

Tabloids, Talk Radio, and the Future of News Technology's Impact on Journalism

*by Annenberg Senior Fellow
Ellen Hume*

About the Author

Ellen Hume is an Annenberg Senior Fellow. She served as Executive Director of the Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, where she taught as well. She analyzes how the media, politics, and government interact and what might be done to improve the process.

Previously, Hume served as a political writer and White House correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*. She served as National Reporter (1977-1983) and Metro Reporter (1975-1977) for the *Los Angeles Times* and Business Reporter for the *Detroit Free Press*. A regular commentator on CNN's "Reliable Sources," she has appeared frequently on "Washington Week in Review," "CBS Evening News," "The MacNeil / Lehrer NewsHour," National Public Radio, and numerous news commentary shows. She received her B.A. with honors from Radcliffe College and an honorary doctorate from Daniel Webster College.

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[The Annenberg Washington Program](#)

The Willard Office Building
1455 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20004-1008
Telephone: (202) 393-7100
Fax: (202) 638-2745
TDD: (202) 393-4121

“Modern journalism began around 1890 with the advent of a national system of communication and has had a pretty long run. Its time now seems to be about up,” concludes Columbia University Professor James W. Carey.⁽¹⁾ The recent cutbacks at Times Mirror Co. and the shrinking audiences for television network news are fresh evidence that the news business is in trouble. The challenges generated by new media technologies provide a powerful incentive for the journalism community to get its house in order. This paper is the conclusion of a project conducted at The Annenberg Washington Program and draws from the Program’s conference "Changing the News." It is in part a journalist’s “examination of conscience,”⁽²⁾ that

attempts to map out practical ways in which journalists might abandon some old habits, restore others, and invent some new ones to ensure a healthy role in our emerging multimedia culture. Ideally, these approaches will enable the news media to serve more effectively both their own market imperatives and the public interest. Some of the suggestions offered here may seem obvious; others may seem at first to be difficult or impractical. They involve mostly tinkering rather than radical changes. But together, these ideas aim to help journalists reverse a deterioration in the quality of news content that has made them increasingly vulnerable in the new media landscape.(3)

2. The Future of News: The Consumer Wakes (4)

You are in your kitchen on a rainy Monday morning in the year 2005. You pour a cup of coffee and turn to the blank kitchen wall. "Give me the news," you say, and the wall, actually a giant computer/television screen, changes into a gorgeous full-color map of the world. Headlines, pictures, or icons pinpoint the locations of news stories that your personal computer program has culled from a variety of sources around the world. You ask for each story in the order you prefer, or you receive an automatic sequence in television, voice, or text.

You are saving time by getting only what you want, when you want it, while your hands make toast. To learn more about the stock market crash in Tokyo, you call up the Internet, cruising the computers and videosevers of the world, to gather items from C-SPAN, NHK, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, *Le Monde*, Reuters, and countless digital databases and video files. You stay with a developing issue as long as your interest, money, and time permit. Some of the information comes free as part of your monthly cable or online service, some is subsidized by imbedded advertising, and some requires an access or per-minute-of-usage charge. If you don't like advertising, you can pay more to get ad-free material. If you don't mind getting information that's not so fresh, you can pay less.(5) When you want something on paper, you say "print" and your printer whirs into action.

You ask for a map of your state, and finally your town. Weather and traffic situations are overlaid onto a grid of your neighborhood, showing that construction on the highway will block your usual route to work. The computer "guide" draws a logical detour. Next you call your message center, your "virtual community" of friends and colleagues who have posted news for each other from around the world, and you check out a video email postcard from your cousin in Hawaii. Finally, you say goodbye to the screen, which turns back into a kitchen wall.

If you are still commuting to work (instead of telecommuting) and don't have time for any of this, you grab your portable computer or "personal digital assistant," a combination of cellular telephone, computer, television, radio, and fax machine that is no larger than a small paperback book. Plugged in all night to the multimedia center at your home, this tiny device has been receiving updated versions of customized news. On the way to work, you remember to check up on last week's local election returns in Seattle, where a friend was running for school board. You click a button, and the cellular phone function automatically calls the Internet. Your computer guide searches through highlighted words or pictures in last week's Seattle news stories to bring up the returns; you send an instant consolation email message that will be waiting for your friend when she wakes up.

Suddenly it hits you: there's another issue that must be raised at the morning business meeting. You dash off a fax in longhand on the screen of your personal digital assistant and press a button. Your fax will emerge in clean typescript from each of your colleagues' printers around the world before everyone gathers for the 9:00 a.m. teleconference.

Arriving back home after work, you plug the portable communicator back into your home media center and ask the system to archive Dave Barry's column. You call up new messages, news, and special advertising information on the screen; make theater and plane reservations for next week; and order a pizza. You and

your family watch a new custom newscast and catch a favorite movie or television program. Then you fall asleep watching the baseball game while your spouse chooses the camera angles and calls up instant replays.

Is this science fiction? Does the world really want this kind of interactive, multimedia lifestyle? Can middle-class Americans afford it? Will people ever order customized news and pizza from their television sets? Certainly, such a high-tech future isn't for everyone. Some of these gadgets may cost too much, take too much time, or remain too daunting. Skeptics point out, for example, that the picture phone has been available for years, yet most consumers have not bought it. VCRs everywhere are still blinking "12:00" because folks haven't had time to figure out how to set their clocks, and World Wide Web searches may appeal only to a small, niche market.⁽⁶⁾ But consider how many pieces of the above picture already are in place:

- About 23 million American homes—one in every five households—now have personal computers, and that market is expected to grow at a 24 percent compounded annual rate for the next three years, according to Forrester Research, Inc.
- Anyone with a basic computer and modem who pays about \$10 a month for a text account or \$30 a month for a SLIP account to a gateway service can access the Internet with a browser or guide, moving through the World Wide Web by clicking on hypertext words and pictures. Video, audio, photos, and text can be downloaded for personal use. Home computer modems have become fast enough to make this process less cumbersome and thus more appealing to the mass consumer market.
- Personal digital assistants by Apple, Sony, Motorola, and others are available and improving by the day, including the feature that reads handwriting and turns it into typescript. They retail at prices ranging from \$600 to \$1,500 apiece.
- The Washington Post's Digital Ink service, an online system that offers participants the day's official version of *The Washington Post*, also plans to offer automatically updated versions of a given story or the whole newspaper downloaded to home computers throughout the night. The service includes more than an online computer version of the daily print newspaper; it packages related stories and pictures, archival material, and sound and video clips. A recent review of *The Bell Curve*, for example, offered an opportunity to download an IQ test to take at home. In addition, customers, in their email "chat" lobby, can converse electronically about the news they are experiencing.
- Satellite vehicle mapping services for cars enable drivers to see en route which road to take next, to discover alternative routes in traffic jams, and to find their way when lost.⁽⁷⁾
- Joint television and computer monitors are already in use. Gary Griffith, Hearst Broadcasting Washington Bureau Chief, keeps "CNN Headline News" running all the time in the corner of his computer screen, so he can catch it with peripheral vision while working at his computer. Giant screens are available everywhere, and their \$5,000 price tag is declining.⁽⁸⁾
- Time Warner is offering video-on-demand on a trial basis to homes in Orlando, Florida. Its "Full Service Network" uses a cable television system to provide customer-on-demand movies, instant television news, interactive shopping, and other functions, all accessed through a remote control-operated cable box on top of the television set. The interactive set-top box is still prohibitively expensive at an estimated \$4,000 dollars per unit, but its developers predict an eventual cost of between \$200 and \$300.⁽⁹⁾
- Scores of newspapers and magazines, from *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* to *U.S. News and World Report*, offer online versions of their news and advertising, including online discussion groups and reporters' and editors' email addresses for consumer feedback and story ideas. The *Raleigh News & Observer's* Nando.net service is one of the best of these first-generation online news systems; its income stream is from subscribers, advertisers on the system, and additional charges for deeper database searches. Nando.net provides its own subset of niche publications, offering special subscribers more detailed information on politicians' votes and other issues.

- Television programs like PBS's "Washington Week in Review" and some networks have Internet home pages for information and feedback. While viewers watched the O.J. Simpson trial on CNN, for example, a message scrolled under the picture that gave viewers a number to call if they wished to "download evidence" to their computers through an arrangement with CompuServe.

The history of earlier media innovations teaches us to take the vision of the future seriously. All of these newly digitized tools—voice-activated computers linked to the Internet, "smart" cellular telephones, interactive cable television, video-on-demand, handwriting-to-text, CD-ROM, and expanded bandwidth—are in use today, and costs are declining as they improve. One doesn't want to make the same mistake that William Orton, President of Western Union, made when he rejected an opportunity to buy Alexander Graham Bell's patents for \$100,000. "What use could this company make of an electrical toy?" he said.(10)

Many technological glitches, still a serious barrier for most consumers trying to enter the digital world, are being conquered with amazing speed. Recognizing that the future is digital and that information will be available in multiple formats; many telephone, broadcast, newspaper, cable, and computer companies are scrambling toward the same goal: to provide the consumer with a constant stream of merged communications into the home, combining news, entertainment, advertising, mail, voice and video communications, and home shopping through some form of multimedia computer- television-telephone-fax-CD-ROM device.

A CBS/*New York Times* poll taken in June 1993 found that most Americans would like to interact more with their televisions: watching programs that they had missed simply by pressing a few buttons; making video phone calls that allow them to see other people on their televisions; playing television game shows; and choosing camera angles as they watch sporting events. They were willing to pay about \$10 a month more for a package of these new features, according to the poll.(11) The speed of this change depends heavily on the software designers, who haven't yet provided the technologically inept customer with a comfortable way to use the Internet. But this is considered just a matter of time.(12)

Nicholas Negroponte, founding director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) Media Lab, predicts that by the year 2005, Americans will spend more time on the Internet than watching network television and that videocassette rentals will have been replaced by easily available video-on-demand services. (13)

The "Niche" Marketplace

These new technologies are accelerating a shift of power away from traditional voices of authority in journalism and politics.(14) Both institutions are uneasy, for good reason: their roles are being challenged by new competitors and their audiences are restless. Some citizens are sidestepping the traditional news media altogether. They are turning to opinion journalism like the *American Spectator* or the raw experience of C-SPAN or talk radio,(15) or they are watching the latest courtroom drama.(16)

Some mass media almost certainly will survive side by side with the new niche media technologies. Advertisers don't want to lose the chance to reach millions of people at once. After all, when television developed, radio and print did not die out.(17) People still want to know what other people are thinking and still gather for huge consumer, entertainment, and news events, such as the Super Bowl, the Persian Gulf War, the O.J. Simpson trial, and *Pocohontas*.

However, new media designers at the M.I.T. Media Lab and elsewhere predict that the day-to-day mass audience will splinter further into niches, not just because hundreds of channels are offering programs where once there were just three, but also because people will want to create their own customized flows of information.

Niche marketing already has arrived, in both commerce and politics. Instead of offering a single product to

the greatest possible number of customers, marketers now try to sell as many specially tailored products as possible—over time—to the same loyal customers.(18) The seller is giving up an anonymous mass audience to reach a smaller group that is more likely to buy.

As a result, the media marketplace is becoming more competitive. As the total daily circulation of newspapers declined from 62.3 million in 1990 to 60.7 million in 1991, the newspapers were vying with 12,000 magazines and newsletters, 8,500 weeklies, 350 commercial television stations, 500 public service television stations, 10,684 cable television systems, 9,500 radio stations, and 2,650 database services.(19)

In politics, citizens already are treated as demographic niches, and our common values rarely are addressed. Candidates and political interest groups deepen our divisions by fashioning single-issue appeals to narrow voter populations. If we are looking for a national sense of citizenship, of shared interests and goals, we will have even more difficulty finding them in the niched media. Harvard professor Robert D. Putnam has documented that Americans' direct engagement in politics and government has fallen steadily and sharply over the last generation, even though average levels of education (traditionally the best predictor of political participation) have risen. Part of the explanation, Putnam suggests, is that technological trends are radically privatizing or individualizing how we spend our limited free time.(20)

Some social scientists fear that the arrival of new media technologies, from the explosion of cable television channels to the endless offerings of the Internet, will shatter both the mass media audience and our common American experience. Alternatively, some enthusiasts see these communications technologies as the dawn of a new age for democracy, enabling ordinary citizens finally to break through the elite barriers of politics and public discourse. Still others choose to ignore their potential impact. But anyone who believes that politicians and journalists can carry on as usual hasn't been paying attention.

The fundamental values of both journalism and politics are being challenged, in part because of the new technologies. Their problems—and their revitalization—are inextricably linked. The future of both depends on how effectively they can revive their core standards and regain the public's trust.

Today, American “news,” an artificial construct that has changed constantly during the past 200 years, is under assault. Unless journalists work now to save it, the ethic of objectivity that developed in journalism at the turn of the last century as both a reform effort and a response to market opportunities may be doomed.(21)

“The smell of death permeates the newspaper business these days,” observes media critic Howard Kurtz, noting that even deep-pocket chains have proved as helpless at preserving their papers as small-town owners; more than 150 dailies have folded in the past 25 years.(22) According to an April 1995 Times Mirror Center poll, only 45 percent of those surveyed said they had read a newspaper the day before, down from 58 percent in 1993.(23)

The idea that these audiences simply have fled to television news is not an adequate explanation for the drop in newspaper readership. The same poll also found that only 48 percent of those surveyed had watched network news the night before, down from 60 percent in 1993. Indeed, the national television networks, which once enjoyed the attention of a captive nation, now compete with hundreds of alternative offerings on cable. Now that legal obstacles have been removed, the telephone companies are replacing their copper wire networks with fiber optics, enabling them to transmit their own news and classified services directly into the home.(24) Pseudonews competitors like talk radio, advertorials, and infotainment, which don't pretend to provide verified information or balanced viewpoints, also are claiming their share of established “objective” news customers.

Ironically, we are losing our gatekeepers just when we need them most. People are overwhelmed by news products and imitations: infotainment magazine shows, infomercials, docudramas, home videos, talk shows, and Internet gossip, all competing with traditional news stories in the old and new media. Citizens

need a trustworthy guide not just for stories about what “officially happened” around the world each day but for the enormous flow of information that is gushing into their homes.(25)

One would think that journalists are ideally positioned to offer this guidance. However, new competitors, including Microsoft, TCI, Bell Atlantic, and Rush Limbaugh, are poised to take their place. Journalists have great opportunities to improve as the public gains access to new communications tools. But so far, many journalists are responding by doing exactly the wrong things, undermining instead of strengthening their future prospects.

3. The Opportunity: The Medium or the Message?

News organizations have responded to the new media environment in several ways. Many are:

- Going tabloid. Instead of beating their entertainment and propaganda competitors, many journalists are joining them. The increased competition spawned by the new technologies has led some traditional news purveyors to “go tabloid”—increasing coverage of celebrity gossip, bizarre crime, and sex scandals to try to retain their mass audience. Television news and magazine programs, in particular, have loosened their standards and definitions of what makes news.(26)
- Adopting new technologies. As newsprint costs rise, computer costs are dropping. Newspapers and magazines have rushed into online and other new media formats, hoping that new clothes will attract new customers. By the end of 1994, more than 450 publications were available in online (computer) versions. Experiments with CD-ROM have not proven as successful for journalism.(27) Broadcast television news purveyors also are making deals to deliver their products on addressable cable and multimedia or in online forums.
- Inventing “public journalism,” family-sensitive programming, and other audience-focused news. News professionals at dozens of local newspapers, television stations, and public radio stations have chosen to court their distracted audiences by inviting them into the newsroom. They are creating public journalism, convening citizens as partners to redirect both the content and the role of journalism in community life. In addition, family-sensitive television news at WCCO in Minneapolis and elsewhere attempts to reduce the amount of meaningless violence depicted in the news.

These practices have stirred impassioned debate within the news business; very few news organizations are simply carrying on as they once did. Some struggle to survive as new technologies loosen the journalist’s control over the timing, space, place, sources, and uses of news.

As news organizations react to these new technologies, many are concentrating on the look and feel of their delivery systems, trying to figure out how they will sell what is basically the same old content in new media formats. This may be the wrong focus. Digital technologies now free the news from any fixed delivery medium, enabling consumers to convert content instantly into video, audio, or text.(28) Computer, telephone, cable, and other businesses almost certainly will provide the new media delivery systems.

However, the one thing they will be hard pressed to produce is the “brand name” content—the valuable product that journalists offer. This is why so many delivery businesses have been seeking partnerships and contract arrangements with existing news and entertainment content providers.(29)

While journalists are experts at creating massive quantities of content every day, they cannot assume that what they offer now as news will “sell” in competition against pseudonews providers, even if they present their content in dramatic new formats.

The journalist’s challenge isn’t the medium but the message. As consumers start experimenting in cyberspace, journalists need to address more urgently not the delivery format but the quality of their core product: reliable and useful information on which citizens can act. Conscientious journalists fear that their work

already is losing its mandate, and they are right. The problem is not the strength of the competition but the weakness of today's journalism, hobbled as it is by formulas, attitudes, and habits that alienate many customers.

Many journalists would vehemently deny that their product is in trouble. Certainly some of the best journalism ever practiced is the work of the current generation of news professionals, and some highly successful news offerings—"Sixty Minutes," *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, "MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour," "Nightline," and "All Things Considered"—prove that audiences still appreciate high-quality journalism.

It is unfair to lump all "journalism" together because it ranges from the tabloid extreme of *The National Enquirer* to the respectability of the *National Journal*. However, even at its best, most journalism fails to differentiate itself clearly enough as a valuable product in the new media marketplace. It becomes increasingly clear that the formulas and approaches that characterize a large share of "serious" American journalism need an overhaul if the news is to survive as something different from propaganda or entertainment.

If this sounds harsh, consider the evidence. The new media are customer-driven. And in the words of Donald Kellerman of the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press, which has tracked the increasingly negative public opinion of the news media for the past decade, "Familiarity with the media seems to breed contempt."⁽³⁰⁾ As trust in most institutions has plummeted during the past 20 years, the journalism watchdog has lost favor too. According to the Yankelovich Monitor, 55 percent of citizens had "a great deal of confidence" in news reports on television in 1988, but by 1994 that number had dropped to 29 percent. Concurrently, confidence in newspapers dropped from 51 to 24 percent, and confidence in magazines fell from 38 to 14 percent.⁽³¹⁾

Not only have journalists failed to maintain their credibility with the average citizen, but 71 percent of the people polled by the Times Mirror Center in 1994 said they believe the press interferes with society's ability to solve its problems.⁽³²⁾

"The American media produce a product of very poor quality," says author Michael Crichton. "Its information is not reliable; it has too much chrome and glitz; its doors rattle; it breaks down almost immediately; and it's sold without warranty. It's flashy, but it's basically junk. So people have begun to stop buying it."⁽³³⁾

This is a moment of truth for the major journalism organizations. They cannot rely any longer on their most precious assets: a monopoly on defining what's news, exclusive access to official sources, and the public's trust.

4. Why Today's Journalism Is Vulnerable

If journalists are to find more appreciative audiences, they might start by breaking three bad habits: the strategy framework, cynicism, and tabloid news. Each encrypts the news so that it is meaningful only to other journalists, insiders, and voyeurs. The citizen is left with little comprehensible information on which to act.

Strategies and Insiders

When the Kettering Foundation conducted focus groups around the United States in 1991, "people talk[ed] as though our political system had been taken over by alien beings," Kettering Foundation President David Mathews concluded.⁽³⁴⁾

To be sure, this alienation isn't entirely the journalists' fault. But the news is America's daily meal of

politics and policy information. Instead of informing citizens in ways that might be useful to them, today's influential reporters often focus on strategy, interpreting political and public policy news as if they were professional wrestling referees. By treating public policymaking as a match that is being conducted—and fixed—by cynical professionals, this approach unwittingly makes citizens feel like spectators or dupes. Denied a part in the public drama, people “became either consumers or escapist from politics,” Columbia's James Carey wrote, observing how citizens responded to this kind of news. “It was a journalism of fact without regard to understanding, through which the public was immobilized, demobilized and was merely a ratifier of judgments derived on high. It was, above all, a journalism that justified itself in the public's name, but in which the public played no role, except as an audience.”(35)

Focusing on strategy at the expense of issues used to be most prevalent during political campaigns, when media attention turned to “horse race” polls and tactical maneuvers. Although many journalists tried to correct this tendency during the 1992 presidential campaign by improving the quantity and quality of “issues” stories, a focus on strategy still applies to much day-to-day news coverage, both locally and nationally.

“Whereas the game was once viewed as the means, it is now the end, while policy problems, issues and the like are mere tokens in the struggle for the presidency,” says Syracuse University Professor Thomas Patterson, who analyzes the impact of press frameworks on politics in his book, *Out of Order*.(36)

During the recent attempt by Democrats to pass a health care reform plan, many of the nation's most respected television newscasts and newspapers dedicated nearly two-thirds of their health care coverage to the strategy involved, characterizing the participants as winners or losers. They focused on facts and issues only in the remaining one-third.(37)

Even when journalists cite public opinion polls, they often use them to grade politicians instead of framing questions about the public's opinions or interests. Policy battles often are described as having only two sides, led by opposing politicians locked in personal combat.(38)

To understand how these habits shape the news, one needs to look no further than NBC's January 19, 1995 evening news report shortly after the Republican party had won control of both houses of Congress. It was a *tour de force* of strategy, insider, poll, personality, and conflict coverage.

Correspondent Lisa Myers focused on how Republicans and Democrats were frustrated by each other's tactics. Her colleague Brian Williams continued the emphasis on tactics and scorekeeping. Showing a silent video clip of President Clinton speaking to an audience, Williams said, “This was all we saw of the President today, a speech to retirees about pensions. But it was a chance for the President to stay above the fray, above the Gingrich-bashing on Capitol Hill, and look presidential. This way he controls the audience and the message. It's an effort that just might be working.”

Finally Williams recounted the results of the latest NBC poll, which showed that Clinton was up and Gingrich was down. “Bill Clinton took the oath of office two years ago tomorrow,” Williams said. “Today the White House released this collection of the President's accomplishments so far, 37 pages of programs, bar graphs, and numbers, the story the White House says hasn't been told.”

That story still was not told, although Williams gave us a glimpse of the stack of white paper. Sitting at home, the citizen received no information about Gingrich's goals or the content of the White House's 37 pages. This narrow, superficial, pseudo-insider coverage told citizens nothing about their government's actual activities; it seemed to be aimed instead at an audience of insiders who cared only about keeping score.

Although it is especially common on network television, this kind of coverage hardly is confined to the national news. Local journalists, taking cues from their more prominent colleagues, are likely to ask a

political candidate, “You’re behind in the polls. How can you win?” instead of, “Why are you running for this office?”

The Negativity Bias

The press is the living jury of the nation,” said 1830s newspaper editor James Gordon Bennett. Increasingly, it seems to be a hanging jury.

Much has been said in journalism reviews about how negative the news is and how this drives audiences away. Many journalists, from the muckrakers of the last century to the investigative reporters of today, have proved that some bad news is good for us. We need to know the truth about our problems in order to face them effectively.(39) Indeed, the founding fathers established constitutional protections for the press because they understood that leaving the watchdog function to partisan politicians wouldn’t necessarily serve the public interest; both sides have too many incentives to preserve the status quo and ignore problems that elude quick fixes.

Watergate, Vietnam, the Iran-Contra scandal, and dozens of other situations prove that the press’s skepticism certainly is warranted. Citizens need the press, as they need the police, to bear witness to the underside of American life; it would be a mistake to blame either for the crimes they uncover.(40)

However, the critics also have a point, which is gaining new significance in the changing media environment. While the strategy framework omits much of the real news that citizens need to know, other journalistic habits actively poison the atmosphere. Many journalists are biased, not so much by “liberal” or “commercial” viewpoints but by negative assumptions about all institutions.

As former NBC President Lawrence Grossman points out, American journalists have become the exact definition of the ancient Greek chorus: “old citizens full of their proverbial wisdom and hopelessness.”(41) The journalist’s well-intentioned attempt to overcome manipulation by public figures often overcompensates, creating news that is so fundamentally negative, day in and day out, that it distorts the nation’s understanding of itself.(42) Local news, particularly on television, thrives on violent accidents and criminal events that rarely are presented in a meaningful context. Instead of learning what might be done about these tragedies, we become instead a passive audience, watching what one critic calls the pornography of violence. News about crime and violence is cheap and easy to cover; news about ways people might attack such common problems is even more important—and very hard to find.

Our national self-image is as skewed as our local picture. Most political analysts would agree that politicians are no more venal or corrupt now than they ever were.(43) Yet during the past 30 years, the portrayal of politicians has grown sharply more negative, according to several studies.

This negativism exerts a measurable effect on politics. Thomas Patterson determined that low poll ratings for government and political figures closely tracked the increasingly negative coverage. “News that incessantly and unjustifiably labels political leaders as insincere and inept fosters mistrust on the part of the public and makes it harder for those in authority to provide the leadership that is required if government is to work effectively,” Patterson concluded.(44)

Many journalists still shrug off criticism that the news is too negative, observing that they can’t report all of the airplanes that arrive safely each day. “I don’t sit around sucking my thumb about why the public doesn’t like us more,” says Bob Rivard, Managing Editor of the *San Antonio Express-News*. “We’re contrarians. That’s why we got into this business.”(45)

But while journalists believe they are just telling the truth about what goes on, the public thinks otherwise. A Times Mirror poll in March 1993 found that 64 percent of the public felt that the news media “put too much emphasis on negative news.” James Carey concurs: “In the public’s eyes, the media [have] become the adversary of all institutions, including the public itself.”(46)

Journalists usually assume the worst, explains Michael Lewis of *The New Republic*. “Do I believe that a lot of people’s motives are base? Yes. If you dig, you usually can find a selfish motive,” he says.(47) Indeed, our piranha press corps seems willing to devour anyone, at any time, for frivolous infractions as well as serious ones.(48)

“You really look like a fool if you take the issues seriously,” *New York Newsday* columnist Gail Collins confessed to Paul Starobin of the *Columbia Journalism Review*. Coverage of government has to be especially tough, she said. “Anytime you write something really, really positive about a politician—unless he’s dead—everyone in the community of journalism says, ‘God, did you see how they’re sucking up to that person?’”(49)

Those who try in good faith to serve in government find themselves tarred with the same cynical brush as the miscreants; thus, accountability is moot. Indeed, many respected journalists have expressed their concern about the cynicism that now pervades the American news media, particularly in Washington.(50)

“The reporter used to gain status by dining with his subjects; now he gains status by dining on them,” writes Adam Gopnik in *The New Yorker*, decrying the “casual cruelty of so much of the media.” Instead of highlighting problems in a way that rewards the politicians who try to address them, Gopnik continues, reporters “now relish aggression while still being prevented, by their own self-enforced codes, from letting that aggression have any relation to serious political argument, let alone to grown-up ideas about conduct and morality.”(51)

In a related process, instead of trying to envision what good public policymaking might look like, most journalists simply pick at the pieces of the policymaking process as they develop, comparing each to some purist ideal. American politics is the art of compromise, but Patterson’s content analysis indicates that journalists usually denigrate compromises as hypocrisy or “going back on a promise.”

Instead of proving that journalists are unbiased guardians of the public trust, this perpetual negativity has backfired. The apparently endless flow of scandals and feeding frenzies has damaged, rather than enhanced, journalism’s credibility. The watchdog that barks at everything loses its bite.

“Journalists are now creating the coverage that is going to lead to their own destruction,” says Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. “If you cover the world cynically and assume that everybody is Machiavellian and motivated by their own self-interest, you invite your readers and viewers to reject journalism as a mode of communication because it must be cynical too.”(52)

The Closed Door

To be sure, more than simple negativity is at work. After all, Rush Limbaugh, with some 20 million listeners a week,(53) also is profoundly negative. But Limbaugh articulates the anger and frustration that many people are experiencing after decades of negative information. And, significantly, he connects people to politics. He welcomes them in instead of shutting them out.

Limbaugh and other radio talk show hosts fill a vacuum that could be served instead by a better journalism and a more receptive political culture. Unfortunately, they are filling it with material that often is inaccurate.

According to a new study by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, talk radio listeners think they know more than other people but actually answer less accurately on public affairs questions. Jamieson’s research tracked how citizens learned about the health care reform debate over a nine-month period in 1994. “At the end of that period, we took the people who said they relied on talk radio and ... asked them how well informed they felt. We had been watching their level of information across the process. Of all the people we watched, they

said they were the best informed. And of all the people we watched, they were the least informed. And they were also the most cynical about governance.”(54)

This is the price the nation pays when journalists cede the public policy debate to others who don’t worry about being disinterested, verified, or comprehensive. If verified facts are not part of the public discourse, then there are no reference points for accountability. As Senator Daniel P. Moynihan observed in a debate with his 1994 electoral opponent on WNBC in New York, “You’re entitled to your own opinions. You’re not entitled to your own facts.”

Understandably, the public doesn’t have a clear sense of why Rush Limbaugh isn’t considered a journalist if Sam Donaldson is. As Carl Bernstein once remarked, journalism is “the only institution that remains closed while insisting that all others be open.” Ordinary citizens who seek entrance to the “journalism temple” to learn how it works often are rebuffed.

Today’s news is created, packaged, and delivered by a priesthood of journalists, trained by editors who hired them because they had the right “instincts”; that is, they had the same set of cultural expectations and values as the editors themselves. The news is delivered, take it or leave it, to a passive audience. The public has little ability to add anything to the news agenda or to correct errors of interpretation or omission. Theoretically, both the news production process and the product are protected from outside influence in order to preserve journalists’ ability to tell the truth, without fear or favor. Traditional news organizations seldom offer information about their reporters’ qualifications, how they choose what becomes news, or what citizens can do to affect the news agenda. In fact, inquiries into the political affiliations of journalists are viewed as inappropriate, and many reporters do not disclose even their outside income from interest group speeches.(55)

Journalists believe this closed culture protects them from commercial and ideological pressure, but it also makes it easy for citizens to believe the worst when critics complain. A book like Noam Chomsky’s *Manufactured Consent* is credible to unsophisticated news consumers, even though it bears no resemblance to the way news actually is created. Do citizens appreciate the fact that most professional journalists try to leach out their own biases, provide alternative views, and get two sources for each fact? If not, isn’t it at least partly because journalists don’t submit to any system of public accountability to monitor their standards?

The Journalist’s Influence

Though journalists consider themselves useful channels for public information, some citizens believe that they just get in the way. Part of the problem is that as journalists struggle to respond to the digital revolution, they still haven’t dealt with the added public responsibilities created by the last wave of new technologies—radio and television.

Political parties, which used to bear the responsibility of connecting citizens to government, have been crippled by democratic reforms and the rise of television as an alternative medium of political information. Today, radio, television and the newspapers that influence television news have become the key link between the public and the politician.(56) As a result, journalists at the major networks and newspapers influence politics in ways that the founding fathers and early newspaper editors never could have imagined. Their influence often is unwitting; in fact, many reputable journalists routinely turn a blind eye to their role, believing that excessive preoccupation with their influence will bias their work.

Acting on their understanding of what makes a good story, they nevertheless can have an inordinate impact on policy, unless political officials respond adequately to the issues that appear, sometimes randomly, in the news. The press does not necessarily set the political agenda, but it can create obstacle courses for officials and citizens who might prefer to take things up at a different pace or frame them in a different way.(57)

This is exactly what happened, for example, one week after the 1992 election, when Thomas Friedman of *The New York Times* covered President-elect Clinton's speech to veterans in Arkansas. Clinton's intent that day was to help heal the wounds caused by his failure to serve in Vietnam. When asked by a pool reporter(58) whether he still planned to allow gays to serve in the military, Clinton said he intended to keep his promise but would "consult with a lot of people" over an indefinite period "about what our options are" for lifting the ban.

Reading the pool report back in his hotel room, Friedman realized that lifting the ban on homosexuals in the military was the hottest topic Clinton had addressed that day. He dismissed the fact that Clinton had made exactly the same promise several times during his presidential campaign. Friedman, in fact, had been a foreign correspondent during the campaign; he was just starting on the White House beat. He persuaded his editors in New York that Clinton's repetition of his pledge was real news because he was now president-elect, not just a candidate making a campaign promise.(59) The story led *The New York Times* on Thursday morning November 12, 1992, with the following headline: "Clinton to Open Military's Ranks to Homosexuals." The subhead erroneously characterized this as "His First Move on Policy."

Neither Clinton nor the gay-rights lobbyists had meant to make opening the military to gays his first policy move; the Friedman headline and story made it so. And the story touched off a firestorm that Clinton, with slight experience in handling the national press, could not contain. Friedman's page-one, lead-story treatment in the most influential newspaper in the country set off a second round of coverage in the other media, which had not highlighted his comments on lifting the ban in their stories that day because he had told them the same thing before. Analysts have since decried this Clinton "decision" to begin his presidency by lifting the ban as an important strategic mistake. In fact, it was *The New York Times* that pushed it to the top of Clinton's political agenda.

This incident is not unique. As the news media's influence has grown in recent years, so has the public's dissatisfaction with the way it is handled. Most journalists still believe they are operating in the public interest and should be valued for helping ordinary people understand their world. But increasingly, people see journalists as a special-interest group, like any other, which manipulates them in order to throw its weight around or make a buck.

As Margaret Gordon, Dean of the Graduate School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington, told the Freedom Forum Foundation Center during the 1992 presidential campaign: "Recently my colleagues and I organized two focus groups in the Seattle area on the media's coverage of the campaign. What we found is that people are incredibly angry at the media. They think that all the media moguls and journalists have access to massive amounts of information that the public doesn't ever see.... People no longer believe that journalists are operating in the public interest or for the public good. Many of the people we spoke with believe that journalists' decisions are business-motivated ones."(60)

Some news organizations unabashedly are seeking the same profit levels they enjoyed in their monopoly days, regardless of the impact on their product. They cite fiduciary responsibility to their shareholders, not ethical responsibility to the public. However, as former FCC Chairman Newton Minow says, "to aim at the bottom line is to aim too low."(61) In fact, some efforts to squeeze more money out of news actually may backfire in the new media marketplace.

The Tabloid Trend

It grows more difficult every day to describe the differences between news and sheer entertainment or propaganda. This obscuring of the line between news and non-news, together with the cynicism and other bad habits already discussed in this paper, make journalism vulnerable to its less scrupulous competitors in the new media environment. Standards and definitions of news always have varied widely, depending on the era and the news organization. But now even in the most respected newsrooms the traditional standards

of verification, objectivity, and relevance become more elusive by the day.

When *The New York Times* quotes the tabloid *National Enquirer* as the basis for a news story, when ABC “journalist” John Stossel openly promotes his personal political agenda on the air, when former “Sixty Minutes” veteran Diane Sawyer asks Donald Trump’s mistress, “Was it the best sex you ever had?,” when “Dateline NBC” stages an explosion to “prove” that a certain truck is unsafe, and when, as “CBS Evening News” anchor, Connie Chung, goads the relatives of public officials into name-calling—separating news from entertainment and propaganda is next to impossible.(62)

Instead of protecting their turf, some of the nation’s best news organizations seem to be squandering their credibility just when “brand-name” trustworthiness is most important to their survival. Local television news broadcasts provide ample evidence that local news also doesn’t deliver what it promises. Paul Klite, Director of the Rocky Mountain Media Watch, a citizens’ watchdog group, analyzed 50 local television news shows that ran in 19 cities across America on January 11, 1995. According to Klite, the newscasts were on average 30 percent commercials; 30 percent sports, weather, and chatter; and 30 percent other news. In the 12- to 15-minute window of “real” news, 28 percent was crime; 25 percent was disasters; and 31 percent was fluff, for example, “bears eat Popsicles, girl reunited with dog, how to tango,” and celebrity stories, Klite found. “That leaves less than five minutes in the newscasts to talk about education and the environment, the economy and arts and science, homelessness and poverty, overpopulation, government, health, and all the other important issues of our time,” says Klite, adding that this was a “consistent pattern across the country.”(63)

Many news executives in broadcast and print act as though the tabloid trend is inevitable, and some good journalists feel powerless to save their craft. They believe that the new media technologies have created a marketplace in which everyone is forced to descend to the lowest common denominator. Hesitation to air even unfounded rumors about a politician’s private life is derided as elitist, and any positive news has to fulfill some light-hearted Cinderella cliché—or be dismissed as boring.

Serious journalists working at national newsmagazine shows say that they must use the tabloid stories to attract the mass audience, and then they can slip in some substantive information and serious stories. But this scenario works only if the audience is truly captive, willing to endure the serious along with the titillating. In the multichannel universe, customers who are pressed for time and capable of switching instantly to other options are not likely to sit still for the whole package as the news organization delivers it. If they want tabloid entertainment, they may not accept a hybrid that is half-naughty and half-news.

Public Information

American politics has undergone a related transformation, which is part of the tabloid trend: our common culture has been turned inside out; we have lost the difference between public and private, in both journalism and politics.

Seemingly all private behavior is now deemed relevant, yet much public behavior is ignored. What does a government official do from day to day? What has she sacrificed or gained by being in public life? What are her motives? Do her acts (public and private) serve the country well, or are they doomed to fail? What does the political system actually produce, on the ground? These are not today’s political stories.

Instead, news revelations about the private lives of politicians often shape their public fates, no matter how tenuous the story. The news chain may originate with a partisan “dirty tricks” spin doctor, who leaks to a shameless tabloid. Soon the “serious” news media feel compelled to pick up the story, simply because it’s “out there.” The trend is evident not only in journalism; ordinary citizens’ private eccentricities—publicly revealed on “Oprah” and “Prime Time Live”—replace real talk about common problems. Instead of acting like a nation of citizens, we have become a nation of voyeurs.

Politicians certainly have contributed to this process. Issues that might be considered public or “common to us all,” have been discredited by the current wave of political correctness, which prefers private and individual initiatives. Efforts for a common good, like the right-to-life, abortion rights, environmental, and consumer movements, are denigrated as “special interests” that are indistinguishable from private profiteers.(64)

Simultaneously, the news—which the founding fathers protected as an indispensable source of information and debate about our public life—has become preoccupied with private revelations and isolated tragedies: “A man has barricaded himself with his girlfriend and three children at 4th and H Streets. Let’s go there live!” Today’s news largely consists of discrete events with little intrinsic relevance to our common problems; major public policy choices affecting us all often are treated superficially or omitted altogether. Coverage of the O.J. Simpson, William Kennedy Smith, Menendez brothers, John Bobbitt, Tonya Harding, Susan Smith, Heidi Fleiss, Joey Buttafuoco, and Jeffrey Dahmer cases is of popular interest and, in some cases, has led to valuable public discussions of such substantive issues as spousal and child abuse, racial discrimination, and the criminal justice system.

Ordinarily, however, common threads are not offered; if these situations involve us, we rarely understand how. As Americans we seem to be amusing ourselves to death, to use Neil Postman’s phrase, instead of facing our common challenges as a nation. Consumers, as citizens, need bread as well as circuses. The health of our democracy depends on it.

“Active citizenship must be based on an understanding of how democracy works,” asserts *Washington Post* columnist David Broder, the dean of American political journalists.(65) If the news media don’t convey that understanding from day to day, who will? Rush Limbaugh and other talk radio hosts demonstrate that public affairs are of interest to more than 20 million listeners a week, and they are providing that information, with their own perspectives, for better or for worse.(66)

As they conscientiously attempt to offer intelligent and relevant information, even the most experienced journalists often lose track of what news should be about. For example, in January 1995, ABC, CBS, and NBC—which attract about 31 million viewer households a night(67) and thus still serve as our principal source of national news—devoted an average of less than two minutes each per night to the historic changes underway in the new GOP-led Congress.(68)

Nothing illustrates this misguided coverage more graphically than Connie Chung’s much-touted interview with Speaker Newt Gingrich’s mother, during which Mrs. Gingrich described First Lady Hillary Clinton as a “bitch.” The scandal wasn’t that Connie Chung appeared to violate an off-the-record agreement—it was that she considered this news. This was tabloid at its purest: celebrity combat. The real news of the day, shrunk down to make room for the Chung cat fight, was about the plans Mrs. Gingrich’s newly-empowered son was developing for changing the government.(69)

The national newspapers, which many rely on as surer sources for news of politics and government, also are impaired by habits that please fellow journalists but not many others. *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*, for instance, failed to say much about what was in Newt Gingrich’s “Contract with America” until his party won the 1994 elections. Sophisticated Washington journalists had dismissed it as a cynical gimmick, rather than seeing it as a blueprint that some voters actually might want to examine. As this essay has observed, the strategy, negativity, agenda-setting, and tabloid elements of today’s news often distort journalists’ honest efforts to inform the nation. These ingrained practices, created in part by competitive factors no longer relevant in the new media landscape, distance journalists from the very audiences they believe they’re serving. They corrode the market strength of journalism just when it most needs a loyal following. Fortunately, the new technologies also offer several ways to reverse this downward spiral.(70)

5. How New Technologies Are Changing the News

Interactivity: Citizens As Journalists

The old media deliver the old politics: the insider's game, presented on high, from the elite to the masses. The new technologies break the journalist's monopoly, making some of the new news an unmediated collaboration between the sources and the audience.

As we have seen, citizens can program their computers to retrieve their own "news," assembled easily from original sources far more diverse than the journalist's official Rolodex. Newly empowered, they also can second-guess what professional journalists produce. According to technology marketing analyst Nicholas Donatiello, people are eager to control which communications come into their homes and when. They also want to be "more selective about what segments they want to watch of the news." (71)

If the news isn't compelling enough, they will find alternatives. Montreal's six-year-old Videoway system, considered the first commercially successful interactive television system, found that subscribers spent about four hours a week, or half of their time on the system, playing video games. They reduced the amount of time they spent watching regular television by six hours a week, or about 20 percent. "You might be seeing the interactive news and think: I'm tired of the war in Bosnia. Let's see a different story. You feel your TV is a TV and a Nintendo and a computer. You watch in a different way," one customer told *The New York Times*.(72)

These patterns, analysts believe, are not due just to the fact that people like to be entertained; people also aren't being offered enough compelling programming on the proliferating new channels. So far, the digital revolution seems to have brought us endless reruns of "I Dream of Jeannie" and a tidal wave of copycat tabloid entertainments.(73) Mitch Kapor, founder of Lotus, designer of the Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet, and creator of the Electronic Freedom Foundation, worries that he will wake up one day to find that he has 500 channels of television "and they all are showing the Hair Club for Men."(74)

Interactivity experts believe that a small group of users will take the time to create their own news formulas from day to day but that most interactive media consumers won't be browsing around or creating a serendipitous "communal" experience. They won't even want a multitude of choices.

They will want a quick, efficient way to obtain precisely what they are looking for, whether it's a trustworthy overview of the world's events, a copy of Julia Child's lemon mousse recipe, or a conversation with a fellow basset hound breeder. As media analyst Denise Caruso explains it, "The message of this new medium is 'I want what I want and nothing more.'"(75)

In the M.I.T. Media Lab's version of the future, people will customize their computer news "guide" once, and then the day-to-day work will be done automatically. This robot will go out and get the news—not the news that a professional journalist would choose, but the specific kinds of topics that the consumer says she wants.

Journalists, if they're smart, will offer continual information guidance that obviates the need for such robots. To do this, they may not have to be as entertaining or as ideological as Rush's reports, but they will have to be more accurate, more relevant, and more attuned to their audiences than most are today. The new technologies offer journalists not only the potential perils of competition and scrutiny but also the potential benefits of an expanded role: connecting citizens to information and to each other. To succeed, journalists cannot connect simply for the sake of connecting; they will have to deliver something of additional value to the customer.

Time Is Infinite

Interactivity is only one of the dramatic technologies now changing the news. Journalism, already instant

and global, can be released by digital technology from many time and space constraints, offering unlimited opportunities for both consumers and providers.(76)

The wired consumer can get his customized news all day, at any time of day, updated regularly by his provider. He no longer will watch, hear, or read video, audio, or text “by appointment,” when the news purveyor decides to send it out. It will be stored, in digital form, for the customer to call up when and how he wants.

Surveys indicate that this time-shifting and indexing, always available to some degree with print and now available for television and radio, is attractive to consumers. It also is a great boon to journalists because it opens up a new market for recycling material that currently appears once and then vanishes into the air. Stories in the new digital media are archived so they can be accessed when consumers actually want to learn about these subjects; material omitted from the original story also can be packaged and sold. Major news archives have been available for years in library clip files, on microfilm, and in databases like LEXIS/NEXIS. But now they will be easy and inexpensive for the public to access from their homes, at a moment’s notice, especially if journalists package and resell them to accompany current news. The incentive is to reuse everything because the news hole has expanded beyond the current news staff’s capacity to fill it.

Thus, time, which is now one of the journalist’s greatest foes, will lose its power to define the news story. If deadlines are fixed as they are now by arbitrary distribution deadlines, they can force a rush to judgment that erodes the trustworthiness of the news product. But if deadlines are constant, one can devote to an enterprise news story (77) the time it really takes. A news organization that is determined to establish its “brand” in the multichannel marketplace will not rush stories to publication but will allot what *Washington Post* editor Bob Woodward calls more “time against the problem” to improve the product.

More significantly, the hot “scoop” loses its commercial value in this environment. Scoops are prized by reporters, who rate each other on who gets the news first. However, the value of the time-sensitive scoop is lost in the constant news marketplace, except in financial and some other specialty markets. Even though more and more news stations “burn their brand” into each video frame to mark their scoops, the news consumer rarely remembers who had a news item first as she surfs through scores of channels.

Furthermore, if the news truly is a major breakthrough, it will be picked up in nanoseconds and carried by hundreds of other news sources.

Instant scoops on Los Angeles local television stations about evidence that was being developed for the O.J. Simpson trial generally backfired; there were too many, too often to identify with a particular purveyor, and they usually were incorrect. In the multichannel environment, why would a customer deliberately look for a newscast that rushed to judgment and proved incorrect?

On the other hand, a news organization will need something exclusive to offer if it is to occupy a distinct niche in the multichannel environment. A news channel with a trusted anchor will have an advantage in the new marketplace, and a different kind of exclusive scoop—a research or analysis piece that has been developed by the news organization alone—will sharpen the purveyor’s competitive edge.

Space is Endless

In the digital world, journalism is liberated not just from time but from space constraints. The reporter’s dream has come true: now there is a bottomless news hole, thanks to new technologies and the Internet. Online news customers become archaeologists; they can start at the surface with the headline, digest, or summary of the news, and then click on words or pictures to enter layer upon layer of longer stories, related features, analysis pieces, and sound and video clips. Finally, they will reach original documents and discussion groups on an issue.(78)

This changes the way that people browse through the news, reducing the serendipity factor of an unanticipated story or advertising encounter. It alters story formulas from linear narratives to headlines and summaries, followed by increasing layers of substance, with related entertainment and ads. Unless journalists guard against it, the new online advertising will be more closely linked to the content, with travel agencies sponsoring travel news, for example.⁽⁷⁹⁾

Place is Local

Thanks to satellites and the Internet, the communications media can defy not only space and time but place. Cable viewers in Washington, D.C., now can see the latest newscasts from Moscow, New York, and Tokyo, in addition to other traditional American media, including CNN.

Previous communications technologies made the news more global. Now the new media also make it more local. Improved access to the rest of the world's news raises the value of local journalism sent directly from the original location where the news occurs. It can sell itself to new markets because it has a unique product that no one else can produce. Remember when all 64 channels were carrying O.J. Simpson's white Bronco live as it sped along the Los Angeles Freeway? Most networks were carrying pictures provided by the same few local television stations in Los Angeles.

The foreign correspondents and international "parachute journalists" who go from crisis to crisis for CBS and *The Washington Post* are less valuable in this new media marketplace. Unless they offer a framework and context that add value to the raw footage, more foreign bureaus will close as customers seek to get their news live and fresh from the locals on the scene, the wire services, and international specialists like CNN and the BBC.

Customized news also becomes local in a different way—rooted locally to a new geography of "virtual," rather than physical communities. Ironically, as we reach everyone in the world at once through CNN and the Internet, we respond by retreating to small virtual communities of specific interest. We turn inward to smaller groups because, as political writer E.J. Dionne observes, the global community is "too big to put [our] arms around."⁽⁸⁰⁾

The Playing Field Is Even

All programming appears to be equally legitimate when it is just a click away on the same big screen. The major broadcast networks still occupy the dominant low-number channel positions, but that no longer matters the way it used to. A high-cost, high-quality program can be substituted instantly for a low-budget, offbeat cable access program; a rerun of "Dobie Gillis" is interchangeable with Bill Clinton's latest speech, which can in turn be clicked off for the latest ruby ring offer on a home shopping channel.

Thus, the expensive, high-powered network news loses its aura as something special; instead, it sits on the bench, next to local news, CNN, Fox News, entertainment news, sports news, and weather news. How will a consumer decide which to pick? A channel surfer will probably land on the news with the hottest production values or the most dazzling story of that millisecond. Or viewers may stop for a while because they see the story being delivered by someone they like and trust.

But quality news cannot be designed to win the channel surfing contest. It must expect instead to be selected, as a special niche that loyal viewers visit for good reason. Some channels choose all-news formats so that they become the logical place to go for news.⁽⁸¹⁾ As the surf gets crowded, consumers will want to know where they can go for real news. They won't want to waste time getting there.

High-Quality News Is Easier to Produce—And to Invent

Never has high-quality journalism been easier to produce. Instant access to endless archives, government

documents, and other databases enables reporters to bring facts and context together as never before. Computers help reporters sort out patterns in housing discrimination, crime, and toxic waste dumping. Political contributions can be lined up instantly with votes on critical issues. Computer-assisted research, known to journalists as CAR, is transforming the depth and quality of coverage, particularly in print. As Howard Kurtz reports in *Media Circus*, computer skills enabled Philadelphia Inquirer reporters Donald Barlett and James Steele to identify companies that were seeking special tax loopholes from Congress. One company included in the tax bill was characterized only by the amounts of three of its loans and the years they were due. By feeding these numbers into the Dow Jones database, the reporters were able to learn that the company was FMC Corporation of Chicago. The process took just a few minutes.(82)

At WFAA-TV in Dallas, Producer Walt Zwirko used Microsoft's CD-ROM encyclopedia, Encarta, for background material on Haiti as the U.S. military prepared to land there. Highly compressed CD-ROM archives enable reporters to find phone numbers, street maps and other intimate data for the nation and the world.(83)

Yet as real facts are easier to assemble and analyze, so are phony pictures, documents, and audiotape easier to create at home with the inexpensive, easily accessed new technologies. Journalists, who have a hard enough time confirming facts as it is, will have to be far more concerned in the future about establishing the authenticity of their evidence. Citizens will want to know where to find sources they trust, not just random "video vigilantes" who chase ambulances and sell their film to the highest tabloid bidder.

6. What Customers Really Want from the New News

Consistently providing the highest quality news is the best policy for news organizations trying to survive in the niched media environment. However, they may have to change the way they cover issues—starting more often from the ground up rather than the top down. Every journalist has had the discouraging experience of producing a "serious" issue story, only to find that some entertainment piece captured the audience that day. A much-vaunted NBC health care special flopped when viewers fled to tabloid entertainment on other channels. Many journalists say that if the public wanted "serious" journalism they would provide a stronger market for it. Substance doesn't sell, they say. There are three things wrong with this argument. First, even our "best" journalism consistently misses the mark because it is hobbled by strategy and score-keeping formulas that shut out the audience. Second, the tabloid approach cannot ensure a solid, long-term audience—particularly in the niched media landscape. Third, the issues piece is usually an isolated phenomenon. It often comes at the wrong time, in the wrong place, for consumers to respond. Now that consumers can access the news when they want, they are more likely to seek news they can trust.

Good Journalism Does Sell

Even though our best journalism often is flawed by strategy frames, cynicism, and other bad habits, the audience for serious public issues is impressive. Consider the following evidence:

- In October 1991, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* ran a nine-part series by Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele about the global economy, leveraged buy-outs, deregulation, and related subjects. The *Inquirer* reprinted 18,000 copies of the series and made them available the day the last story ran; the copies were gone in 48 hours. In all, the paper ended up printing 400,000 copies of the series. When it was published later as a book, it sold more than 500,000 more copies.(84)
- The first presidential debate in 1992, subjected to a fluke eight-second blackout on ABC at the beginning, still beat out a baseball game on CBS.(85) Televised local town hall meetings in Wichita and other communities also have led their markets, even when scheduled against major sporting events.
- The marketplace strength of the respected *New York Times* continues, while tabloids like the *New York Post* struggle to survive. Good newspapers have a halo effect for advertisers. Most would

- rather be associated with a credible news product than a tabloid or a circular.
- Although fewer people watch the evening news programs now than in the 1960s, about 31 million (a significant number) still tune in every night to ABC, NBC, and CBS. Ratings of the “MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour” indicate an audience of 5 million viewers each day. CNN and C-SPAN have small hourly audiences but significant cumulative daily and weekly audiences.(86)
- Dataquest, Inc., a Silicon Valley research firm, was surprised to find how many multimedia customers polled in the summer of 1993 were interested in getting the news. “My initial hunch was that they would be more interested in entertainment than information,” said Bruce Ryon, the firm’s principal analyst for multimedia research. “But they were actually more interested in information, and news ranked fairly highly in the information category.”(87)
- Ross Perot’s folksy deficit seminars during the 1992 presidential campaign attracted enormous audiences.
- Interest in public policy would be far greater, analysts say, if the news were released from its “insider” cage. The public’s apparent lack of interest in the official side of national and international affairs stems at least in part “from a profound sense of powerlessness,” reinforced by “the cosmopolitan and investigative style of what is usually defined as journalism at its best,” which emphasizes irony or the complexity of the issues, according to Russell Neuman, Marion Just, and Ann Crigler, authors of *Common Knowledge*. “Our subjects reacted with special enthusiasm to information about how to take control of public issues. We found, for example, that a fairly technical magazine story about the stock market was given high marks for interest by our audience judges because it emphasized what you can do about the problem.” They advise journalists to “incorporate the dimension of civic action into the substance of the news story.”(88)

Market surveys indicate that the people most likely to approve of press performance today are poorly informed about public affairs. “They see the news as essentially part of the entertainment package that eases their passage through their own real-world lives,” says Donald Kellerman of the Times Mirror Center.

Times Mirror polls have found that those readers and viewers who watch the news most closely are most critical of its quality. According to Kellerman, however, if the news is presented from a different point of view, treating readers and viewers as citizens, it acquires a different value. “When the news relates to their everyday lives, when it’s presented that way, people are interested.”(89)

How might this work? Covering Washington news from the citizen up, ABC correspondent Aaron Brown recently made the unmanageable, dull subject of federal taxes and the budget deficit into a dynamic story, with direct connections to real people’s lives.

Brown went to Knox County, Tennessee, where citizens had just voted, two to one, for Republican promises to cut federal programs and taxes. “People are tired of paying taxes and not getting anything in return,” said one citizen in Brown’s piece, summarizing the conventional wisdom of the community.

Then Brown reviewed the federal budget and calculated both how much Knox County provided in taxes and how much it received in the form of welfare, food stamps, Medicare, Social Security, roads, tunnels, buildings, national parks, federal prisons, university research, and military facilities. Citizens realized, at the end of Brown’s report, that they had to choose which programs should be cut in order to reduce their income taxes.

The idea that people are less interested in current news fare because they simply aren’t reading or aren’t interested in events isn’t true, surveys indicate. Young people are reading more books and magazines than ever and checking out more books from libraries.(90) In fact, young people are “generally more interested in what’s happening in the larger world around them” than their news consumption would suggest, according to a Times Mirror Center poll.(91)

“Is this fear about declining interest in news correct? Or, as it seems to be the case, do such surveys merely show that people are disenchanted with the news they are getting?” asks John Maxwell Hamilton, Dean of theanship School of Mass Communications at Louisiana State University. “Poll after poll shows that people simply don’t think establishment media do a good enough job.”(92)

The False Promise of Tabloid News

The tabloid trend, which has affected virtually every news organization in some fashion, may offer some short-term advantages; the sexy story may grab channel surfers and beat out the competition for a while. But it is exactly the wrong way to strengthen the long-term competitive position of the news in the new media landscape—where success will depend on customer loyalty.

The tabloid journalist is missing an opportunity by resorting to formulas that may actually be turning off the most important consumer group—people who want news as opposed to those simply looking for entertaining background noise. This group becomes vital to the future of journalism as the marketplace breaks down further into niches.

Local and national television news programs holding consistent first-place positions in their markets are most often those offering the highest-quality news, rather than the tabloid approach. While this is especially true in Boston, Minneapolis, and Dallas, it is a good rule of thumb for most communities, according to telecommunications consultant John Ellis.(93)

In the closely-contested Boston market, WCVB-TV has retained its longstanding number-one position as both the most respected and most watched local television news, in spite of intense promotion for a new “Miami-style” (“if it bleeds, it leads”) newscast established by rival WHDH. “We swept every newscast for the first time since 1979” in the February 1995 ratings sweeps, WCVB News Director Candy Altman noted.(94)

The arrival of WHDH’s noisy new tabloid style prompted WCVB to jazz up its graphics and to promote some stories it might not have emphasized otherwise, but, Altman says, her tabloid competitor has been forced to tone down its “gotcha” journalism.(95) “There is not a summary rejection of this [tabloid] model,” Altman concludes, noting that in some markets, tabloid newscasts are very successful. “But the stations that do this aren’t [usually] number one.”

As long as the more serious, high-quality newscast avoids becoming “stuck up,” Ellis and Altman believe it can beat the tabloids. If it is connected to citizens’ concerns, not just to official events, it has even stronger audience appeal over time.

Tabloid-style news isn’t a good long-term strategy mainly because entertainment niches already are too crowded with similar programs. Ellis notes, “There will always be somebody who can outleaze you. That’s your downfall.” In addition, tabloid formulas distance people from the news, just when making connections is what counts. In spite of temporary ratings boosts, tabloid-style newscasts usually don’t generate the kind of customer loyalty that matters in the niched media marketplace.

At WCCO in Minneapolis, for example, management found that tabloid coverage backfired because it weakened the station’s link with its audience. John Lansing, who was TV News Director at the time, recalls that WCCO’s tabloid news experimentation in May 1992 temporarily put it on top in its market, but it couldn’t keep meeting the expectations they had set. “Ratings actually dropped for newscasts that were missing a heavily advertised, sexy topic,” he says. WCCO had to be “even more outrageous the next time in order to preserve our numbers.” According to Lansing, this formula also made the station uncomfortable. They knew they were distracting their viewers with entertainment instead of connecting to them with real news. “While they were watching tabloid-style news, viewers actually distanced themselves from the ‘real’ community, the one in which they work and live and play every day. We realized we didn’t know our

community's needs, and, worse, we were contributing to the community's disengagement from itself.”(96)

WCCO convened town hall meetings and developed a different approach—critics called it a gimmick—that turned tabloid on its head. “Family-sensitive viewing,” as WCCO pioneered it, promised to reduce or eliminate violent, gory news videos and stories during family viewing times. WCCO now remains in first place in its market, without the tabloid teasers.(97)

Offering an alternative to the tabloid news on other channels also has worked for WBMG-TV in Birmingham, Alabama. “We started getting away from making sure that we had three ambulances on the nightly news,” says senior reporter Don Holfield. WBMG substituted news about local government and issues of concern to its audience. “The ratings—we’ve seen a slight increase, but the response is tremendous,” he said.(98)

Build It and They Will Come

Although new technologies break the journalist's monopoly on news, they also hold great promise for reviving the reliable journalist's true market value. The customer will seek out what she wants, when she wants it—if she knows it is there.

The key to the future is developing greater credibility for a “brand” of news, maintaining strict standards and accountability for the quality of that product, and then putting that quality content into all of the new formats. “My advice is to do one thing. Do it well,” says John Ellis. “Create a national brand in one medium, then leverage it into all the others,” agrees Turner Entertainment President Scott Sassa.(99)

Some of journalism's most respected leaders understand this well. “No longer will the viewers be guided by what they see, but solely by the reputation of the news broadcaster and the organization behind him. Brand names will count,” concludes Frank Stanton, who helped create the old “CBS News” that set the standard for broadcasting excellence.(100)

Katherine Graham, dean of American newspaper publishers, concurs. “No matter how information is transmitted—no matter what form it takes—quality and integrity will count for everything in the years to come, as they have in the past,” she says.(101) A *Wall Street Journal* house advertisement proclaims, “What matters most to our customers, and to us, is not the form of delivery, but the content being delivered. Exclusive content that is essential, not just of passing interest, to our customers. Proprietary content carrying brand names that signify premier quality.”(102)

Even though high-quality news programming has its off seasons, as CNN experienced between the Gulf War and the O.J. Simpson trial, having a reputation for being the source for news pays off when the next big news story hits. One can go tabloid overnight, but developing a reputation for quality is a long-term sell. “It's going to take you 7 to 10 years to do it,” Ellis cautions.

7. What the Public Misses: Success Stories

Most journalists would rather uncover something than cover it. Secret information takes on importance it may not deserve, simply because it has been secret. News often is colored by the framework established by a leaker whose personal agenda remains hidden.

The late I.F. Stone was admired for his exclusives, but few journalists today copy his methods. He found them by poring over government documents that were available to the public. “The White House press corps knows more than I do,” he once remarked. “The problem is, most of it isn't true.”

Journalists are constantly presented with story opportunities that they cannot use because they don't have a “peg.” Positive, openly available news is very hard to peg in today's news culture. As they search for

outrages to unveil, both the contemporary press and the radio talk show commentators often overlook much of what is actually going on in American politics today.

Genuine success stories may be harder to find than problems, but efforts to solve problems are evident everywhere. If talk radio is the “stealth medium,”⁽¹⁰³⁾ civic action is the “stealth politics” that remains an invisible but vital part of America at all levels.

“America has a secret political life,” observes David Mathews, President of the Kettering Foundation, which has helped to nurture civic involvement around the country. His foundation and others like the National Civic League, Amitai Etzioni’s Communitarian Network, the Civic Forum, the Ford Foundation’s Innovations project, and the Rockefeller Foundation’s The Common Enterprise initiative, offer numerous “success stories” that describe citizens working together to solve community problems, with some evidence of success. But most Americans, who take their view of American political life from downbeat national news and cynical campaign ads, do not see enough of these stories. They often are not aware that someone out there is making a difference. Even more remote is the possibility that they, too, might find a way to engage positively in finding resolutions to such problems as crime, unwed parenthood, pollution, welfare abuse, and corruption.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

Indeed, the traditional habits developed to foster journalistic “objectivity” prevent most journalists from providing information in their news stories about how citizens can help or even evaluate possible solutions to the problems being covered (with one exception: they often list relief agencies after a major disaster). When citizen successes are chronicled, they usually are individual “hero” stories, which sometimes hamper, rather than help, group efforts to overcome community divisions.

Some journalists, recognizing the corrosive effects of negativity on their communities—and their own relationships with their customers—have actively redirected their coverage. “ABC News” began a trend with the networks when it initiated a nightly “American Agenda” feature that often includes problem solvers and success stories; the *Akron Beacon Journal* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1994 for covering race in a way that engaged local citizens; and *Newsweek* devoted a special issue, May 29, 1995, to “Everyday Heroes.”⁽¹⁰⁵⁾

8. The Public Journalism Effort

Some news organizations have decided that more must be done. They are trying to change the basic journalism culture, converting cynicism into civic exploration. The *Wichita Eagle* and *Charlotte Observer* have been on the cutting edge of this more systematic change, drawing diverse citizens into public discussions about community life. This new approach, called “public” or “civic” journalism, covers the news from the citizen up, not from the expert down. It takes ordinary people seriously, addressing some of the issues they think are important, instead of relying solely on experts and insiders to set the agenda. Because it permits diverse viewpoints to be heard and respected, regardless of their dramatic value, it seems to go a long way toward breaking down the strategy, negativity, and insider barriers that now distance audiences from the news.

At the *Charlotte Observer* in 1993, for example, editors learned of police concerns that a race riot was brewing. White families who lived around the downtown Freedom Park were unhappy because minority youths were drag racing and cruising in and out of the park at night, creating disturbances. When the park was closed because of the tension, black citizens were outraged, claiming that the park belonged to everyone and minority youths had nowhere else to go.

Many local news organizations would see this as a great story, full of controversy and drama. However, instead of inflaming the situation by deliberately seeking the most incendiary quotes from polarized sides, the newspaper tried something different. It had experimented with public journalism during the 1992 election, convening town hall meetings and roaming throughout the community to obtain citizens’ views.

Using the same approach, *Observer* reporters sought thoughtful suggestions from all sides, including people in area neighborhoods, the youths whose behavior was under question, and the white families. A range of suggestions was published on the op-ed page, where these diverse views were presented with respect and authority. Citizens formed a commission to develop solutions for all sides: a small entry fee that would cut down on the cruising and an alternative site for drag racing. Although the situation hasn't been completely resolved yet, a racial standoff was averted through civic discourse. The *Charlotte Observer* helped the community begin to work through its problems, instead of aggravating them with sensationalized coverage.

Many public journalism projects involve partnerships among news organizations that normally compete with each other. For example, in summer 1994, the *Charlotte Observer* teamed up with competitors WSOC-TV, the local ABC affiliate, and two local radio stations, WPEG and WBAV, on the project "Taking Back our Neighborhoods / Carolina Crime Solutions." After using crime statistics to identify five neighborhoods that had been especially hard-hit, the news organizations held joint town hall meetings and produced special supplements and broadcasts, featuring residents' proposed solutions and reporting "success stories" about citizens fighting crime. The effort prompted a burst of civic activity: about 500 people volunteered to help out in targeted neighborhoods, 18 law firms offered to file pro bono public nuisance suits to close down crack houses, and a local bank donated \$50,000 to build a recreation center, according to Ed Fouhy, a former network news executive who now heads a center devoted to promoting civic journalism.(106)

A recent series in *The Dallas Morning News* entitled "The We Decade: Rebirth of Community," focused on a "new spirit of civic revival... bubbling to the surface in communities scattered across the United States," which is abetted in certain places by public journalism. Stories featured citizens taking community problems into their own hands and creating successful collaborations to attack problems of health, the environment, crime, and homelessness. The series, spearheaded by reporter Nancy Kruh, provided hotline numbers for citizens looking for help or hoping to get involved.

Editors and reporters from the *Virginian-Pilot* in Norfolk, Virginia, at a recent seminar described how they have become "public journalists" by changing the culture of journalism in their newsroom:(107)

- Reporters look not just for sources at the opposite extremes of an issue but for moderate views in the middle.
- Coverage is framed in terms of people's daily experiences, instead of treating people as incidental ornaments in stories about official politics.
- Reporters use people's emotions to show how they arrive at their decisions, instead of just as "color" to show how people feel about the issue.
- Articles describe the values people bring to an issue, including the gray areas and complexities, rather than simply describing the conflict.
- Citizens' knowledge is valued along with experts' knowledge.
- In writing about who, what, why, when, and where, they also try to explain to citizens why they should care.
- Reporters try to explore how people resolve issues, suggesting that solutions are possible and that readers may have a role to play.

Public journalists believe that the news is more than a spectator sport. "There's a difference between what the audience wants and what the public wants," observes New York University professor Jay Rosen, who has been working with news organizations to develop a form of public journalism that focuses on serious public issues raised by citizens in their local communities. Treating people as an audience makes them passive voyeurs, random visitors seeking entertainment. Rosen further explains, "Treating people as citizens is asking them about the problems in their lives, the things that concern them for the future, and trying to structure your coverage around that. Inevitably there are going to be conflicts between the entertainment function of the media and the news function, but public journalism is about trying to get the

news function right so it can compete better against entertainment and pleasure.”(108)

What news organizations don't do—if they're practicing good public journalism—is endorse specific solutions in their reporting. This would invalidate journalists' ability to monitor the community's public life. Nevertheless, public journalism is controversial among news professionals because some feel it weakens their hard-fought independence and objectivity. Ed Turner of CNN, Len Downie of *The Washington Post*, Max King of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and editors at *The New York Times* are among the most skeptical.

Ed Turner of CNN reacted negatively to a discussion about public journalism during the Program's conference "Changing the News": “I am not a historian. I am not a playwright. I am not a poet. I am not a psychiatrist. I can just barely manage to fill the newscasts that we have. And I am proud of that,” he said. “We are chroniclers of events. It is our responsibility, first and above all, to try to explain to our viewers what happened today, why it happened, and what maybe it will mean for tomorrow.”(109)

However, public journalism at its best improves the chronicling and enhances the watchdog role of the press. Many elements of public journalism are substantive improvements over current practice. In fact, the strategy, negativity, and tabloid formulas seem far more detrimental than public journalism to journalists' ability to explain, in Ed Turner's words, “what happened today, why it happened, and maybe what it will mean for tomorrow.”

Properly practiced, public journalism is simply good journalism without bad habits. “Have these [public] news outlets lost their objectivity? Is their agreement to try the techniques of civic journalism a thinly disguised form of community boosterism? No.... Their willingness to bring citizens into the process rather than keep them out is simply smart business as well as good journalism. They are finding that some of the 'ancient' and 'sacred' practices of journalism are simply habits best done without. Their core values—accuracy, seriousness, context, independence—remain. Giving the public a voice, they found, does not mean they lose theirs,” says Ed Fouhy.(110)

Practitioners of public journalism do not report yet any major increases in circulation or ratings, but they say they have developed a more loyal, more directly engaged audience, which is a real asset in the new niched marketplace. And they certainly have changed their role from discouraging public life to stirring it up.

9. Conclusions: The New Marketplace for News

Polls show that trust in the news has plummeted. Strategy and negativity formulas separate the news from its audiences, and tabloid content overwhelms verified, objective reporting with unfortunate effects on audience loyalty and American political life. Armed with so many alternatives, customers may opt for mere tabloid content, when entertainment is what they're looking for, or they will look for a more clearly-defined news product, if information is what they want.

- With ever-increasing ease, customers can bypass news packaged by professional news organizations, relying instead on bits and pieces from many sources assembled by their customized computer news “guide.”
- News content, as it is formulated today, is ill-suited to the niched marketplace, where specialization is an asset to brand strength.
- A more strategic approach is to clarify the kind of news being offered and to build trust by ensuring that the quality remains high.
- The objective is to create a trustworthy product that adds value to the raw data readily available in the new marketplace. Such a product would save the customer time by identifying only what is relevant and verified.
- As they lose some of their simultaneous mass audience, journalists can compensate by using new

- technologies to improve both the quality and the impact of their work.
- Because of their ease of compression, archiving, and accessing, new digital media technologies create a bottomless news hole. They also eliminate a fixed news deadline and create easy access to databases and an indefinite shelf life for news content. These changes allow journalists to offer more in-depth information, to craft the information more carefully, and to extend its reach. Stories that once sank into oblivion after they were broadcast or published can be recycled now into different formats and revisited by consumers when they are of interest to them.
- Addressing a “public”—rather than an “audience”—may be essential to the future of news. The smartest new journalism is both interactive and proactive. It acknowledges that if it is to be successful, news cannot count on captive or random audiences. News must be selected as an option. Instead of shutting ordinary citizens out of public debate, journalism can open doors for citizen engagement.

Specific Strategies for Reviving the News

- To establish a solid niche in the new media marketplace, a news organization might find some of the following strategies useful:
- Clarifying the journalist’s mission and standards so that journalism will have an identity of its own in a confusing, crowded marketplace. The serious news provider should specifically and openly disclose its attempts to provide objective, verified, and relevant news in lieu of “infotainment” or propaganda.

Such clarification might consist of a regularly published or broadcast statement of purpose with an accountability process for consumers. Additionally, one could offer better labeling for different kinds of news, putting “Tabloid Titillations” under one heading, “Congressional Action” under another, and so on. *The Washington Post’s* Digital Ink online news service relegates trivia and rumors to an “Is That True?” segment that will include entertaining rumors and gossip, preventing them from displacing the real news of the day.[\(111\)](#)

- Dropping self-defeating strategy, insider, negativity, and tabloid habits. News organizations can begin to build trusting, loyal relationships with their audiences by eliminating some existing bad habits.
- Instead of repeating cliches and myths, news organizations can try to determine whether assumptions are true or false, as ABC’s Aaron Brown did in his story on federal spending. When discussing public policy, news organizations can examine realistic options and consequences without falling prey to the cynical assumption that all motives and compromises are base. Finally, although “family-sensitive” news should not sanitize reality, it can eliminate gratuitous gore that has no real informational value.
- Opening up and connecting news with citizens. Interactivity means that the public will control much about the information it receives including when, where, and in what format it receives the news. People can second-guess journalists by reading original documents or by watching news conferences on their own. It would be wise in such an environment to make both standards of quality and the processes of creating the news as transparent as possible.
- When *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* Editor Bill Woo invited citizens into daily news planning meetings, he discovered that many brought negative stereotypes about the news business. “It’s good to have people in to see us as a quite ordinary collection of men and women figuring out what we’re going to do. It breaks down the notion that we are working in some kind of cabalistic fashion,” he says.[\(112\)](#)
- Inviting a limited number of citizens into news budget meetings; holding open houses to meet the public; and welcoming feedback and story input through email, pizza parties, town hall meetings, and other venues are all potential vehicles for launching or establishing a more comprehensive, connected news agenda.
- Making the news more of a public experience is good public relations, but it also is good for our

- political culture. In 1992, simply by running a daily page-one box that counted down the time left to register to vote, the *Charlotte Observer* helped create a noticeable surge in voter registrations, according to a local election official.
- Being accountable. Clarifying standards and opening doors to the public will exert strong pressure on other news organizations to be more formally accountable for the decisions they make. News organizations should expand legitimate coverage of the industry's lapses.
 - The journalist's comeback—that disgruntled consumers can “turn off the television” or stop buying the newspaper if they don't like what they see—is suicide in a buyer's market. Admiral Bobby Inman, burned by press coverage when he was a proposed nominee for Defense Secretary, suggested that when a columnist wrote anything about him, he should be allowed equal time directly adjacent to the column. Inman's scheme goes too far, but the news would gain credibility if people had better opportunities to respond to issues being discussed and to characterizations created by professional journalists. Letters to the editor are far briefer than the stories in question and aren't always published. Although journalists' errors in framing and judgment are common and may be even more damaging than some errors of fact, there are no established avenues for correcting them. “Talk back” features should be routinely available to aggrieved news subjects and other relevant parties. To demystify the process, journalists might produce occasional “inside the news” stories explaining how their understanding of an issue developed or how they came to frame a story in a certain way. *Washington Post* columnist David Broder is one of the few journalists who regularly writes a column confessing his bloopers for the previous year. This practice has hardly hurt his credibility; if anything, it has strengthened his reputation.
 - Being neutral and fair. In the new media, the market will be so saturated with diverse points of view that the voice of a professional, open-minded, objective observer will have added value amid the cacophony. Instead of avoiding discussions of values and meaning, however, journalists might be wise to increase the diversity of viewpoints and sources used to create the news. When appropriate, a journalist should disclose biases and make it clear that the professional goal is to hear from all sides. “Public” journalism is not “advocacy” journalism. Public journalism invites participation in public discourse and the news agenda and offers information about citizen involvement and potential solutions to problems. Journalists should protect their objective watchdog function to help enforce fairness and political accountability.

Lani Guinier provided this definition of fairness to the American Society of Newspaper Editors: “In my view, fairness means a balance of perspective, not the absence of a viewpoint. In my view, fairness means intellectual diversity, not merely racial diversity. In my view, fairness means inclusion, not exclusion, of all relevant viewpoints... fairness does not mean simply looking for extremes on either end of the spectrum in order to present a controversy, but being prepared to show the nuance, to show the complexity, to show the range of viewpoints that may enlighten, not just entertain.”(113)

- Getting it right, instead of worrying so much about getting it first. Journalists' obsession with scoops and deadlines often weakens the quality of the news; there is no commercial rationale for this in the new marketplace.(114) Developing a trustworthy product is the first priority for building the brand that draws the loyal niche audience.
- Balancing news about problems with news of problem solving. The news could create a more accurate picture of the day's events by balancing reports of problems and disasters with thoughtful accounts of problem solving. Journalists could make celebrities out of people whose actions deserve honor and public recognition instead of focusing so exclusively on Beauty (Nancy Kerrigan, Nicole Simpson, Julia Roberts) and the Beast (Tonya Harding, O.J.Simpson, Susan Smith, Jeffrey Dahmer, et al.).
- Teaching media literacy and citizenship in school. News organizations could help people understand how journalism should work, how they can evaluate the differences among media options, and how they as citizens can engage in public life. If they don't make these efforts, journalism could well end up as “roadkill on the information superhighway.”(115) *Wichita Eagle* Editor David Merritt recently lamented that journalism may lose its purpose. Practitioners would

do well to take his words to heart: “Rather than accurately diagnosing the problem and devising a useful remedy, journalists set out in frantic pursuit of the departing audiences. Concerned about our weakening commercial franchise, we ignored our truer and far more valuable franchise: the essential nexus between democracy and journalism, the vital connecting with community, and our role in promoting useful discourse rather than merely echoing dissent.”[\(116\)](#)

Endnotes

1 James W. Carey, “The Mass Media and Democracy,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 47, No. 1, Columbia University, 1993, p. 4.

2 I am indebted to journalist Cokie Roberts for this expression. “I think we, in the mainstream media, need to conduct what the nuns who raised me would call an examination of conscience about our role in all of this as well as the role of the alternative information sources and the role of the politicians. It seems to me we have an obligation to do a better job,” Cokie Roberts, The Fifth Annual Theodore H. White Lecture, November 17, 1994, Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University, 1994, p. 17.

3 This paper could not have been written without the support and assistance of Newton N. Minow, Director of The Annenberg Washington Program, Associate Director Yvonne Zecca, and Program staffers Lisa Spodak and Margaret Fleming Glennon. The author also owes many debts to journalists, political scientists, and free-thinkers, including Deborah Weisgall, John Clippinger, Jerome S. Rubin, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Katherine Fulton, Thomas Patterson, Marvin Kalb, Charles Firestone, Howard Kurtz, Ed Turner, Gary Griffith, Johanna Neuman, Sonia Jarvis, Ed Fouhy, Ed Miller, Bill Kovach, Jay Rosen, Stephanie Faul, Davis Merritt, Rich Oppel, Rick Thames, Everette Dennis, Adam Powell III, and Pat Butler.

4 Much of this description originated in a speech given on July 28, 1993, by Jerome S. Rubin, Director of the News in the Future Project at the MIT Media Lab. I have updated and embellished his vision to include the Internet and other expanded services.

5 “I have an account with Dow Jones that I use to log into the stock market. My account is embargoed for 15 minutes. If I want up-to-date quotes like my 86-year-old stockbroker uncle has, I have to pay a considerable premium to Dow Jones or to my uncle. This is the modern equivalent of the difference in cost between airmail and surface mail,” observes Nicholas Negroponte in *Being Digital* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995) p. 32.

6 Nicholas Donatiello, President of Odyssey Homefront, a San Francisco-based market research firm, concludes that home computer owners haven’t been convinced yet that online services provide a real value worth the investment. J.W. Huttig, “News Update,” *PC Today*, April 1995, p. 4.

7 Oldsmobile’s factory-optional Guidestar system uses military satellite tracking technology to enable customers who are lost to pinpoint their current locations and destinations. Delco Electronics, Pioneer, and Sony are working with systems imbedded in the car stereo. “Nearly all major autosound brands that market auto compact disc players are either offering audio navigation systems now or will be in the coming year,” claimed an advertising supplement in *The Washington Times* on March 16, 1995. “These voice recognition systems ‘listen’ as a driver spells the address and street name of a desired destination. It then confirms the city and address, calculates the route using CD-ROM mapping information, and provides synthesized voice directions every step of the way to the destination,” says the advertorial. These systems are projected to sell for \$500 to \$700 because they are easily integrated into the existing car stereo gear. “Onboard Navigation Systems Promise to Change the Way We Drive,” by Ron Cogan, *The Washington Times*, special advertorial supplement, March 16, 1995.

8 Jerome Rubin, Director of the “News in the Future” project at the M.I.T. Media Lab, predicts that the home media center’s giant screen will be a computer delivering television pictures. (From a telephone interview with the author, March 20, 1995.) Others suggest that for some time there will be multiple options, including cable television, broadcast television, and online services, coming separately into the home media center, where a switch will determine which will be shown on the giant screen.

9 Paul Farhi and Elizabeth Corcoran, “Interactive in Orlando,” *The Washington Post*, December 13, 1994. The Orlando project is the most comprehensive and high-profile attempt to offer interactive television in the United States since the pioneer Qube system was offered in Columbus, Ohio, from 1977 to 1984. Other

companies also are testing the market. Bell Atlantic Corp. is introducing a more limited interactive service through phone lines in parts of Northern Virginia, and U.S. West Inc. of Englewood, Colorado, has begun a similar test in Omaha, Nebraska. The Qube project may have helped Warner Communications win political points in the franchise wars of the late 70s, but it did little to convince the world that interactive TV was popular with consumers. A subsequent experiment by GTE in Cerritos, California, in 1989 also failed to produce much consumer demand. But many industry analysts believe that these projects were marketed ineptly and ahead of their time. Because technology has improved and video games and other interactive experiences are more common, consumers finally may be ready, they say, to pay for interactive television and video on demand. While Time-Warner and others are counting on monthly fees, advertising, and paid customer transactions to make their systems viable, another economic model will be tested in Montreal starting in fall 1995. Le Groupe Videotron, a Montreal-based cable television and broadcasting firm, expects to offer a new interactive multimedia system free of charge to Chicoutimi, Quebec, reaching 80 percent of the households across Quebec by 2002. Le Groupe Videotron Chairman Andre Chagnon believes that service providers will subsidize the cost of the system because it offers marketing access to most of the area's population and provides precise feedback on what they want to buy. Jim McElgunn, "TV Street," *Digital Marketing* (MacLean Hunter Publishing Limited, 1994).

10 As quoted by Annenberg Visiting Fellow Johanna Neuman in *Lights, Camera, War* (to be published by St. Martin's Press in January 1996), galleys, p. 53.

11 The poll, conducted on June 1-3, 1993, found respondents 18 to 29 years old most interested in interactive television. This is the audience group that newspapers and network news have been having the most trouble attracting. John Tierney, "Will They Sit by the Set, or Ride a Data Highway?" *The New York Times*, June 20, 1993.

12 The media world anticipates the arrival of Microsoft's Windows '95, which will include an easy way for consumers to access the Internet. Also jumping into the online access business to compete with existing Prodigy, America Online, CompuServe, and others is AT&T. Revenue streams will include a basic subscription fee of about \$10 a month, fees for extended use, and advertising. In addition to having to provide the technology and support, they will have to pay content providers like *The New York Times* a share of the subscriber fees.

13 Samuel C. Florman, "He Has Seen the Future and It Works," *New York Times Book Review*, February 5, 1995, reviewing Negroponte's *Being Digital*.

14 Although one point of this paper is that definitions have become blurred, the words "news" and "journalism" refer in this discussion to professional American-style journalism that attempts to present objectively to the public facts that are new, verified, and relevant. "Journalists" are people in all print, electronic, and multimedia who gather, create, and convey the news content. Not generally included in these terms are docudramas, editorials, advertisements, opinion columnists, talk show pundits, or comedians.

15 See Paul Sperry, "A Changing Information Market," *International Business Daily*, March 27, 1995. In addition, a new magazine devoted to talk radio claims that the number of talk radio stations has quadrupled in 10 years. Of these radio stations, 70 percent of the estimated 8,000 hosts identify themselves as "conservatives" according to Marvin Kalb, "Telling the News from the Pseudo-News," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 2, 1994. Another study by the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press says that about 4 in 10 Americans listen to talk radio on a relatively frequent basis.

16 Howard Kurtz, "O.J. Squeezes the News," *The Washington Post*, April 6, 1995, citing an April 6, 1995, Times Mirror Center poll that said that nearly one in four Americans regularly watched the O.J. Simpson trial.

17 See Paul Farhi, "Advertisers, Suitors Zoom in on TV Networks," *The Washington Post*, October 31, 1994. See also Johanna Neuman, *Lights, Camera, War*, on the ways in which existing media technologies have endured as new ones have emerged.

18 See Don Peppers and Martha Rogers, *The One to One Future* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), p. 15.

19 Jean Gaddy Wilson, "For a New Nation, a New Press," *Nieman Reports*, Vol. 46, No. 1, Spring 1992, p. 17.

20 Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone," *The Journal of Democracy*, January 1995, pp. 65-78.

21 An old-fashioned partisan story could run only in one party's papers; an "objective" wire story could run

in all papers, doubling its market reach. See Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

22 Howard Kurtz, *Media Circus* (New York: Times Books, 1993), p. 315.

23 "Did O.J. Do It? Network News Viewing and Newspaper Reading Off," Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press, April 6, 1995.

24 CBS News executive Howard Stringer moved to a new job creating programming for Bell Atlantic, Nynex, and Pacific Telephone. In addition, Oracle Corporation, a well-known software company, has been talking with telephone, computer, and news companies about creating a nationwide digital video service that would allow personal computer users to create their own customized video newscasts or conduct online research from video news archives. See John Markoff, "Oracle in Talks to Offer Video News Service," *The New York Times*, March 15, 1995, p. D1.

25 A megabillion-dollar battle is raging to establish strategic advantage in the converging media industry by designing and marketing the best navigator, interface, or "intelligent agent" to access communications services. "The fact that *TV Guide* has been known to make larger profits than all four networks combined suggests that the value of information about information can be greater than the information itself," observes Nicholas Negroponte in *Being Digital*, p. 154.

26 Don Hewitt, the founder and Executive Producer of "Sixty Minutes," angrily recounted at a Columbia Journalism Forum on November 28, 1994, how a CBS executive had called to chew out the producers of "48 Hours" because they had done a segment on how the U.S. troops were doing in Haiti instead of a more sensational piece on child abuse. As Hewitt told it, the executive barked "How dare you! The people don't want Haiti. They want child molestation."

27 "Welcome to Cyberspace," *Time*, Spring 1995 Special Issue, p. 60.

28 As Negroponte observes, once the value of the content is established, "the added value of a distributor is less and less in a digital world." *Being Digital*, p. 84.

29 The nation's largest cable operator, TCI, bought a large chunk of MacNeil-Lehrer Productions, which makes documentaries and feature television programs. (The "NewsHour" was not part of the deal.)

30 Remarks by Donald Kellerman, Times Mirror Center Senior Fellow, during the conference "Changing the News," at The Annenberg Washington Program, February 9, 1995, transcript, p. 164.

31 "Great confidence" in doctors dropped from 71 to 53 percent. From 1991 to 1994, great confidence in the federal government slid from 18 to 9 percent, in state government from 12 to 8 percent, in local government from 15 to 13 percent. *The Yankelovich Monitor*, a yearly tracking study, is a service of Yankelovich Partners, Inc.

32 Kellerman, "Changing the News."

33 Michael Crichton, "The Mediasaurus," *Wired*, October 1993.

34 *Citizens and Politics: A View from Main Street America*, The Kettering Foundation, 1991, pp. 23, v-vi.

35 Carey, "The Mass Media and Democracy."

36 Thomas Patterson, *Out of Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p. 68-69.

37 Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph N. Cappella, "Newspaper and Television Coverage of the Health Care Reform Debate," Annenberg Public Policy Center, August 12, 1994. The authors analyzed CBS, NBC, ABC, CNN, "The MacNeil Lehrer NewsHour," and "Nightline" as well as *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Philadelphia Daily News*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *Philadelphia Tribune*, from January 16 to July 25, 1994.

38 E.J. Dionne argues that Americans could find common ground on most issues if the politicians (and the press) would stop polarizing the debate. See E.J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991).

39 Sometimes gory pictures on the television news can serve an important public purpose. In New Mexico, the video from a terrible car accident led to stricter drunk driving laws.

40 Historians are quick to point out that American politics have always been nasty. The first real presidential contest in American history was, as Paul F. Boller Jr. recounts, full of personal attacks: "The Federalists called Jefferson an atheist, anarchist, demagogue, coward, mountebank, trickster and Franco-maniac, and said his followers were 'cut-throats who walk in rags and sleep amidst filth and vermin.'" Paul F. Boller, *Presidential Campaigns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 8.

41 Larry Grossman, quoted in *Nieman Reports*, Vol. 48, No. 2, Summer 1994, p. 53.

42 For discussions of the press's negativity bias, see Thomas Patterson's *Out of Order* and Kathleen Hall Jamieson's *Dirty Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

43 See Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *Congress, The Press and the Public* (Washington, D.C.: The American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution, 1994).

44 "In the 1960s, less than a third of the media's evaluative references to political leaders were unfavorable. In the 1980s, nearly two-thirds were." Thomas Patterson, "Trust Politicians, Not the Press," *The New York Times*, op-ed page, December 15, 1993.

45 From an interview with the author, October 19, 1994.

46 Carey, "The Mass Media and Democracy."

47 Paul Starobin, "A Generation of Vipers," *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April 1995, p. 29.

48 This author, formerly a member of the piranha press corps, learned firsthand how stupid a feeding frenzy can be when, as a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, she covered vice presidential candidate Dan Quayle in Huntington, Indiana, just after George Bush picked him as his running mate in 1988. The public was so outraged at what seemed to be press harassment of the candidate over his decision not to serve in Vietnam that the press became the issue, rather than the failure to serve. Although this author never wrote an article about the event because it occurred after her newspaper's deadline, she was particularly singled out by press critics for appearing to hound the candidate unfairly in pursuing the story. See Larry Sabato, *Feeding Frenzy* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

49 Starobin, "A Generation of Vipers."

50 See, for example, Howard Kurtz, *Media Circus*.

51 Adam Gopnik, "Read All About It," *The New Yorker*, December 12, 1994.

52 Jamieson, quoted in William Glaberson, "The New Press Criticism: News as the Enemy of Hope," *The New York Times*, "Week in Review," October 9, 1994.

53 No one really knows the size of Limbaugh's radio and television audiences. For an analysis of the estimate of 20 million Limbaugh radio listeners each week, see Philip Sieb, *Rush Hour* (Fort Worth, TX: The Summit Group), pp. 2, 35.

54 Jamieson discussed her study on the misinformation levels of radio talk show listeners at the Theodore White Lecture with Cokie Roberts, published by the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, 1994, p. 40.

55 "The next great American scandal will involve not politicians, not corporate executives, but journalists," predicts James K. Glassman, former editor of *The New Republic*, in an op-ed piece, March 28, 1995, in *The Washington Post*. Describing the activities of financial columnist James C. Cramer, Glassman observes that "Many top journalists are becoming entangled in conflicts of interest because they're trying to do two irreconcilable things at once—report fairly and give expensive speeches to interest groups with a stake in gaining favorable coverage."

56 For a more detailed discussion of how journalism affects politics, see Ellen Hume, "The News Media and the National Interest," *The Morality of the Mass Media* (Dallas, TX: University of Texas at Dallas, 1993).

57 Johanna Neuman's book *Lights, Camera, War* argues convincingly that the media set the agenda only when politicians fail to offer their own strong leadership on the issue in question. Journalists are caught in a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" dilemma when they hold information they know could affect policy dramatically. When *The Washington Post* had information about Senator Packwood's alleged sexual harassment of women staffers, they held it until after Packwood's election in order to be sure it was thoroughly checked and handled responsibly. Packwood's critics cried foul. But just a few years earlier, when *Post* reporter Ken Ringle had a story about an aide to then Speaker Jim Wright who had brutally attacked a woman and gone to jail for the crime, the timing of the story's publication was interpreted as another deliberate nail in the coffin of Wright's troubled speakership. Ringle insists that the timing of the story was determined by meticulous fact-checking and other internal publication requirements, not by the political events it would influence.

58 Because logistics do not allow all news organizations to cover the president's every move, several reporters and camera people are designated to cover such events on a rotating basis and are obligated to provide to all the others a comprehensive pool report. Non-pool reporters are barred from covering the

event themselves but are assured they will be told about everything that happened.

59 "While I knew he had made the promise several times during the campaign, this was the first time that Clinton had made the pledge while I was covering him," Friedman explained to William Gregory White, a Harvard graduate student who wrote a paper about the episode for the author's seminar in May 1993. "I felt that this was particularly newsworthy given that Clinton was now making the pledge to lift the ban for the first time as president-elect," Friedman told White.

60 "Covering the Presidential Primaries," *The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center*, June 1992, p. 75.

61 Newton N. Minow, "How Vast the Wasteland Now?" Speech delivered to the Gannett Foundation Media Center, May 9, 1991.

62 "CBS Evening News," once the pinnacle of national broadcasting, has had the most noticeable slide downhill. Connie Chung co-anchored the "CBS Evening News" for almost two weeks from Portland, Oregon, in order to track down Tonya Harding and persuade her to talk on Chung's magazine show, "Eye to Eye." During that entire period, the known facts in the Harding story did not change enough to warrant the on-location spotlight. See Tom Rosensteil, *The Beat Goes On* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1994), p. 37.

63 Paul Klite presented his data from the study, "A Day in the Life of Local TV News in America," at the conference "Changing the News," at The Annenberg Washington Program, February 9, 1995.

64 While an organization may not represent the majority's values and may seem to some self-indulgent in its mission, the author believes that there nonetheless is something virtuous about seeking a better life for the community that should be distinguished from simply seeking private, personal gain.

65 David S. Broder, "The Citizenship Movement," *The Washington Post*, November 27, 1994.

66 Theodore White Lecture with Cokie Roberts, p. 17.

67 John Carmody, "The TV Column," *The Washington Post*, June 28, 1995, p. C4.

68 Howard Kurtz, "Television Has Trouble Bringing Congress's Revolution Into Focus," *The Washington Post*, January 24, 1995, p. 1.

69 The Chung exchange, which aired on January 4, 1995, the day Newt Gingrich became Speaker of the House, wasn't even conducted that day—it was taped on December 20 for the January 5 "Eye to Eye With Connie Chung" program. Holding the interview until the day Gingrich became speaker made it appear that CBS was deliberately trying to spoil Gingrich's big day. If it was genuinely news, why didn't they run it the day it was done? If it wasn't news, why did they put it on the "CBS Evening News"? CBS sources insist that all they were thinking about was getting more attention (and audiences) for Chung's "Eye to Eye" broadcast. Regardless of the motivation, the choice of running this item when they did was spectacularly inappropriate. It backfired. CBS subsequently seemed to be trying to make it up to Gingrich—carrying his "100 Days" speech live and running a generally sympathetic Connie Chung interview with him afterward. The episode also was cited when Chung was dropped from her CBS job a few months later.

70 Many journalists argue that because politicians and the public are at least as much to blame (or more so) for today's troubling political culture, there is nothing much to be done about it. However, Sissela Bok offers a powerful argument to the contrary in her paper "School for Scandal" (Joan Shorenstein Barone center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University, April 1990, pp. 1-2). She argues that if journalists work differently, this can make a positive difference in our political culture: Just when peoples the world over look to our democratic traditions for guidance in how to safeguard fundamental rights, many in our own country feel trapped in a vicious circle of manipulative and trivializing political discourse. In any vicious circle, a number of factors contribute to a downward spiraling.... The way to begin to break out of such vicious circles is to bring about forceful change at as many points as possible of their downward spiraling. As social theorists have argued, vicious circles are dynamic systems, not static ones; by changing the direction and momentum of any one factor, all the others will be affected.

71 Nicholas Donatiello, discussion at The Annenberg Washington Program, May 18, 1994.

72 Tierney, "Will They Sit by the Set, or Ride a Data Highway?"

73 See Mark Thalheimer, "High-Tech News or Just Shovelware?" *Media Studies Journal*, Winter 1994.

74 Mitch Kapor, speaking at the Digital World conference, June 1993, Los Angeles.

75 As quoted in *Nieman Reports*, Vol. 48, No. 2, Summer 1994, p. 33.

76 One says this with some trepidation because these claims have been made as each new communications

technology has been introduced, from telegraph and telephone to fax, radio, and satellite television. As Johanna Neuman chronicles in *Lights, Camera, War*: “Whenever a new communication technology arrived on the scene, diplomats complained about shortened time for decisions; journalists boasted of new influence, the public noticed its world was shrinking.... Each new media technology dislodged the middleman, bringing the audience closer to the stage, offering the potential for wider circulation of information” (Galleys, Preface, p. 1).

77 An enterprise news story is a journalistic term for a story that is not a breaking story but one that a reporter develops through personal enterprise.

78 Entrepreneurial news organizations like CONUS in Washington offer custom news coverage for paying clients. They will cover an event as if it were genuine “news” and provide a tape to the client. The footage does not appear on any newscast, but the client has a journalistically framed video of the event to use as he wishes.

79 Journalism and the public would be worse off if journalists replaced their negativity addiction with the opposite extreme—too many light features—because advertisers don’t like bad news. Many media advertisers now are willing to take the luck of the draw on what news will run beside their ad because they want the “halo effect” of credibility that they believe they get from a neutral newspaper or newscast. Understandably, advertisers now are looking for clever ways to hook customers in the online environment, where “netiquette” currently resists blatant salesmanship. Advertorials, long television ads that seem like magazine programs and news, are one way they can get the message across to a niched audience.

80 The pictures from around the world remind us of our own distinct cultures, of who we are in contrast to what we see. “In the very act of drawing people closer together, modern communications destroy the cultural isolation in which misunderstanding ferments, but, often at the same time, intensify perceptions of difference that increase social antagonisms and promote social fragmentation,” concludes former newspaper editor Michael O’Neill in *The Roar of the Crowd* (New York: Times Books, 1994), p. 68.

81 New technologies are enabling them to “address” their news on cable to different regions. Thus Channel 8’s local all-news programming in the Washington, D.C., area provides different stories simultaneously to Washington, Maryland, and Virginia.

82 Howard Kurtz, *Media Circus*, p. 368.

83 Gary Griffith, “New Age Newsgathering,” *The RTNDA Communicator*, Vol. 10, October 1994, pp. 10-13. CD-ROM, which has not proved to be a good medium for fast-changing news delivery, nevertheless is an ideal technology for storing and easily accessing past stories and information. Still photographs are staging a big comeback in multimedia CD-ROMs.

84 Beverly Kees and Bill Phillips, *Nothing Sacred: Journalism, Politics and Public Trust in a Tell-All Age*, Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, Vanderbilt University, p. 53.

85 From Ed Fouhy, producer of the presidential debates for the Bipartisan Commission on Presidential Debates and Director of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism.

86 Lester Crystal, Executive Producer of the “MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour,” predicts that these sources will “hold the bulk of the news and information audience five years from now.” TCI, the huge cable operator, wanted the cachet that such “serious” news purveyors bring. So it bought a large interest in MacNeil Lehrer Productions, which makes spin-off educational programs featuring Robert MacNeil and Jim Lehrer. (From a speech given at “Live and Learn Seminar Day,” sponsored by the Northwestern University Alumni Association and held at the Norris University Center on Northwestern’s Evanston Campus, April 16, 1994.)
87 Philip Moeller, “The Age of Convergence,” *American Journalism Review*, January/February 1994, p. 24.

88 W. Russell Neuman, Marion R. Just, and Ann N. Crigler, *Common Knowledge* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 111.

89 Presentation at the conference “Changing the News,” at The Annenberg Washington Program, February 9, 1995.

90 “Library circulation of juvenile books increased 33 percent from 1980 to 1987. Sales of juvenile books jumped 250 percent from 1972 to 1986. People in their teens and twenties comprise a major portion of the readership of such magazines as *Rolling Stone*, *Mademoiselle*, and *GQ*. They are simply less interested in what newspapers have to offer,” says Howard Kurtz in *Reinventing the Newspaper* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund Press, 1993), p. 63.

91 The poll is cited in John Maxwell Hamilton, "In Defense of Electronic Liberties," *Media Studies Journal*, The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, Fall 1991, p. 37.

92 Ibid.

93 David Bartlett, President of the Radio and Television News Directors Association, cautions that there is no definitive research about which news organizations are tabloid and which are not. Furthermore, some stations lead in certain newscasts while different stations lead at other times of the day. But he concurs with Ellis's observation that the less sensationalized, more serious news generally rises to the top in most television markets. Bartlett said in a June 20, 1995, interview with the author that even in Miami, the television station that has set the style nationally for "Miami-style" tabloid news, WSDN, is not at the top of its market; the least tabloid-like news, on WLG, is generally more popular with audiences. The interview with media business consultant John Ellis was conducted by the author on March 15, 1995. Ellis has worked as a consultant for Roger Ailes, President of CNBC, and for General Electric, NBC, and other media companies.

94 While the tabloid rival rose from third to second place, the reason was complicated; it had to do with its strong "ER" program lead-in and a shakeup in network affiliations as well as its tabloid appeal.

95 A WHDH reporter who posed as a crime suspect's friend to get an interview with the suspect's father was let go after the duplicity caused an uproar.

96 John Lansing, "The News is News, Right? Wrong!" *The Poynter Report*, The Poynter Institute, Fall 1994, pp. 6-9.

97 While WCCO remains in first place in Minneapolis, other stations that have tried "family-sensitive" programming haven't won the ratings boosts they had hoped for. One reason may be that some are missing the point. Violence should not be swept under the rug any more than it should be gratuitous. It should be covered in a way that provides meaning and context for viewers.

98 Beverly Kees and Bill Phillips, *Nothing Sacred: Journalism, Politics and Public Trust in a Tell-All Age*, p. 82.

99 This phrase was a subhead summarizing Sassa's views in David Kline, "Savvy Sassa," *Wired*, March 1995, pp. 112-15.

100 Frank Stanton made these remarks at a March 8, 1995, dinner given by the Radio Television News Directors Foundation in Washington, D.C., which honored retired CBS anchor Walter Cronkite.

101 Katherine Graham, Chairman of The Washington Post Company, delivered these remarks in an April 7, 1993, speech entitled "The Future of News in an Interactive Age."

102 "Delivery or Content," *Wall Street Journal* advertisement, January 16, 1995, p. B6B.

103 See Michael McKeon, "Fragmenting of News," *The Washington Post*, May 11, 1994.

104 As described in David Mathews' unpublished speech, "America's Secret Political Life II," February 1995. See also *Communications as Engagement*, a survey by Millennium Communications for The Rockefeller Foundation's "The Common Enterprise" initiative, 1995.

105 At Newhouse News Service in Washington, D.C., Constance Casey has been assigned to a new "good works" beat, looking into foundations, community service organizations, and other institutions trying to solve public problems. Yet the horrible child abuse or foreign war story in the local newspapers or on CNN often is paired with a light feature rather than a serious positive story. Animals at the zoo, fashion shows, and other frivolities may be fun, but they do not compare to the serious news that could be offered about people like Robert DeSena, who is cutting gang violence in New York City high schools through theater projects, or Habitat for Humanity, which brings community volunteers together to build homes for poor people. What journalist was looking at the United Way, which does innumerable good works across America, until its leader got into trouble?

106 Ed Fouhy, "The Dawn of Public Journalism," *The National Civic Review*, Summer-Fall 1994, p. 263.

107 "Reporting on Public Life at the Virginian-Pilot," prepared for the Project on Public Life and the Press, Fall Seminar, November 10-12, 1994, American Press Institute, Reston, Virginia.

108 Jay Rosen made his comments during an interview on CNN's "Reliable Sources," broadcast on March 19, 1995.

109 Ed Turner's remarks were made during the conference "Changing the News," at The Annenberg Washington Program, February 9, 1995.

110 Ed Fouhy, "The Dawn of Public Journalism," p. 262.

111 This would have been a perfect place for Connie Chung's infamous interview with Mrs. Gingrich, in which the speaker's mother called the First Lady a "bitch."

112 Bill Woo was interviewed by Lisa Spodak of The Annenberg Washington Program on January 5, 1995.

113 Kees and Phillips, *Nothing Sacred: Journalism, Politics and Public Trust in a Tell-All Age*, p. 89.

114 With the exception, to be sure, of some time-sensitive news niches such as financial data.

115 This was the title used for the Key West Literary Seminar on journalism in January 1995.

116 Davis "Buzz" Merritt, *Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News is Not Enough* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc, 1995).