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Digital Journalism in the Post-Gutenberg Age

- When I talk about the revolution in journalism I often comment that it has changed as much in the past 25 years as publishing did in the 25 years after Gutenberg invented the printing press.
- It is my way of trying to understand why journalism feels so confusing, perpetually unfamiliar, out of control and chaotic.
- And it isn't only cynical veterans who feel this way.
- Even my students, the first of whom got their NYU degrees in 2000, feel this way.

After invoking Gutenberg so often, I thought I should look into him more closely

- Not a lot of biographical details available. Still, his story has lessons for us today.
- First of all, it turns out that Gutenberg was more an *assembler* than a pure inventor.
- The screw press, which applied direct pressure to a flat-plane, was invented by the Romans in the 1st century AD to make wine and olive oil.
- And he wasn't the first person to try to mechanize printing.
- In the 8th century, the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans made books using engraved wooden blocks.

- In the 11th century the Chinese invented movable type in the.
- In the 12th century Europeans made texts by re-using individual characters.
- Gutenberg’s most important “discovery” was conceptual.
 - *Typesetting* and *printing* were two separate work steps.
- Gutenberg had been a goldsmith, and learned how to create an alloy of lead and tin that was flexible but cooled quickly. In addition, he invented a matrix to mold type quickly and precisely.

The economic problems that beset Gutenberg also feel quite familiar and modern

- Like many innovators today, Gutenberg wasn’t good at business.
- In 1450, he borrowed 800 gulden (\$150,000 today) from Johann Fust, and another 800 gulden in 1453 to expand his shop for the Bible project.
- While Gutenberg worked on the Bible, he printed more lucrative jobs like Latin grammars and indulgences for the church.
- Finally, in 1456, Gutenberg produced the Bible
- Alas, it was the same year Fust demanded his money back.
- Fust sued and won control over the printing workshop, and half the Bibles.
- Gutenberg was left nearly bankrupt.
- In 1457, Fust published a book of psalms, with no mention of Gutenberg’s involvement.
- In 1462 the city of Mainz was sacked and Gutenberg went into exile.
- He died in 1468, his contributions largely unknown.

Aftermath

- In the 50 years after Gutenberg, 20 million books were published in Western Europe--more than had been copied by all the scribes in Europe during the previous *thousand* years.

- By 1600, over 200 million books had been published.
- For the first time authors--like Luther and Erasmus--wrote books that sold hundreds of thousands of copies.
- But the printing's *full* impact took longer to emerge.
- For the first 50 years printed books were simply made more quickly, and less expensively, than those made by the scribes.
 - The fonts looked like the scribes penmanship.
 - They had the same content, and 80% of them were in Latin.
 - It wasn't until a full century after Gutenberg that something truly new appeared.

The story would be very different if it stopped there

- 50 years after Gutenberg, it looked as if the printing press would *secure* the old regime, not *disrupt* it and welcome a new one.
- It produced the indulgences against which Luther raged, and led to the Reformation
- It both printed the first Bible, and diminish the authority of the Catholic Church.
- It spread the influence of Latin, and led to the rise of the vernacular.
- It spread the word of god and enabled the rise of modern science.

I would argue that journalism and digital culture are at a similar point in development today

- These are early times in this revolution.
- If we take 1990 as the birth date of digital culture, we are at around 1481 in Gutenberg's time--long *before* most of the developments I just listed took place.

- Some have suggested that we are living on the far side of what they are calling the “Gutenberg Parenthesis.”
- Outside, and to the left of the parenthesis is the pre-1456 oral culture where information was largely passed around mouth-to-mouth. Scribes copied books by hand. Both processes changed the contents of the stories and books in the process. Neither instilled a fixed sense of ownership or authorship.
- Gutenberg’s printing press changed our conception of the world, introducing concepts like intellectual property, and the editorial/advertising business model. We were all educated and socialized within the Gutenberg parenthesis.
- This is why it is so difficult for us to accept the fact that the world inside the Gutenberg parenthesis wasn’t the culture’s final resting place, but was only a 500 year pause.
- That dominance is now being challenged by digital culture and the pre-Gutenberg oral culture it embraces.
- The revolution began in the 19th century with the invention of the telegraph, which made information transfer instant and eventually international.
- In the 1920s broadcasting made live events accessible to the audience at home and created the notion of mass media.
- The internet and the web have made communications two way and truly global.
- Today information is passed around link to link, click to click, remixed along the way, more process than product, with more ambiguity about who owns what.

With this confusion comes a crisis in the business model

- Why is traditional journalism in such bad shape? I'll answer that question with a question: How many thriving industries can you think of that have relied on the same technology and business model for a century?
- From 1945 through 1990, one of the best jobs in the American newspaper industry was that of an advertising salesman at a large, metropolitan daily. Every day he would arrive at his office and simply pick up the phone to take orders from department stores and retailers. They had nowhere else to go. As long as there was enough editorial copy to publish alongside advertisements, the system worked.
- News organizations enjoyed higher profits by attracting larger audiences by pricing their products artificially low. They didn't discriminate all that much between different kinds of consumers they attracted. They just wanted to get as many as possible.
- As a result, journalism organizations developed stronger relationships with their advertisers than with their readers. Most readers had only a superficial attachment to journalism, which they realized wasn't worth paying for. It existed solely for the sake of the advertisers.

Post-Gutenberg Economics - More models, more mobile, more available

- Today, there is no single business model for journalism.
- In an interview with *The Economist*, Hearst Magazines president David Carey said, "You need five or six revenue streams to make the business really successful."
- The largest factor spurring journalism innovation has been new hardware.
- iPod invented in 2001
- The iPhone and iPad in 2007 and 2010
- Conde Nast was one of the earlier tablet experimenters in the publishing world

- Users spending upwards of 60 min with its mobile app, suggesting the experience is like reading a magazine, with the deep engagement that implies.
- The Pew Research Center found that 73 % of adults who consume news on their tablet read in-depth articles, with 19 % doing so daily.
- 68 % of tablet owners read newspapers or magazines on a tablet that they had never read in print.
- 45% of magazine readers with tablets spend at 1–3 hours per week with magazine content and another 18 % spend 3–5 hours.
- Regardless of platform, four business models have emerged as the primary ways magazines are generating profit: selling advertising, selling subscriptions, conferences/events, and selling applications.

A few Case Studies

The Atlantic

- Founded in 1857, it was an important journal of opinion that always lost money.
- In 2005, the new owner realized that the only way to save the old magazine was to create a new one as well. Access to the website became free, and it expanded.
- It created an entirely new digital magazine, and broke down the wall between print and online. It continued to run long, thoughtful pieces, and hired a bunch of smart political and cultural writers to write exclusively for the website.
- In 2014 The Atlantic's digital ad revenues exceeded its print ad revenues. Digital ad sales now make up 60% of the total

National Geographic

- Always trying new things: among the first with color photography.
- They, too, created several new magazines to deal with the problems with the existing print edition.
- National Geographic now produces 4 digital magazines as well as 20 free and paid apps for the iPad, and 13 for the iPhone
- Focus on *interaction* in their tablet edition, adding video, audio, and interactive maps.
- The magazine's English language magazine app reached 4.5 million downloads and 300,000 paid digital subscribers by 2012.
- To get readers to visit the monthly app more regularly, it began offering daily coverage in 2012 with newsfeeds and a photo of the day feature. Subscribers received live coverage of a Mount Everest expedition, with Twitter feeds, photos, video, and blog posts from team members.

Fusion

- Demographic Shift - not just in age, but also in ethnicity.
- Fusion was originally conceived to primarily attract a younger audience of an English-speaking Hispanic and Latino American background; about 20% of millennials are classified as being of Latino descent.
- Fusion has broadened its scope "engage and champion a young, diverse and inclusive America," regardless of cultural or language background.
- an American multi-platform media company that is a joint venture between the Disney-ABC Television Group subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company and Univision Communications
- Launched on October 28, 2013, the network's content features news, lifestyle, pop culture, satire and entertainment aimed at English-speaking

millennials, including those of a Hispanic background; the channel is Univision's first major push into English-language programming.

- Fusion gears its programming less towards breaking news, instead emphasizing context and analysis on news and issues, along with interviews, documentaries, and long-form reports on current events, lifestyle, and pop culture.

Books

- By 2013, ebooks represented 25% of the US trade publishing market, up 45% since 2011.
- Audio book sales up 11%

A Changing Business Model even in newspapers

- In 2014, for the first time ever, newspapers around the world generated more revenue from circulation than from advertising.
 - \$92 billion from circulation compared to \$87 billion for advertising.
 - “The basic assumption of the news business model, that advertisers would subsidize news content, is gone,” said Larry Kilman, secretary-general of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers. “This is a seismic shift from a relationship between publishers and advertisers – to publishers to their audiences.”
 - Some European and Asian papers have been 50-50 for years.
 - In the US, despite strong growth in digital subscriptions and advertising, print still provides 93 percent of revenues.
 - India, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa experienced growth.
 - Circulation was down in North America, Europe and Australia.
 - Desktop audiences fell for the first time as mobile use continues to surge.

It takes time for a new medium to mature

- The newspapers of the 1700s simply made things up or relied on letters from far-flung, unpaid correspondents. Professional journalism came more than 100 years later.
- Radio was a hobbyists' novelty until it became a vehicle for news and variety shows.
- The gramophone was originally designed for office dictation.
- Television was originally intended simply to bring pictures of live events into people's homes.

Free content must play a role

- Some 30 hours of video material are uploaded to YouTube every minute
- Journalists must use their skills to curate the vast pool of material developed by people and organizations outside of the conventional media mainstream.
- Traditional journalists are the best ones to curate it because they have the most experience.

In order to make these changes, we have to listen to young people

- The example I use is of children born to immigrant parents.
- They still learn their native language from their parents, but in immigrant families the roles are often reverse and the *children* become translators for their parents.
- In many respects it is the parent who must be taught the new vocabulary. And the degree of parental discomfort is proportional to the degree of dependence on the child's translating ability. In situations where the parent is helpless without the child's mediation, the level of discomfort is very high.

PODCASTS

- The best example of this new dynamic is in podcasts
- Some of the best work is being done by people who come from music rather than journalism.
- The growth of podcasts, as opposed to radio.
- Podcasts are highly produced, deeply reported, well written longform pieces.
- 44 percent of Americans listen to podcasts, on a weekly basis. Podcast consumption grew from roughly 39 million monthly users in 2014 to 46 million in 2015.
- Last year, a podcast called "Serial" investigated a decade's old murder week-by-week, in real time. Over 80 million people downloaded it.
- The national advertising market for podcasts is still relatively small—between and \$50 million and \$100 million—but growing fast.
- Last year, Apple said subscriptions of podcasts through iTunes reached 1 billion.
- Technical innovation key development - Despite early enthusiasm, podcasts faded in popularity in the early 2000s, partly because of the many steps required to download and play them. The introduction of the iPhone in 2007 changed that, making podcasts convenient to access. It's easier to play them in cars, too, as automakers build wireless media functions into more and more models. And faster WiFi and mobile data speeds have made podcasts easier to stream.
- Podcasts are the best example of a form of journalism that is infused with the best of traditional journalism values.

Small is beautiful

- I am not suggesting that the podcast economy will take care of big media's economy.
- However, I do think that there are indications that, driven by the advertising/content model, we have over-emphasized the size of the audience.
- Right now, a passionate audience is measured in the same way as a passive audience.
- Online, a click is a click. Studies have shown that a small number of dedicated readers generate the greatest number of page views. They visit the sites they love most frequently, they look at more pages when they visit, and they spend more time on the site. They are the long readers, and should be counted in that way.
- In the future, we must not only measure them differently, but design everything about their media experiences differently. Short, disengaged readers need to get their basic news as efficiently as possible, and they will pay for that privilege. Long, engaged readers must be made as comfortable as possible so that they might luxuriate in the journalism they love. And they, too, will pay for the privilege.
- Engagement, not numbers, will become the most important characteristic. The more engaged the readers are, the more chance we have of making money from them—whether through advertisements or a variety of other transactions. The benefit of more engagement isn't just in higher ad rates, but in relationships that publishers must to build with their most loyal readers—a dynamic that has been lost in the drive to attract mass audiences.
- I am confident that the traditional values of journalism will be more properly valued as the new economic models emerge. We must stay true to our traditions, even as we stay open to experiments and new ways of thinking.

