

The Evolution of Journalism

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Abstract

Journalism is undergoing what many in the industry describe as a crisis (McChesney, 2011; McNair, 2009; Harrington, 2009; Flew & Wilson, 2010; McNair, 2011) with the online environment described as the most wide reaching disruption journalism has had to contend with (Paul, 2008: ix). This article will use a creativity model to attempt to explain the changes occurring in print journalism and the challenges presented by newer forms and platforms of journalism. The research model has been examined and verified in print journalism via a doctoral research project and this article will briefly explore the model in current and future journalism practises.

The Evolution of Journalism

The debate raging in journalism regarding traditional methods and newer news production methods and distribution platforms is another chapter in a continuing evolution. The following quote from David Cole illustrates how the perceived dangers to journalism are not a new concept:

... the present period is the most crucial in the ever-changing history of newspapers and magazines. The problems seem more complex than previously, the dangers graver, and the demands made on every section within the industry more exacting (1963: 15).

Cole's comment could well describe current discussions inside journalism with claims made that online technology and media platforms are eroding journalistic values. Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and Damon state that journalism is a profession in crisis:

... many practitioners feel that it is difficult to honor the precepts of the domain, their field is wracked by tension, the stakeholders are threatening the core values and the principal roles, and the future may well hold even worse tidings (2001: 35).

However, by applying current thinking from creativity research to the domain of journalism, it is possible to explain these changes and recognise that journalism is undergoing one phase in a continuing evolution and this evolution is necessary for journalism to continue to have relevance. This article is based on information gathered as part of a doctoral thesis that examined the creative practices of print journalists in Australia. The doctoral research applied the systems model of creativity, a model that proposes that an individual, as active agent, interacts with social and cultural structures in order to produce a creative contribution, to print journalism. One of the outcomes of the research was a speculation about

the future of journalism with the conclusion that there are two ways the domain of journalism can develop: the current forms of print and broadcast will adapt to include the newer technologies, including social media (SM) tools such as Twitter and Facebook, or a new form will emerge and take its place in the culture alongside print and broadcast journalism.

Creativity researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi developed a systems model of creativity to explain how a producer, as active agent, created their work. A creative outcome occurs when an individual interacts with a dynamic system: a domain of knowledge (cultural structure), a field of experts who understand that knowledge (social structure) and the individual themselves, with their personal attributes and background.

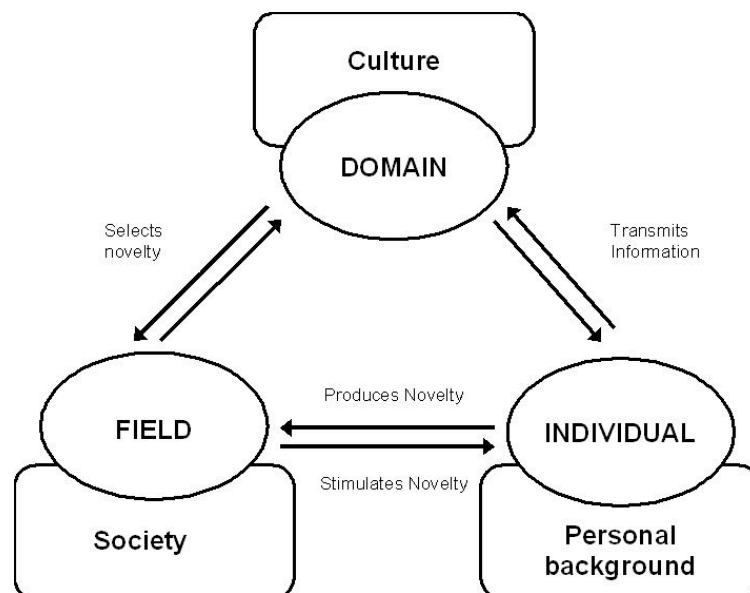


Figure 1 - Csikszentmihalyi's systems model of creativity (2003: 315).

An individual learns the rules, conventions, techniques, guides and procedures of the domain, in this instance the domain of print journalism, produces a variation, in print journalism this variation would be, for example, an article or a procedure, and presents the variation to the field, which verifies that the variation is novel and appropriate, a creative outcome. This creative outcome is then included in the domain for other individuals in the system to use in their own production process. The relevance of the systems model to this article is that the domain, as the structure that includes the knowledge a journalist needs

to learn, is in a constant state of change. Whether or not the field, as the social structure that judges which new products, processes and ideas are appropriate for inclusion in the domain, accepts these changes to the structures of the domain will determine the future of print journalism and its continuing relevance. Changes within spheres of cultural production are a natural progression of a dynamic system in action and a domain cannot remain stagnant or it risks becoming less relevant within the culture.

Csikszentmihalyi states that 'some of the most creative breakthroughs occur when an idea that works well in one domain gets grafted to another and revitalises it' (1997: 88) and he uses physics in the late nineteenth century as an example of a domain that was stagnant until quantum theory revitalised it (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003: 320). With this in mind, it can be argued that the grafting of ideas from the domain of information communication technology (ICT), for example the Internet and the different opportunities it offers, has led to a revitalisation, to use Csikszentmihalyi's term, of journalism. These newer ideas have meant that some practices that are traditionally considered to be part of the broadcast journalism domain, such as video and audio, are now employed as part of a print journalist's work practices. Furthermore, it can be shown that the grafting of elements from SM platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook and blogging, to the system of journalism is also contributing to its ongoing evolution.

It will be demonstrated here that the systems model can explain the changes occurring in journalism and the challenges presented by newer forms and platforms of journalism and the changes can be managed in two ways: the field can accept these changes and include them as part of the existing domain, as noted previously, or a new domain, with its own rules and procedures and its own practitioners and field, will form. Gardner et al. state that new domains form when rules and procedures become specialised and can be passed on to new practitioners (2001: 22). Mark Deuze claims that this is happening with online journalism:

The various online journalists interviewed and observed by the authors in this book are developing their own rituals, best

practices, skillsets and norms regarding the characteristics of their medium, particularly when it comes to addressing the online user (2008: 208).

Deuze is seemingly proposing that online journalism will become its own sphere of production. Hermida argues in a similar way using Twitter (what he calls microblogging) as an example:

...it should also be considered a system of communication with its own media logic, shapes and structures ... the institutionally structured features of micro-blogging are creating new forms of journalism, representing one of the ways in which the Internet is influencing journalism practices and, furthermore, changing how journalism itself is defined (2010: 300).

On the other hand, Stephen Quinn proposes that current forms of journalism will adapt to an online platform. Quinn argues that 'mediamorphosis' (2009: 82), where mainstream media creates reporting styles to accommodate new media forms, will likely occur: 'As mainstream media embrace audience-generated content, they are changing their approach to news and *modifying their structures and formats*' (Quinn & Quinn-Allan, 2009: 77, my emphasis). The systems model would explain this by declaring that the field is accepting new procedures into the domain, which is expanding to accommodate the new practices, thus providing individuals with new structures to learn to produce novel and acceptable work. This reasoning has implications for how journalists practice.

The information for this paper is based on findings from a research project that examined the creative practices of print journalists in Australia. The ethnographic study used information from semi-structured interviews conducted with thirty-six journalists, editors, sub-editors and cadets from Australian newspapers and magazines as well as from the observation of three Australian newsrooms. Document and artefact analysis added further depth to the data collection. The project began early in 2006 and by the time of its

conclusion in 2011, the print journalism industry in Australia had changed dramatically. Print journalists now use a number of media platforms to present news to their audience and employ digital tools in the production and dissemination of their work. When the project commenced in 2006, social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, were not yet used as journalistic tools and blogging as a source of news was still in its early stages (Australian Press Council, 2006b: par. 62). Online journalism was not considered a major threat to traditional journalism, although regulatory bodies such as the Australian Press Council recognised that news publications were attempting to transform their business to adapt to an online environment (2006a: par. 7). Since 2006, the journalism landscape has changed in the West. Most Western news publications now have a highly interactive online presence and many journalists use social media as a regular news gathering and dissemination tool to assist them in their work practices. Individual journalists interact with their audience via blogs and Twitter, and participatory, or citizen, journalism gives the audience a voice in the media. There are dedicated online news publications in Australia, such as the Fairfax publications *Brisbane Times* and *WA Today* and the latest announcement *The Guardian* and independent publications, including *Crikey.com*, *New Matilda* and *The Global Mail*. Blogging, Facebook and YouTube are increasingly important. The use of Twitter is no longer abnormal. As an example, during the Egyptian revolution in 2011, activists ‘coordinated them through Twitter, spread them by SMSs and webcast them to the world on YouTube’ (Castells, 2012: 58), a commentary that was used by journalists around the world as a source of news. As a further example in an Australian context, official organisations such as the Queensland Police Service and NSW Fire and Rescue used Twitter and Facebook to inform citizens directly during the Queensland floods in 2011 (Bruns, 2011) and the bushfires in January 2013 (Fire & Rescue NSW, 2013), thus bypassing journalists. Personal photos from social media sites such as Facebook have been used by media outlets (MediaWatch, 2011). The use of these digital and social media tools now provides the daily working sources of news for many journalists (Hermida, 2010; Hermida, 2011; Farhi, 2009; Posetti, 2009d).

This paper will describe the relationship of these practices and platforms of delivery to the domain of journalism and discuss how the field and journalists themselves are using and reacting to these changes, including opportunities and challenges. It is important to point out that this paper does not include citizen journalism and its relationship and relevance to professional journalism, although the systems model can certainly be of use within that discussion as well to explain the creative process of citizen journalists. This paper is contending that the current debate around online journalism and SM can be explained by employing Csikszentmihalyi's creativity model and journalists and other members of the field of journalism can understand and accept changes that occur by understanding that change and adaptation is a natural occurrence in a dynamic system of cultural production. While journalism is experiencing 'mediamorphosis' (2009: 82), digital journalism, including SM, is starting to develop its own rules, its own procedures and it may eventually have practitioners who specialise in its practice and, in line with the systems model, a field of experts who understand the domain and judge the appropriateness of its practitioners' contributions.

Domains of journalism

Csikszentmihalyi defines the domain as the cultural component that 'consists of a set of symbolic rules and procedures' (1997: 27). Sawyer takes this definition further by including, 'all of the created products that have been accepted by the field in the past' (2006: 125). The domain provides a set of structures that an individual learns and draws on to produce a creative product and these structures must be learned before a variation can be made. As Sawyer explains,

... creativity researchers think of the domain as a kind of creativity language. Of course, you have to learn a language before you can talk; it's impossible to communicate without sharing a language. In the same way, it's impossible to create anything without the shared conventions of a domain (2006: 137).

Culture is made up of hundreds of domains (Gardner et al., 2001) including such disciplines as literature, chess, mathematics, cooking, information technology and, of relevance here, journalism. Domains can include discrete sub domains because of different procedures in work practice between different styles in a domain. In writing domains, for example, different forms of poetry have distinct rules – haiku, with its 5-7-5 syllable format, versus limericks or sonnets – as do different genres of literature – romantic fiction versus children’s literature versus science fiction writing. Journalism has its own rules and procedures, and its own field of experts, and therefore, according to Csikszentmihalyi’s definition, it can be constituted as its own domain. Journalism can then be divided into the sub domains of broadcast and print journalism, “broadcast” can be divided further into television and radio journalism and “print” can be grouped into newspaper, magazine and long-form styles. Each of these domains and sub domains has similarities but also differences with each having not only its own rules, conventions and procedures but also its own field, which judges acceptable additions to the domain. The following diagram illustrates how the domain of journalism may be viewed, including the emerging sub-domain of digital journalism.

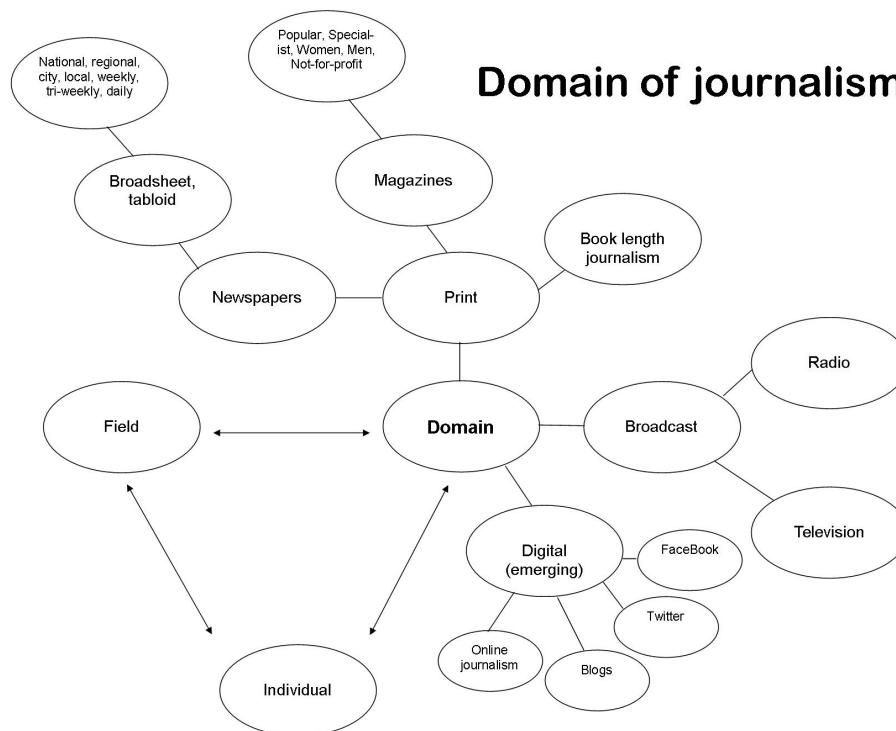


Figure 2 – Domain of journalism

Journalists immerse themselves in the domain of journalism and acquire the rules and procedures as well as engage with previously created products and this domain acquisition enables a journalist to produce, or create, their work. In other words, a journalist internalises the rules and traditions of the domain.

However, the domain not only provides the traditions and rules for journalists to draw on but also for the field to use as a reference point. As Csikszentmihalyi contends: “New” is meaningful only in reference to the “old” (2003: 315). This is what the domain provides: the “something” for comparison. When a journalist produces an article using the acquired knowledge from the domain, it is presented to a field of experts, who understand the domain and use this understanding for verification that the produced outcome is novel and appropriate. This outcome is then included in the domain for future reference.

Csikszentmihalyi claims that if a domain has clear rules and procedures, it is easier to learn past knowledge. Without access to this past knowledge, an individual cannot produce a variation. The rules and conventions of, for example, print journalism are relatively clear, particularly in hard, or daily, news, with many of journalism’s textbooks repeating the rules, conventions and procedures that journalists need to learn. Examining journalism schools’ curriculum also shows consistency in what have become traditional processes. However, newer tools, such as social media forms including Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, and newer platforms, including blogs and online only publications, are leading to uncertainty in what constitutes the conventions, codes, rules and techniques of journalism. While academics are examining how social media is changing practises (see for example Posetti’s (2009a; 2009c; 2009b; 2009d; 2010) and Crawford’s (2011) work on journalism and Twitter, and Fenton and Witschge’s (2011) discussion of ethics and digital media), and there are beginning to be accepted procedural processes, there is still uncertainty in the industry about how these tools should be used by journalists. As Posetti noted: ‘Crucially, Twitter is also raising important new questions about ethics and professionalism, and raising them faster than media organisations can answer

them' (2009e: par. 8). As well as ethical and professional questions, the legal implications for journalists in using, for example, social media, are also vague. How the field reacts to the use of newer tools will determine the future of the domain of journalism.

An example of the uncertainty in mainstream media is the reaction of traditional media forms to the use of social media in courtrooms. Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) managing director Mark Scott actively encourages staff to use social media in their reporting (in Mumbrella, 2009) and has issued a *Social Media Policy* that provides journalists with guidelines on how to use these newer tools in their practice (Scott, 2009). Other mainstream media outlets are more reluctant. In 2009, a journalist from *The Australian* newspaper, a publication in the News Limited stable of newspapers, as well as a journalist from online publication *ZDNet* were given permission by the Federal Court in Sydney, Australia to "tweet" proceedings of a copyright case (Simons, 2009). However, two days later, News Limited stopped its journalist from reporting using Twitter because of legal concerns (Sims, 2009). A Bill introduced in November 2011 to the NSW Parliament by Attorney General Greg Smith proposes to 'prohibit the unauthorised use of any device, including a smart phone or tablet, to transmit sounds, images or information forming part of court proceedings from a room, or other place where a court is sitting, to another place' (2012: 3), which could deny journalists the ability to report directly from Court.

Pearson and Griffith conducted research into the legal implications of journalists using newer technologies to take notes instead of using shorthand and found that journalists are:

Typing notes directly into the computer; recording telephone conversations with listening devices; using digital recording devices to store audio on memory chips or downloading audio files on to computers; using mobile phone technology and voice recording applications; conducting interviews via email, text messaging (SMS) or instant messaging; using Facebook, Twitter

and other social media as a source of quotes and photos (2011: 148).

The last point in Pearson and Griffith's list, that is, using social media for quotes and photos, is particularly problematic for a journalist's practice because 'the ephemeral nature of social networking ... may present a problem for journalists who publish information gained via such means' (Pearson, 2011). If a journalist is taken to court, the information may have become unavailable online and there would be legal ramifications if data were unavailable. A further issue with journalism and social media was reported on by journalist Nic Christensen who wrote in *The Australian* that the Madeleine Pulver story, where a young woman had a fake collar bomb put around her neck, brought the issue of privacy and the media back into debate. Australian news publications used photos from Ms Pulver's personal FaceBook site. Christensen quoted Michael Fraser, from the Communication Law Centre at the University of Technology, Sydney: 'In the social media environment, with the kind of information that is now available we need to have another look at this issue because the whole context has changed' (in Christensen, 2011). Pearson also commented in the same article and stated that while newsrooms have not addressed the issue of using photos from social media sites, the law has also not caught up with a changing media environment (in Christensen, 2011). Within the doctoral research, an observation noted during a discussion with a journalist in one of the observed newsrooms confirmed the above comments: '(Journalist's name deleted) says she uses Facebook all the time to find and contact people. People don't realise their information is out there. They think it is for social contact only but journos use it to find people' (Fulton, 2010 – Day 1).

Therefore, it can be argued that while the rules in traditional journalism are relatively clear and accurate, the conventions and guides for using these newer tools are currently in a state of development with many questions that need to be answered before they become a readily accepted part of journalism, if indeed they will. An alternative is that digital journalism, which includes SM tools and online only sites, could become its own sub domain and take its place alongside

print and broadcast with its own set of rules, conventions and procedures. As Gardner et al. suggest: 'When enough specialised knowledge has been codified for smooth transmission to new practitioners, we call the resulting symbolic system a *domain*' (2001: 22, emphasis in original).

Writing for online only publications is providing new rules, conventions and techniques. In 2008, academic and journalist Margaret Simons (2008) wrote about her experiences as a journalist both as a traditional print journalist and a writer for online only publication *Crikey* and the differences in writing within the two environments. Simons' initially wrote for the online publication using the same style, the same 'rules', as traditional reporting – inverted pyramid style, fact heavy, little opinion – and found the readers expected a different writing style in the online environment. Simons states that in the Internet age, 'the art of conversation, (has) for the first time become an essential part of the journalistic method' (2008, par. 16). Another difference Simons highlights between online journalism and writing for a hard copy publication is the ability to use 'hot links' (2008, par. 24), where links to other websites, articles and information is used within a story to add 'layers of meaning' (Simons, 2008, par. 25) to an article. The language used and the structure of an article expected in an online environment, as well as the instant feedback, both positive and negative, from the audience has meant that Simons has adapted her journalistic style: Simons, as an individual in the system of journalism, has learnt the 'rules and the content of the domain, as well as the criteria of selection, the preferences of the field' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997: 47), thus allowing her to create successfully.

It is possible, however, to find examples of how these practices and platforms are being used at traditional media outlets. Australian mainstream publications have a presence on both Facebook and Twitter, which directs readers to articles on the publication's webpage. Journalists are also using Twitter accounts to inform their audience of articles they have written as well as sourcing information, including appeals for interviewees. Posetti, writing about the use of Twitter by mainstream journalists, provided the following summary:

In addition to disseminating their stories, covering and tracking breaking news via Twitter, journalists are using it to crowd-source case studies and sources, subvert the modern PR machine, develop global professional networks, find jobs and market their own journalistic brand, while aiming to build potential new audiences through engagement with followers (2009d: 38).

An examination of publications' websites demonstrates that journalists are using hot links, video, audio and slide shows to add depth to a story and journalists and editors from the doctoral study discussed how their publications are using an online presence to supplement the hard copy version of a story. One magazine editor noted how journalists at her publication wrote shorter articles for the online version of the magazine, while directing the reader to the longer, detailed piece in the hard copy edition. On the other hand, in one of the observed newsrooms, one important story had too much information to include in the hard copy of the newspaper and the editor made the decision to upload the extra information and photos on the publication's website (Fulton, 2009-2010).

Each of these examples seems to indicate that the existing print journalism domain is expanding to include newer practices that journalists will need to learn to enable them to continue creating their work.

Conclusion

Koutsoukos and Biggins, discussing the redesign of the journalism major at the University of Newcastle, recognised that future journalists will not be simply print journalists or broadcast journalists but would need to be multi-skilled: 'The majority of working journalists claimed one particular medium; this is no longer a given, nor can it be an expectation. Radio journalists are just as likely to shoot video and write print for online' (2010: 2). To paraphrase Koutsoukos and Biggins, any journalist is just as likely to produce video, audio and online content. But changes within spheres of cultural production are a natural progression of a dynamic system in operation and a domain cannot remain stagnant or it risks

becoming less relevant within the culture. In journalism, whether or not the field accepts these changes to the structures of the domain will determine the future of print journalism and its relevance. On the other hand, as per Deuze's suggestion, digital journalism may well become its own domain and take its place alongside print and broadcast journalism.

While journalism may follow Deuze's suggestion and a new sub domain will form comprised of its own rules, conventions, techniques, guides and procedures, and its own field of experts to judge acceptable products, what seems to be happening is that these newer practices and platforms are being absorbed into the current practises of print journalists. What is clear, however, is that regardless of what may happen in the domain of print journalism it is still crucial that a journalist, as one element in a dynamic system of production, must learn and understand what constitutes the domain they are working within and must understand what the field requires to enable the production of creative texts. In other words, the systems model of creativity is a model that can be used to explain the creative process regardless of the form of journalism a practitioner is engaged with.

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