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# Epistemological Threads of American Journalism

By: Currie Dickerson

## **Abstract**

National civil discourse is intricately tied to a unique epistemology – the theory of knowledge and resulting methodologies – of American journalism. The rise of digital technology platforms in a democratic society has resulted in an unprecedented battle for the hearts and minds of a pluralistic people. While the spectrum and veracity of individual opinion appears to have reached its extremes, reliable and truthful sources are rapidly disappearing in the digital age. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American press engaged in a rich dialogue within communities and was recognized as a stimulator of public debate. However, a shift soon occurred: The professional journalist attempted to fill the role of the “expert.” This phenomenon in the industry marked the beginning of a media reputation soiled by entertainment and consumerism. The evolution of the press has shaped public understanding of facts, and the resulting gravitational pull toward highly subjective versions of truth can arguably be an unfortunate characteristic of modernity.

## **Keywords**

Journalism, Epistemological, Professionalization, Media, Press, News, Fake News, Modern Journalism, Propaganda, Public Discourse, Arab Spring, Public Opinion

## Introduction

In this paper, I will trace epistemological threads of American journalism since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century using the following factors: 1) professionalization of the industry and legal changes, 2) effects of the digital age, and (most recently) 3) America's social character. Within this framework, I will analyze the position of American journalists in shaping public dialogue and attempt to project future trends. To illustrate the current effects of these epistemological trends, I will draw from examples in the coverage of the Arab Spring in 2011. Through these examples, I will examine how the gathering and communication of knowledge by news outlets has evolved, and whether this trend has led to a loss of influence in public discourse. By nature, the field of journalism can never be hegemonic – its power is inherently limited by current events, consumer tastes, technology, and favor with other elite classes. At the same time, it is also not possible to have a political life in America without journalism. A democratic society void of journalists would result in unguided and unchecked conversation amidst a tumultuous sea of information and complexity.

In the academic article *How Journalists Think About the Facts: Theorizing the Social Conditions Behind Epistemological Beliefs*, the authors list three advantages in studying how journalists perceive facts:<sup>1</sup>

1. Functional rationale: Understanding how journalists perceive facts clarifies their role and function in a democratic society.
2. Professional rationale: Institutionalized professional norms may influence how journalists understand reality and their own predetermined ideologies.

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<sup>1</sup> Godler, Yigal and Zvi Reich. (February 2013) How Journalists Think about Facts. *Journalism Studies*, vol. 14, no.1. p. 94-95.

3. Academic rationale: The current absence of scholarly research regarding the epistemology of journalism warrants further study.

This three-tiered justification helps to categorize and challenge a perceived “enlightened” ideology of the media elite. In this report, I hope to contribute to the current understanding and conversation of the role and influence of journalism in American civic life.

### **The Professionalization of Journalism**

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many notable thought leaders predicted the flaws and trends of the American journalism industry in a democratic age. French philosopher, Michael Foucault, foresaw the effects of “a progressivist brush” on the industry, with the “triumph of period over place.”<sup>2</sup> These characteristics of modernity marked an era of converging sources, each claiming an objective newsgathering technique. The content of coverage was not necessarily changing, but the translation of ideas was revolutionized to include “new forms of intellectual inquiry, new modes of thinking about the world, and revolutionary ways of conceiving the political order.”<sup>3</sup> Walter Lippmann was an influential voice in critiques of American journalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote a series of books, *Liberty and the News* (1920), *Public Opinion* (1922), and *The Phantom Public* (1925), in response to the changing dynamics of the industry. Lippmann, sounding the alarm of an increasingly disenchanted media elite, prophetically declared in 1922 that “news and truth are not the same thing and must be clearly distinguished.”<sup>4</sup> He witnessed clear intellectual gaps in the media and the consequential “breakdown of the means of public knowledge.”<sup>5</sup> During his inquiry and research, Lippmann connected trends in American press coverage with the fate of democracy. His prophetic climax of these two trends resulted

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<sup>2</sup> Livingstone, David N. (May 2007) Science, Site and Speech: Scientific Knowledge and the Spaces of Rhetoric. *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 20, no. 2. p.71-72.

<sup>3</sup> Livingstone, p.75.

<sup>4</sup> Godler and Reich, p.94.

<sup>5</sup> Lasch, C. (1996) *The Revolt of the Elites: and the Betrayal of Democracy*. New York: W.W. Norton., p.168.

in a type of individual who must be governed by an *expert* to navigate public opinion in a complex society.

Prior to this period, journalism was characterized by *sensationalism*, or “yellow journalism,” which, at its height, helped to “create a climate conducive” to the Spanish-American War of 1898.<sup>6</sup> Sensational journalism features emotional appeals over factual claims in the published story narrative. Proponents of sensational journalism included well-known members of the press, such as Upton Sinclair, who advocated in *The Jungle* to reform Chicago meat-packing companies, which later influenced the passage of the Pure Food and Drugs Act (1906) and the Meat Inspection Act (1906).<sup>7</sup> During this period, the press was openly partisan and funded by political parties. In response, newspaper editors, such as Horace Greeley, founded the *New York Tribune* in 1841 to help remedy sharp partisanship. Greeley and other editors distrusted the “the demands of party loyalty [that] infringed upon editorial independence.”<sup>8</sup> In contrast to their rejection of party-influenced opinions in content, Greeley and others still rejected a “strict separation” between differing points of view in the place of partisanship. The resulting journalistic ideology at the *New York Tribune* attempted to remedy the two driving forces of subjectivity and objectivity. Whether fueled by partisanship or strong-willed editors, profit-driven newspapers continued to promote the sensational approach which dominated the journalism field from 1830 until around 1900. These stylistic trends in newspapers also parallel voter participation during this period, when 80 percent of voters cast official ballots in presidential elections. After 1900, only 65 percent went to the polls in 1904, and 59 percent turned out in 1912, when journalism was no longer

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<sup>6</sup> United States Department of State, Office of the Historian. (n.d.) U.S. Diplomacy and Yellow Journalism, 1895–1898. Retrieved from [history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/yellowjournalism](https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/yellowjournalism).

<sup>7</sup> Musser, R. (2007) *History of American Journalism*. University of Kansas, School of Journalism & Mass Communications. Retrieved from [history.journalism.ku.edu/1900/1900.shtml](https://history.journalism.ku.edu/1900/1900.shtml).

<sup>8</sup> Lasch, p.163.

“an extension of the town meeting.”<sup>9</sup> While correlation does not imply causation, the relationship between the supplementary effect of newspapers in public debate and voter turnout is significant.

Lippmann understood that the next era of reporting represented “a journalism guided by the new ideal of professional objectivity.”<sup>10</sup> The professionalization of journalism becomes an important factor in understanding the epistemological roots of the current American media. One characteristic that added to the professionalization of the industry was the rise of a political ideology, progressivism, at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of America’s leading progressive presidents, Theodore Roosevelt, did not approve of the extreme habits of sensational journalism during this time. Thus, he saw the solution in professionalization of the industry, saying, “journalism must be accountable to its critics; professionalism would be a solution.”<sup>11</sup> The prophetic nature of his words proved true, as there are now hundreds of journalism schools across the country on nearly every university campus. According to findings in *Journalism 1908: Birth of a Profession*, the movement toward journalism as a profession began when the University of Missouri founded the first school of journalism in 1908.<sup>12</sup> This reflected a demand for more uniform approaches to the journalistic career, and over the next few decades more than twelve journalism programs were launched in American universities. Economic and capitalist-driven factors in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century also transformed the newsroom into a marketplace, and further pushed journalism toward a professional identity. This development prompted a greater focus on writing in technical terms, as opposed to a narrative literary style. Journalists cultivated “a capacity to translate specialized language and purposes of government, science, art, medicine, [and] finance into an idiom that can be understood by broader, more amorphous, less educated audiences.”<sup>13</sup> However,

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<sup>9</sup> Lasch, p.164.

<sup>10</sup> Lasch, p.167.

<sup>11</sup> Winfield, Betty H. (2008) *Journalism, 1908: Birth of a Profession*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.p.3.

<sup>12</sup> Winfield, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Kaul, Arthur J. (January 1986) The Proletarian Journalist: A Critique of Professionalism. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, vol. 1, no. 2. p. 47.

despite these developments, public officials and readers/listeners continued to question whether such modernization had truly legitimized journalism as a standard profession.

While America recognizes a right to “freedom of the press,” certain industry regulations and standards are still enforced. In 1933, and in line with the progressive norms of the New Deal, the Newspaper Guild was created to the great disappointment of the established American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA). The ANPA did not want journalists to be categorized as *professionals*, in the technical sense of the word. However, as journalists began taking on a more prominent role in public discourse throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, important media laws began to play an important role in press relations, including the Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 2006 (regarding discrimination and hate speech); the Data Protection Act of 1998 (regarding information gathering); and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).<sup>14</sup> The FOIA has operated in the U.S. since 1967 and “provided the public the right to request access to records from any federal agency.”<sup>15</sup> More recently, President Barack Obama even issued two memos on his first full day in office in 2009, stating that he was “committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government,” through increased transparency and guidelines in the FOIA.<sup>16</sup> To show his commitment to this priority, he immediately signed the FOIA Improvement Act into law. This public accessibility to government records has marked an important methodological shift in the relationship of government officials and journalists, with increased pressure on reporters to navigate readily-available and large sources of information.

### **Digital and Social Revolution in America**

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<sup>14</sup> University of Miami, School of Communication. (December 1, 2012) Seven laws of journalism we should know. Retrieved from [students.com.miami.edu/netreporting/?p=4180](http://students.com.miami.edu/netreporting/?p=4180).

<sup>15</sup> United States Department of Justice. (n.d.) What is the FOIA? Retrieved from [www.foia.gov/faq.html](http://www.foia.gov/faq.html).

<sup>16</sup> The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. (2009) Federal Open Government Guide – 10th Edition. Retrieved from [www.rcfp.org/wp-content/uploads/imported/FOGG.pdf](http://www.rcfp.org/wp-content/uploads/imported/FOGG.pdf).

Historian and author Christopher Lasch, in his book *Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*, argues that the “Lost Art of Argument” has only become more apparent following the era known as the Information Age. Lasch notes the significance of a worsening trend where “the public no longer participates in debates on national issues, [so] it has no reason to inform itself about civic affairs.”<sup>17</sup> Especially over the last century, the rise of epistemological trends grounded in the scientific method have shaped journalism in America. “It is no accident that the evolution of journalistic objectivity parallels that of scientific objectivity, for objective journalism shares the core values of the scientific method.”<sup>18</sup> Media habits are attempting to move away from making value judgments, and instead pursuing objectivity. However, those like author Michael Ryan, in his *Journalistic Ethics, Objectivity, Existential Journalism, Standpoint Epistemology, and Public Journalism*, alternatively claim that “objectivity is a myth.”<sup>19</sup> Journalists are instead “moral spectators,” and must present two sides of an issue, a methodical process that assumes the presence of a subjective good and evil.<sup>20</sup> By presenting both sides equally, without condemnation or support of either argument, objective journalists potentially forfeit the emotional connections of a story and the opportunity for greater public engagement. Ryan also notes that journalism has moved toward an increasingly existential viewpoint. Operating in a pluralistic society, this characterization of journalists becomes profoundly challenging. While partisan rhetoric is supposedly tasked to the editorial pages, the binary effect it has on complex conversations means that “opinion then resides outside of news...and editors become arbiters in the balance of opinion.”<sup>21</sup> Echoing similar concerns, author David Brooks, in *Bobos in Paradise*, argues that the Information Age has taken “products of the mind and turned them into products of the

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<sup>17</sup> Lasch, p.162.

<sup>18</sup> Ryan, M. (January 1, 2001) *Journalistic Ethics, Objectivity, Existential Journalism, Standpoint Epistemology, and Public Journalism. Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 16, 1, 3-22.

<sup>19</sup> Ryan, p.6.

<sup>20</sup> Ryan, p.7.

<sup>21</sup> Barnhurst, Kevin G. (November 2015) *Contradictions in News Epistemology: How Modernism Failed Mainstream US Journalism. Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 37, no. 8. p. 1244-1253.

marketplace.”<sup>22</sup> Technology has generated an influx of opinion leaders amidst a complicated network of information. One characteristic of this new globalized and consumer-driven media environment has been a shift back to the *sensationalism* that dominated the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This trend can be seen in the waning popularity of noncommercial media outlets, like the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), which, by 2013, had lost 48 percent of its audience over the previous eight years.<sup>23</sup> A greater financial pressure has been placed on broadcasters and news stations to not only provide factual news but also to entertain the public.

Whether to the detriment or benefit of modern journalism, the commanding role of image-driven news has significantly increased knowledge flows over the past 100 years. The invention and use of the 35mm camera, following the Leica 1 (the first commercial 35mm camera available), had “a particular truth-bearing power” in the transference of public knowledge.<sup>24</sup> The corresponding rise of television news relied on an extraordinary story-telling approach to appeal to viewers, where “filmmakers have taken over some of the duties of print journalists.”<sup>25</sup> These digital platforms encouraged viewers to expect a visual verification of facts as opposed to the subjective or partisan coverage of events which characterized the century before. This new evidence-based approach in television journalism gave the industry a powerful validity in newsgathering. As the process of reporting must respond quickly to breaking news, the industry is legitimized solely by an uninhibited production process. This differs from the presentation of scientific claims, which must undergo a series of tests before being validated. Journalists must consistently cater to the needs of public opinion, while dutiful proponents of the scientific method are not necessarily bound to an audience. Thus, public perception

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<sup>22</sup> Brooks, D. (2004). *Bobos in Paradise: The new upper class and how they got there*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.

<sup>23</sup> Zurawik, D. (October 29, 2013) PBS NewsHour' has lost 48 percent of its audience in last 8 years. *The Baltimore Sun*. Retrieved from [www.baltimoresun.com/entertainment/tv/zontv-blog/bal-pbs-newshour-huge-audience-loss-20131018-story.html](http://www.baltimoresun.com/entertainment/tv/zontv-blog/bal-pbs-newshour-huge-audience-loss-20131018-story.html).

<sup>24</sup> Creech, Brian. (October 2017) A Newsmaker's Tool: The 35mm Camera and Journalism's Material Epistemology. *Journalism*, vol. 18, no. 9, p.1125-1141.

<sup>25</sup> Scott A.O. (April 26, 2015) Serving Up Truth with the Imagination. *New York Times*, 164,56848.

of a story can appear more important than accurate content in television journalism, as the digital translation of stories is intended for “immediate comprehension” and constructed to seamlessly transition from one story or statement to the next.<sup>26</sup> Television audiences are unintentionally forced to understand stories at a fast pace, with limited context, influential actors, and other relevant factors. The goal of television newsgathering is to invoke strong emotions and focus this response toward a particular image or person involved in the narrative. This mandate of immediacy in journalism is unavoidable in a consumer-driven culture where the processing time of information is negligible. The only expectation of the public for a news presentation is that it is current and up-to-date, no matter if the extracted details of the story are factually true.

In response to the sovereignty of the image, the authors of *Overcoming the Objectivity of the Senses: Enhancing Journalism Practice Through Eastern Philosophies* argue that limits remain in the use of scientific tactics due to an “overreliance on the objectivity of the senses.”<sup>27</sup> The authors present a globalized understanding of communication and compare methods of truth-finding between Western and Eastern philosophies. In Western culture, truth tends to be proven or validated through observable evidence. In Eastern culture, truth “takes a more holistic view wherein epistemology is inseparable from ontology.”<sup>28</sup> Centuries prior, empirical views of the world were reflected in the publication of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1784. He argued that Indian or “Eastern” epistemology is more conducive to a global audience because “journalism as a historical entity ended up separating facts from beliefs as a way of seeking ‘truth.’”<sup>29</sup> Eastern philosophy takes on a holistic approach by contrasting sensual evidence (*pratyaksha*) and non-sensual evidence (*proksha*).<sup>30</sup> In contrast, Westernized

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<sup>26</sup> Ekstrom M., (December 2002) Epistemologies of TV Journalism: A Theoretical Framework. *Journalism*, vol. 3, no. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Martinisi, Alessandro and Jairo Lugo-Ocando. (August 2015) Overcoming the Objectivity of the Senses: Enhancing Journalism Practice through Eastern Philosophies. *International Communication Gazette*, vol. 77, no. 5, p.440.

<sup>28</sup> Martinisi and Lugo-Ocando, p.442.

<sup>29</sup> Martinisi and Lugo-Ocando, p.442.

<sup>30</sup> Martinisi and Lugo-Ocando, p.442.

approaches to journalism are dependent on the epistemology of the “Enlightenment Project,” where “adapting scientific methods to human affairs, including journalism, was the central point for those advancing” these ideas.<sup>31</sup> Rather, the author of this article argues, journalism should not be bound by the scientific approach to fact-finding and reporting, but instead seek methods to expose and eliminate human suffering, as prevalently found in the Eastern traditions.<sup>32</sup>

The challenge to “fuse reason with belief” in journalism industries across the world has multiplied in recent years.<sup>33</sup> Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, in *Manufacturing Consent* (1988), revealed that the “same underlying power sources that own the media and fund them as advertisers, that serve as primary definers of the news...also play a key role in fixing basic principles and the dominant ideologies.”<sup>34</sup> This framework, called the *Propaganda Model*, had been used for more than twelve years at the time of their published book, but both Herman and Chomsky focus on a key difference: globalization and the new global media elite. The advertising industry has played a key role in the consequential rise of the power of consumer media. In 1983, there were 50 large firms with control over mass media.<sup>35</sup> By 1990, 20 even larger firms were in control.<sup>36</sup> This number has since shrunk to ten corporations: Disney, AOL, Time Warner, Viacom (owner of CBS), News Corporation, Bertelsmann, General Electric (owner of NBC), Sony, AT&T-Liberty Media, and Vivendi Universal.<sup>37</sup> Each of these corporations own and operate music platforms, news stations, movies, and other avenues of marketability for their brand. This phenomenon has been fueled by “globalization of business more generally, the associated rapid growth of global advertising, and improved communications technology

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<sup>31</sup> Martinisi and Lugo-Ocando, p.451.

<sup>32</sup> Martinisi and Lugo-Ocando, p.446-47.

<sup>33</sup> Martinisi and Lugo-Ocando, p.452.

<sup>34</sup> Herman, E. S., and Chomsky, N. (2008) *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*. London: Bodley Head, p.57.

<sup>35</sup> Herman and Chomsky, p.98.

<sup>36</sup> Herman and Chomsky, p.98.

<sup>37</sup> Herman and Chomsky, p.98.

that has facilitated cross-border operations and control.”<sup>38</sup> Reflecting this shift toward global appeals, virtual reality (VR) media is beginning to gain popularity over print and television methods. The increasing use of VR in the news industry ensures a more sensational approach to story-telling where a viewer can experience current events firsthand. This highly experiential tactic seems to represent the missing link between cultural individuality and accurate fact portrayal. While journalism has traditionally aimed to reach the emotions of a reader or viewer, this quickly evolving technological advancement of firsthand news coverage remains unfamiliar territory for most societies. “Bringing audiences closer to the reality of a story has always been the preoccupation of journalists, and VR, it seems, offers an ideal multimedia experience.”<sup>39</sup> However, the potential shift toward VR methods seems inevitable in a global public square, where more interactions are conducted virtually than in person.

### **The Arab Spring – A Modern Example**

The Internet has undoubtedly created a worldwide platform to share democratic ideals. This “democratic media” has inspired government protests across the world, like the Arab Spring.<sup>40</sup> Chomsky and Herman argued that, while tools like the Internet appear limitless on the surface, such means to information are limited to a select and privileged few. Those in the most hostile situations and environments are unable to access the Internet to address grievances against their governments. To illustrate the growth of the global public square, and its impact on American journalism, I will reference the coverage of the Arab Spring in 2011 as a case study. The Arab Spring began in Tunisia, when 26-year-old Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of a government building to protest government oppression. The scene was filmed by cellphone cameras and promulgated on the Internet shortly thereafter. A firestorm of similar protests erupted in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and other nations in the

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<sup>38</sup> Herman and Chomsky, p.116.

<sup>39</sup> Bailenson, J. (January 15, 2018). How virtual reality could change the journalism industry. Retrieved from [www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/makingsense/how-virtual-reality-couldchange-the-journalism-industry](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/makingsense/how-virtual-reality-couldchange-the-journalism-industry).

<sup>40</sup> Herman and Chomsky, p.134.

Middle East throughout the year.<sup>41</sup> In response, many authoritarian regimes were pushed out and other regimes feared a similar fate. In *Disciplines of truth: The 'Arab Spring', American journalistic practice, and the production of public knowledge*, the author analyzes three epistemological conditions that contributed to the Arab Spring: social media, the authority of individual reporters, and articulation of journalistic knowledge.<sup>42</sup> The protestors fused the power of images with a digitally interconnected world as the means to disseminate their message. The events filmed during the Arab Spring highlighted the desperate conditions in affected countries, and deeply resonated with American publications and television networks. In this sense, people can “see how journalism, as a knowledge-producing discipline, articulates its epistemological authority to the broader culture.”<sup>43</sup> The protestor was even named as TIME Magazine’s 2011 *Person of the Year*. Additionally, the Western tendency to call the series of revolts the “Arab Spring” played into a *reductionist* view of facts surrounding the crisis, which spanned from North Africa to the Middle East. Most Americans watching the protests, and subsequent coverage, did not have the capability to understand particularities of the Arab Spring, due to a lack of proximity. Thus, reporters possessed the greatest power to agitate or confirm public perception. This capability – to reduce the complicated crisis across the Middle East into a single “Arab Spring” – highlights an important fact of American journalistic methods: that truth is expressed through the “use of concepts and labels that cause phenomena and events to cohere around a singular, public meaning.”<sup>44</sup> Relying heavily on social media to gather facts in this incident, the role of the journalist became more of a “storyteller,” or narrative shaper, and less of a verifier of facts. Such verification, whether in response to the Arab Spring or to other global events, remains an important component to holding the industry

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<sup>41</sup> Staff, N. (December 17, 2011). The Arab Spring: A Year of Revolution. *National Public Radio* (NPR). Retrieved from [www.npr.org/2011/12/17/143897126/the-arab-spring-a-year-of-revolution](http://www.npr.org/2011/12/17/143897126/the-arab-spring-a-year-of-revolution).

<sup>42</sup> Creech, p.1010.

<sup>43</sup> Creech, p.1011.

<sup>44</sup> Creech, p.1011.

intact. However, the role of modern journalism in the global public square continues to be defined by the increased use of technology and subsequent flow of knowledge across traditional borders.

### **The Rise of “Fake News”**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Walter Lippmann was distrustful of the “epistemological distinction between truth and mere opinion.”<sup>45</sup> Reflecting on his predictions in the present day, a dominant “fake news” narrative has recently swept the nation and contributed to a remarkable distrust of the media elite, who claim objective journalistic habits. The underlying assumption of this characterization is an unapologetic rejection of falsifiable information in reporting strategies. This phenomenon has prompted a “national soul-searching” among Americans regarding the role of journalism in everyday discourse about current events.<sup>46</sup> Most evident during the 2016 presidential campaign, the rise of “fake news” caused confusion and doubt to flourish, while it simultaneously “pushed up the political temperature and increased polarization.”<sup>47</sup> Michael Lynch, a philosophy professor at the University of Connecticut, noted that the larger issue is “the effect of getting people not to believe real things.”<sup>48</sup> The resulting reputation of the press appears to have reached an all-time low. Both in 2017 and 2018, President Donald Trump declined to attend the White House Correspondents Dinner because “so much of the media is dishonest and corrupt.” This breakdown between President Trump’s administration and the journalism industry represents yet another hole draining the good-standing of the press in civil discourse. Mats Ekstrom, in *Epistemologies of TV Journalism: A Theoretical Framework*, refers to this type of good-standing as “confidence capital,” which is a type of knowledge that is important to the survival of the journalism industry.<sup>49</sup> Negative rhetoric about journalism is not only decreasing the public

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<sup>45</sup> Lasch, p.169.

<sup>46</sup> Tavernise, Sabrina. (December 7, 2016) As Fake News Spreads Lies, More Readers Shrug at Truth. *New York Times*, vol. 166, no. 57439, p.A1-A20.

<sup>47</sup> Tavernise.

<sup>48</sup> Tavernise.

<sup>49</sup> Ekstrom, M., p.259-282.

trust in the ability and accuracy of the media, but also increasing the number of political leaders and other actors who vocalize vehement disapproval of the press. This trend does not bode well for the industry moving forward.

Despite these criticisms, the possibility for Americans to participate in and contribute to public life is heavily dependent on the role of the press. The architects of the United States Constitution protected this entity in the First Amendment, arguably linked with the preceding protection of free speech. However, in recent decades, due to a lack of culture-building among the media elite, American journalism has been losing its influence in the global public square. The failure of journalists to simultaneously uphold objectivity and preserve the enchantment of storytelling has become a detriment to the industry. An “empirical fit” must be kept intact for the proper dissemination of ideas and knowledge to the public.<sup>50</sup> The predominant role of economic forces initially drove the professionalization of journalism and forced the industry to value profit- margins over the enhancement of public philosophy. This shift was driven by technological changes over the last century, as well as changes in economics, which impacted many areas of social, cultural and political life. Similar to the economic reality of globalization, the communication of knowledge has the ability to readily flow across borders in a process of “unbundling,” as described by Richard Baldwin in *The Great Convergence*.

The multiplicity and complexity of these elements understandably affects the epistemological realities of the modern American journalist. Journalism continues to represent a healthy medium and accountability between governmental affairs and public knowledge. However, the possibility for the industry to foster a stronger sense of belonging in discourse appears less achievable than even Lippman could have perceived more than a century ago. Reflective of readers and viewers across the country, the

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<sup>50</sup> Tilley, T. W. (September 1, 1977) Ian Ramsey and Empirical Fit. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 45, 3, p.357.

media elite should undergo a “national soul searching” and rediscover the original intent of newsgathering to stimulate and build cultural debate.

*“When words are used merely as instruments of publicity or propaganda, they lose their power to persuade.”<sup>51</sup>*

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<sup>51</sup> Lasch, p.175.

## Resources

- Bailenson, J. (January 15, 2018). How virtual reality could change the journalism industry. Retrieved from [www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/makingsense/how-virtual-reality-could-change-the-journalism-industry](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/makingsense/how-virtual-reality-could-change-the-journalism-industry).
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