

# FACTFILE:

## GCSE

# JOURNALISM IN THE MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

## UNIT 3: INDUSTRY, THEORY AND PRACTICE



## The Role and Purpose of Journalism and Technology and Modern Journalism

### Part 1, Section A: Technology, Conventions and Modern Journalism

#### THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF JOURNALISM and TECHNOLOGY AND MODERN JOURNALISM

#### Purpose of Factfile?

To enable students to develop knowledge and understanding of the role and purpose of journalism and the impact of technology on modern journalism.

#### Specific Learning Outcomes supported by the FactFile?

Students should be able to:

- explain the responsibility of the journalist in relation to the fourth estate; and
- explain the difference between public service commercial news media outlets in terms of funding and output (Role and Purpose of Journalism);

and

- identify and define the following trends in journalism arising from the development of technology, including:
  - multi-platform journalism;
  - digital interactivity;
  - social media; and
  - citizen journalism. (Technology and Modern Journalism)

#### Target audience? Student? Teacher? Both?

Teacher and Student.

#### How the FactFile supports development of Key Stage 4 Statutory skills?

Opportunities for UICT, PS, WO and Comm throughout.

#### FactFile Content

Unit 3 of the GCSE Journalism course is assessed through an online examination, and Section A of the exam draws on students' knowledge of the role of journalism and the impact of technology on modern journalism, among other topics. Students may be asked to explain and identify definitions and current understanding of each of these areas. They must therefore be able to confidently recognise and recall definitions of the journalist's responsibility in relation to the fourth estate, of journalism's role in society and of the differences between public service and commercial news. They must also be able to recall key trends which have arisen in Journalism as a result of the development of technology, particularly online technology.

This factfile is intended to clarify these areas of content. Similar factfiles on the conventions of print, radio, TV and online formats, professional roles in journalism and journalism law, regulation and ethics are also available from the CCEA microsite.

## The Role of Journalism

Journalists play an incredibly important role in society. Millions of people rely on journalists to find out all kinds of information: from weather forecasts to traffic reports to updates during an emergency or crisis. By supplying reliable information, journalists allow the public to be well informed about what is going on in many different areas of life.

Journalists have three main functions:

- to inform;
- to educate; and
- to entertain.

Of these three, informing is the most important. Fundamentally, the role of journalism is to report 'news' – facts and information – to citizens who can then make their own opinions and judgments. However, in addition to news stories, the media provides investigative reports, background information, analysis, and opportunities for debate and discussion. All of these are vital if a healthy, democratic society is to function properly.

### The Fourth Estate: the importance of journalism in a democracy

In any democratic system of government, the media supplies voters with the information they need to make informed choices, for example, about how they are going to vote in an election.

On a day-to-day basis, journalism acts as a public 'watchdog' on the government and people in power. Journalists follow politicians carefully to make sure they are carrying out voters' wishes and that they don't abuse their positions, for example by wasting tax payers' money.

The principle of 'freedom of speech' – meaning that people have the right to freely express their views and opinions, and to question or criticise the government – is a democratic principle. Freedom of speech, sometimes called 'free speech' or 'freedom of expression', is also a human right (Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights). This right is enabled by journalism. When speech is truly 'free', the media is independent and not controlled by the government.

Freedom of speech is important because if the media was not able to report truthfully on events, important information might be hidden and voters would remain in the dark.

Equally, if the media was not allowed to facilitate open and free discussion, the views and concerns of ordinary people might not be heard.

Journalism is sometimes called '**the Fourth Estate**' to describe this vital role it plays as a pillar of democracy. In some undemocratic countries which do not have a free, independent media (or a 'free press'), journalists face the threat of death for reporting what those in government do not want to be reported.

## Ownership: Public Service and Commercial News

### Broadcast Media and Ownership

Broadcast media in the UK and Ireland is divided into two categories:

- *public service broadcasting*, delivered by corporations such as the BBC and RTE; and
- *commercial broadcasting*, produced by private media companies such as ITV and UTV.
- Public service broadcasters like the BBC are funded by license fees paid by taxpayers, so they don't have private owners or shareholders.
- Private media companies are owned by individuals, families or shareholders. These commercial media companies, which often produce both broadcast and print media, are run to make a profit.

Different types of ownership can have an effect on broadcast journalism and on what is reported and how. Commercial stations strive to achieve high ratings in their programmes in order to attract advertisers, as they depend on these advertisers for revenue. This can lead to claims that content is 'dumbed down', including news reporting on programmes like ITV's News at Ten. Commercial broadcasters can also be in danger of becoming beholden to the interests of their advertisers or sponsors. In 2012, BskyB heavily sponsored the cycling team led by Bradley Higgins in the Tour de France, and their progress got high coverage on Sky News.

State-funded or partly state-funded channels (like BBC and Channel Four), which have a public service remit, can arguably pay less attention to ratings and focus more on quality reporting and investigative journalism. BBC examples of this would include Panorama and Spotlight. However, because they rely on state funding, public service broadcasters are open to accusation of being the 'mouthpiece of the state'.

### Print Media and Ownership

In the UK, newspapers are privately owned, and just a few large companies dominate this market. Currently, 70 per cent of UK newspapers are owned by just three companies: News UK, Daily Mail and General Trust, and Trinity Mirror.

### Ownership Rules and Freedom of Speech

Freedom of speech is supported when a wide variety of sources of news, information and opinion are represented in the media.

To help protect the principle of free speech, there are media ownership rules for television, radio and newspapers in the UK. Major takeovers have to be given the go-ahead by regulators such as OfCom, as well as by politicians. A '20-20' rule exists to prevent any person who owns a national newspaper group from holding more than 20 per cent of an independent TV service. This rule prevents owners such as Rupert Murdoch, who owns the News UK newspaper group (which includes The Times, Sunday Times and The Sun), as well as the broadcaster Sky, from gaining too much power and influence.

The Republic of Ireland has drawn up similar legislation on mergers. Irish media is concentrated in the hands of billionaire businessman Denis O'Brien who owns the Irish Independent, The Sunday Independent and six radio stations including Today FM and Newstalk.

### Digital Technology and Modern Journalism

In recent years, the scope and practice of journalism has changed significantly. The invention of the internet and the development of social media like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or WhatsApp, as well as devices like smartphones or tablets, has allowed journalism to go digital.

It has also changed the nature of journalism in two main ways:

#### 1. The public has more instant access to information

24/7 news channels and online media mean that news is no longer limited to a newspaper or hourly broadcast bulletins, as it was in the past. News is now published almost as soon as it happens ('breaking news'). Stories develop as more information comes to light, and are updated frequently.

#### 2. The public can interact with journalism.

Through blogs and social media, ordinary people can interact with journalists and contribute to stories. They can make their views known by posting comments or tweets, re-tweeting or 'liking' posts or stories which may then start to 'trend', or by participating in online activities such as polls. This is called 'digital interactivity'.

### Student Activity:

1. Go online and find three examples of how digital interactivity has been used in journalism within the past week.
2. Find a story in your local newspaper. Describe how, in its online version, this story might benefit from digital interactivity.

### Citizen Journalism

Digital technology enables members of the public to upload their own photos or videos onto the internet, which may then be shared or used by journalists. If a member of the public breaks or publishes a news story on social media, they are known as a 'citizen journalist', a form of amateur journalist.

#### Positives of citizen journalism

- Ordinary citizens are a hugely important source of news.
- The general public has a role in forming the news agenda.
- Citizens can supply news from places, e.g. war zones, that journalists cannot easily access.
- Informative, specialised blogs can shed light and facilitate discussions on many different topics.

#### Negatives of citizen journalism

- The general public is not trained or qualified to report accurately and objectively, so citizen journalism can be misleading or inaccurate.
- Professional journalists are still needed to fact-check stories and verify that they are true and accurate.
- Many blogs online are highly subjective, self-indulgent and opinionated.
- 'Fake news' can be spread by people deliberately trying to spread rumours or lies.

## Fake News

Getting the facts right is a fundamental principle of journalism. However, in the social media age, rumours, propaganda or lies – all falsely presented as ‘news’ – can be easily spread. In a world where people can feel swamped by an ‘information overload’ and the hundreds of stories which may or may not include ‘fake news’, the role of professional journalists is more important than ever before. Because people don’t have time to verify all the stories they find online, they need trusted journalists to filter, check and analyse news.

Professional journalism is essential, but it is not free. More and more, people are willing to pay to access news from a brand they can rely on.

### Example:

During the American presidential elections of 2016, ‘fake news’ – false stories about the presidential candidates – was spread by propagandists who used outlets including Facebook and Google. The problem of fake news has highlighted the challenges of living in a digital age, as well as the importance of protecting and cherishing real journalism.

## Student Activity:

Find two examples of ‘fake news’ stories online. How do you know they are fake?

## Questions to consider?

- What role does journalism play in society?
- What does freedom of speech mean and why is it important?
- What is the difference between a public service broadcaster and a commercial broadcaster?
- How has digital technology transformed journalism?

## Additional information sources

### BBC Bitesize

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/guides/zyt282p/revision>

### American Press Institute

<https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/what-is-journalism/purpose-journalism/>

### Guardian article on citizen journalism

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2012/jun/11/rise-of-citizen-journalism>

### BBC article on citizen journalism

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2008/11/the\\_role\\_of\\_citizen\\_journalism.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2008/11/the_role_of_citizen_journalism.html)

### How BBC news uses social media

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schoolreport/35039868>

