

Friday 6th July:

Digital Ink: The Future of Journalism

Paul Chadwick, Chris Graham, Colleen Ryan, Francis Wheen,

I saw a 20 year-old carrying a newspaper at the University a few months back. It was remarkable enough to be, well, remarkable.

The dead tree version of newspapers is not going to go away any time soon, not least because baby-boomer lovers of the format clearly intend to live forever. However, it has long lost its primacy as a source of information on the world and is no longer even the dominant forum for the digestion of the information into opinion. As the economics of newspapers (and of TV broadcasting in due course) weaken, the way 'good journalism' has been funded in the past comes under pressure. Does digital technology provide alternative ways of performing this function that are as good as or even better than traditional print journalism? Or has something that has been socially and politically useful for at least the last century withering?

Techno-utopians tell us not to worry, that the Web will provide more and better of everything. 'More' I don't doubt for a moment – there is lots of valuable information available that would once never have been available. Indeed, 'better' can be the case too – some parts of the blogosphere permit deeper, more expert, and less 'spun' analysis than often occurs in the traditional media. But two concerns nag:

- Some digital commentary is good but a very great deal is ratty and 'interested'. The conventions for locating the authoritative material if you are relatively uniformed on a particular topic are not at all clear.
- What is the business model for maintaining good deliberative analysis on the web for when newspapers and media organizations have laid off all their journalists and replaced them with 'bots' crawling automatically through digitally available media releases?

In other words, is there a future for journalism in something like the form we have known it?