

are doing in our name, about the consequences of the public choices we make.

Journalism has traditionally been paid for by newspapers that have either had their own news bureaus around the world or subscribed to and supported a news service like the AP. The money they paid for news-gathering came from advertisers who paid their rates because they had no other way to reach their markets. Now that those advertisers have multiple, cheap outlets in which to market their wares, newspapers, and thus journalism, are in danger. But journalism today is also in danger from forces within. As we have seen, the mainstream media, the conventional media of which print has always been the backbone, are concentrated in corporate ownership and driven by their quest for advertising dollars to simplify and “dummy down” the news, often becoming uncomfortably close to their sources in the process. The quality of journalism has been threatened by more than the decline of the print media.

Shirky argues that we are in the midst of a revolution, “where the old stuff gets broken faster than the new stuff is put in its place,”<sup>112</sup> so we don’t know what journalism will look like in a new, post-newspaper age. But Shirky thinks it’s a mistake to assume that we aren’t transitioning to such an age, that those who proclaim loudly that the old newspaper model can be saved are whistling past the graveyard, refusing to acknowledge that printing presses are costly to run and that the model of newspaper-centered news is obsolete in a world where the Internet makes it impossible for them to charge for or to retain control over the work they do.

And as we saw, some observers believe that the revolution is bringing positive changes. Media critic Dan Gillmor argues that a powerful, citizen-driven journalism is taking the place of a complacent, ratings-driven corporate journalism, that information is gathered and disseminated in real time with multiple researchers on the job to correct and assist each other, a sort of Wikipedia journalism, perhaps.<sup>113</sup> This is the model, for instance, of Andrew Sullivan, who “live blogged” the Iranian uprising in 2009, passing on to his readers information tweeted to him from the front lines, information that could not have been easily gathered even with a news bureau in Tehran. Sullivan would agree with Gillmor, arguing that blogging is “the first journalistic model that actually harnesses rather than exploits the true democratic nature of the web.”<sup>114</sup>

For Sullivan, the demise of the old media and the rise of the new is a positive development, making him more hopeful for democracy, not less. He says,

But what distinguishes the best of the new media is what could still be recaptured by the old: the mischievous spirit of journalism and free, unfettered inquiry. Journalism has gotten too pompous, too affluent, too self-loving, and too entwined with the establishment of both wings of American politics to be what we need it to be.

We need it to be fearless and obnoxious, out of a conviction that more speech, however much vulgarity and nonsense it creates, is always better than less speech. In America, this is a liberal spirit in the grandest sense of that word—but also a conservative one, since retaining that rebelliousness is tending to an ancient American tradition, from the Founders onward.<sup>115</sup>

Shirky is optimistic as well:

For the next few decades, journalism will be made up of overlapping special cases. Many of these models will rely on amateurs as researchers and writers. Many of these models will rely on sponsorship or grants or endowments instead of revenues. Many of these models will rely on excitable 14 year olds distributing the results. Many of these models will fail. No one experiment is going to replace what we are now losing with the demise of news on paper, but over time, the collection of new experiments that do might give us the journalism we need.<sup>116</sup>

And then again, they may not—Shirky’s optimism does not seem misplaced in light of the work of writers such as Gillmor and Sullivan, but the truth is that what’s at stake in the end of the newspaper model may be the very information we need to make the intelligent decisions that allow democracy to thrive. The jury is out on this one, but the open, innovative nature of the medium allows each of us to engage in the experimentation and work that might bring the answers. The late media critic Marshall McLuhan wrote in the 1960s that “the medium is the message.” In the Internet age, that has the potential to be true as never before.