson, T. (2010) 'Media Abundance and Democracy' in *Media, Journalismo e Democracia* No.17, Vol.9, No.2:13-31

Pavlik, J. V. (2001) *Journalism and New Media*. CA: Columbia University Press.

Phillips, P. (2014)Journalism in Context: Practice and Theory for the Digital Age. London: Routledge

Quinn, S. (2002) *Knowledge Management in the Digital Newsroom*. St. Louis, MO: Focal Press.

Redden, J. & Witschge, T. (2010) 'A New News Order? Online News Content Examined' in N. Fenton, *New Media, Old News? Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age,* London: Sage.

Reddick, R. and King, E. (1997) *The Online Journalist: Using the Internet and other Electronic Resources*. Fortworth, TX: Harcourt Brace.

Rheingold, H. (1993) *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley.

Rivas-Rodriguez, M (2003) *Brown Eyes of the Web: Unique Perspectives of an Alternative US Latino Online Newspaper*, London: Routledge.

Shradie, Jen (2011) 'The Digital Production Gap: The Digital Divide and Web 2.0 Collide' *Poetics*, Vol. 39, No.2: 145-168

Siebert, F., Peterson, T., and Schramm, W. (1956) *Four Theories of the Press*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Silvia, T. (ed.) (2001) *Global News: Perspectives on the Information Age*. Iowa: Iowa State University Press.

Singer, J. (1997) 'Still guarding the gate? the newspaper journalists role in an online world', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 3 (1): 72–89.

Singer, J. (1998) 'Online Journalists: Foundation for Research into their Changing Roles', *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 4 (1), available at http://www.asusc.org/jcmc/vol4/issue1/singer.html

Singer, J. (2001) 'The metro wide web: changes in newspapers' gatekeeping role online', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78 (1): 65–80.

Sunstein, C. (2001) *Republic.Com*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Warschauer, M. (2003) *Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide*. MIT Press

Winseck, D. (2008), The State of Media Ownership and Media Markets: Competition or Concentration and Why Should We Care? *Sociology Compass*, 2: 34–47