



UNIT-06

Online Journalism

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Explain the extent to which online journalism differs from conventional journalism, including its potential advantages and disadvantages
- ✓ Discuss the various sources of information that may be used by digital journalists when searching for information online
- ✓ Understand the benefits and potential limitations of search engines when browsing for information for news stories on the web

Unit 6

Online Journalism

The practise of professional journalism in an electronic environment while adhering to the general principles and rules of journalism is known as online journalism (Bulunmaz, 2011). Furthermore, as the definition implies, this entails presenting information to the audience in a different format by utilising the capabilities of traditional journalism technology.

Internet journalism is now supported by faster, more visual, and auditory elements, and is becoming a more popular medium as it improves audience access to information and can disseminate news instantly - without incurring additional financial costs.

While the advancement of digital communication technology has brought new functionality to our lives, such as multi-media, interactivity, and connectivity, it has also given rise to new journalistic opportunities by forming new structures within the media industry. While Deuze (2003) defined Internet journalism as the fourth type of journalism, Pavlik (2001) claimed that communication technologies like the Internet have given rise to a new journalistic style known as "contextualised journalism." The Internet has influenced journalism in two ways, according to Deuze (2004): the creation of a journalist profile for all media types and the creation of unique working practises.

The advancement of communication technologies has allowed the industry to take advantage of the expanded capabilities of the Internet environment, allowing users to become active participants in the communication process and even create their own content. This has resulted in a blurring of the lines between the journalist and the reader, as well as a lack of clarity between the various forms of media, such as radio, television, and newspapers, which have clear and distinct boundaries.

Digital Journalism and New Media Tools

The list below contains a number of commonly used tools that are frequently used as a starting point in much digital journalism:

Research:

- Google
- Bing
- Wikipedia
- News alerts
- RSS feeds

Crowd -sourcing or information sharing:

- Google Drive
- Sky Drive

- Dropbox
- Cloud sharing

Social networks:

- Facebook
- Google+
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Ning
- Digg

Blogging

- Wordpress
- Blogger

Photo sharing

- Pinterest
- Photobucket
- Picasa
- Instagram
- 500px

Video search and editing

- YouTube
- Vimeo
- Kaltura

Slideshows

- Soundslides
- Slideshare

Live streaming

- Bambuser
- Ustream

Mapping

- Google Maps

- Ushahidi

Timelines

- Storify
- Timeline

Other Basic Equipment for Producing a Multimedia Story:

- Digital camera
- Mobile phone with still and video camera
- Audio recorder]
- Mobile phones
- Smart phones capable for use in digital stories production and publishing.

Gathering Information:

With the advancement of computer networking, journalists now have access to new sources and tools such as bulletin boards and social media. These sources can all be classified as electronic information sources. Electronic databases are perhaps the most important among them because of their dependability. E-mail, telnet, Internet browsers, and search engines are other important tools used by journalists.

World Wide Web (WWW)

What is the World Wide Web (WWW)?

The Web is the most common name for the World Wide Web, which is abbreviated as WWW. The World Wide Web is a worldwide network of computers. Computers on the Internet can communicate with one another. HTTPS is a communication standard that is used by all of the computers.

All public Websites connected to the Internet worldwide, as well as client devices (such as computers and cell phones) that access Web content, make up the World Wide Web. The World Wide Web is just one of many Internet and computer network applications.

These technologies underpin the World Wide Web:

- HTML - an acronym for Hypertext Markup Language.
- Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) - a protocol that allows you to send and receive data over
- Web browsers and servers

Search Engines

What is the definition of a Search Engine?

A search engine is an online tool for finding information on the internet. General search engines will look

for any website, subject, or file type. Specialty search engines will look for a specific type of file or a specific subject. Search engines collect websites using software programmes known as "spiders" which crawl the web and look for websites. Website creators can also register their site with a specific search engine to ensure that it is included in that search engine's results. A search engine is essentially a software programme that searches for websites based on the words you specify as search terms. In order to find what you're looking for, search engines look through their own databases of information.

Search engines use robots or spiders, which are automated programmes that follow links on websites and collect data as they go. When someone submits a search query to a search engine, the engine returns a list of sites that are ranked according to their relevance to the search terms. The way search engines evaluate your site and determine the relevance of the words is often determined by the search engine in question. Artificial intelligence is used by some engines, such as Excite, to recognise concepts that frequently appear together. Other search engines prioritise the most popular sites.

The majority of users prefer a search engine with three key features:

- Relevant outcomes (results you are actually interested in)
- An interface that is uncluttered and easy to read
- Options for broadening or narrowing a search.

Human editors create listings for human-powered directories like the Yahoo directory, Open Directory, and LookSmart. Webmasters typically submit a brief description of their websites to the directory, or editors write one for the sites they review, and these manually edited descriptions form the search base. As a result, changes made to individual web pages have no bearing on how they appear in search results.

When you're looking for information on a broad topic, human-powered directories are useful. In this case, a directory can guide and assist you in narrowing your search and obtaining more refined results.

Meta-search engines like Dogpile, Mamma, and Metacrawler send user-supplied keywords to several different search engines at the same time to perform the search. Meta-search engines can integrate search results from all search engines, eliminate duplicates, and implement additional features such as subject clustering within search results.

Meta-search engines are useful for saving time by allowing users to search in one place rather than having to learn and use multiple search engines. "However, because meta-search engines do not allow for the input of many search variables, they are best used to find hits on obscure items or to see if something can be found on the Internet."

Chat and Newsgroups

Chat

Chat is an online conversation in which you can instantly send messages back and forth to one another. Typically, this "talking" is the exchange of typed-in messages requiring one site as the repository for the messages (or "chat site") and a group of users who can participate from anywhere on the Internet. In some cases, a private chat can be arranged between two parties who meet initially in a group chat.

If you have the bandwidth and the appropriate programming, you can conduct a chat using sound or sound and video. Some chat sites, such as Worlds Chat, allow participants to assume the role or appearance of an avatar in a simulated or virtual reality environment.

The Different Types of Chat

Instant Messaging

Instant messaging (IM) is one of the most popular forms of communication; most IM software can handle group chats (with three or more people). When you first start IM'ing, you must choose a name that people will recognise.

ICQ ("I seek you")

When you download ICQ (which is free), you are assigned an ICQ number. Two or more people using ICQ can have the same nickname, but no two people can have the same ICQ number. If you want someone to contact you via ICQ, give them both your ICQ# and your nickname so they don't accidentally contact someone else with the same nickname.

RC – Internet Relay Chat

Unlike AOL Instant Messenger and ICQ, IRC (Internet Relay Chat) is not owned by any company, and you must use an IRC client programme to use it.

IRC has a number of networks that are completely separate from one another, including The Undernet, EFnet, and DALnet. If you want to chat with someone on IRC, make sure you're both on the same network (you can set it and change it each time you start your IRC program.)

What Is a Chat Room?

With electronic chats, individuals log into a system and can communicate directly with anyone else logged into the same system within seconds of writing a comment online, and everyone else logged into the system can view and respond to these initial remarks.

Chat rooms can be used to have formal or informal discussions about current events, controversies, readings, common experiments, business plans, and a variety of other topics. They can also be used by students to present and describe their work to others; feedback or advice can be sought from other students.

Participants can foster a sense of community among groups of students who would otherwise be unable to communicate formally or informally (e.g., geographically dispersed).

The following are some of the most commonly used chat programmes and protocols:

- AOL Instant Messenger (AIM)
- Camfrog
- Campfire

- Google Talk
- Apple Messages
- I2P-Messenger
- ICQ (OSCAR)
- Internet Relay Chat (IRC)
- Yahoo! Messenger
- MUD
- Paltalk
- QQ
- ActivEngage
- SILC
- Skype
- Talk
- Talker
- TeamSpeak (TS)
- WhatsApp
- Windows Live Messenger
- XMPP

Newsgroups

Unlike e-mail messages, which are only visible to the sender and specified recipients, newsgroup messages are visible to anyone who views the group in which they are posted. Newsgroups are international in scope, with participants from all corners of the Internet.

You'll need a newsreader programme, such as Windows Mail, to view messages in a newsgroup; you'll use the newsreader to download messages from a news server. Many Internet service providers (ISPs) provide customers with access to news servers, which typically contain thousands of groups covering a wide range of topics. Some news servers contain specialised topics, such as news about specific technologies or information related to specific governmental agencies.

Types of Newsgroups

Newsgroups are organised into a hierarchy that dates back to the early 1980s, with each type of newsgroup represented by an extension; an example of some of the different types of extensions and their meanings can be found below (for Google newsgroups):

- **alt.** - Any conceivable topic.
- **biz.** - Business products, services, reviews
- **comp.** - Hardware, software, consumer info
- **humanities.** - Fine art, literature, philosophy

- **misc.** - Employment, health, and much more
- **news.** - Info about Usenet News
- **rec.** - Games, hobbies, sports
- **sci.** - Applied science, social science
- **soc.** - Social issues, culture
- **talk.** - Current issues and debates

Videocasting, Podcasting:

What is Video Casting and Blogging?

Like any other form of blogging, video blogging (vlogging) is done with the help of videos. You either self-host your video or use free services like YouTube and Vimeo to host your videos.

What is Audio Blogging, and how does it work?

By combining the words "audio" and "blogging," audioblogging is a type of blogging in which bloggers replace the majority of their text posts with voice recordings, while pictures, which are common in blogs, continue to accompany the voice narration in blog posts.

Writing for the Web

Mojos are mobile journalists equipped with notepads, cameras, recorders, cell phones, and laptop computers so they can file community news stories for the Web at a moment's notice. They don't go to a newspaper office; their office is in their cars, and their deadlines are whenever they get their information.

Web skills are no longer an optional asset; they are critical for media careers in print, broadcast, and public relations. The basic concept for breaking news on the Web is short, fast, and frequent. The Web is no longer the last place to post news; it is the first. Web skills are no longer an optional asset; they are crucial for media careers in print, broadcast, and public relations.

Most news organisations used to simply publish the same information on their Websites as they did in their newspapers or on television reports, but now they're using the Web to create original content, such as multimedia presentations and interactive features like blogs, games, and searchable graphics or databases.

For print journalists, mobile journalism may be the wave of the future, but television stations have been using mobile vans to cover breaking news for years.

The news is posted on "microsites," subsidiary sites of the newspaper's main Web site, which contain breaking news, community profiles, searchable databases, archives, and places for readers to post comments and blogs.

In a Web-centric society, some of the most important qualities of journalism are:

Immediacy: News must be updated throughout the day, and as soon as new information becomes

available, it should be posted on the Web, where it can be delivered to cell phones, e-mail addresses, and Websites via RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds.

Interactivity: Interactive graphics allow readers to click on a map or illustration to find the cheapest gas prices or check crime rates in their neighbourhoods, whereas journalists are no longer the only source of news. Websites feature blogs and messages posted by subscribers to the site, and interactive graphics allow readers to click on a map or illustration to find the cheapest gas prices or check crime rates in their neighbourhoods.

Multimedia: A multimedia story is any story that uses a variety of media such as text with photographs, video, audio, and graphics. Sophisticated multimedia projects feature several of these elements as well as interactivity.

Innovation: Think long and short—full-length stories or miniprofiles; question/answer instead of text; photographs to tell the story, quizzes, lists, and games—and be creative. You can still use the inverted pyramid for breaking news stories, but you can also tell stories in a variety of other ways.

Web-based Reporting

In any medium, good reporting is similar, but the Web requires some additional tools and reporting steps.

Target Full Coverage: Prepare your story for text delivery as well as audio or video elements, and get the full text of a speech, a city budget, a list of contest winners, or other additional information to post on the Internet.

Timelines: When covering a major disaster or crime event, make a note of the time periods in your notes so that you can create a timeline that can be shared on the Internet.

Equipment: Take a tape recorder for audio sound bites and some form of digital storage media such as a flash drive for extended information, in addition to a notebook and pens or pencils for basic reporting; other necessities include a cell phone to call in your story, a digital camera, extra batteries, and a notebook computer if you are going to transmit a story from your location.

Updates and Follow-Up Stories: File your story in a brief form as soon as the news breaks, then plan an updated version for your next print edition. If you're covering a major breaking-news event, plan an updated version for your next print edition.

Check for Accuracy and Timeliness: If you're using information from the Web, double-check the information's date and the Web site's reliability for accuracy: is it from a government agency, a university, a reputable media organisation, or a personal site?

E-mail Reporting: It's a good way to reach people and get limited information, but face-to-face or telephone interviewing is still preferable.

Writing for the Internet

Linear vs. Nonlinear

Although many Web stories are still written in linear order, Web readers have nonlinear options for accessing related elements linked to the story or the site due to the interactive nature of the Web. Print and broadcast stories, on the other hand, are written in linear order from beginning to end, as in a straight line, giving readers no choice but to stop reading.

External or Embedded Links

Should you include links within the text (embedded) or at the end (external) of your story? According to the AP Stylebook, include URLs (Internet addresses) within the text if they refer to a site being discussed, but place them at the end if they provide additional information. In the past, most Web designers and usability experts recommended placing links on the side or at the end of a story because a reader who clicked on an embedded link might not return to the story.

The hyperlink nature of the Web changes the way writers must plan their stories, whether readers scan or thoroughly read Web stories; you must plan the story before the story is written.

Most news organisations use formatted programmes for Web stories, so you won't have to worry about designing the Web page for your story. If you're planning to create a multimedia package or Web site, you should take a Web design course. Web designers plan sites by drawing a "storyboard," which is similar to an organisational chart, to show the main parts and related pieces.

Before you start writing your story, think about how you want it to be organised. Will it be one page of text, or will it be broken up into chunks? Will you use photos, audio, or video? Will there be sidebars?

Some things to think about:

Timelines: Does the story lend itself to the creation of a time line as a background?

FAQ: Would a question-and-answer format or FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) be an effective way to present or accompany the story?

Interactivity: Will the story include an interactive element such as a discussion question, poll, quiz, searchable databases, or other data that the reporter may need to gather in order to engage readers?

Lists or Data for Full Coverage: Will the story be accompanied by a complete list of contest winners, school test scores, or other information for full coverage?

Miniprofiles: Do you need short biographies of the sources for a story about candidates or a long feature series?

Multimedia: Will there be audio or video in the story? Will you need to tape an interview for sound bites?

Related Links: Although some organisations have researchers or Web producers who find related links, you should include the relevant links when writing your own stories.

Reporters' E-mail Addresses: While not all news sites include this information, it's a good idea to include your e-mail address in your byline.

Your story's checklist might look something like this:

- Headline
- Highlights (above or on the side—optional)
- Summary blurb
- Main story—one scrolling text page or divided into chunks of several Web pages
- Breaking news brief or updates
- Links to related stories and sources (preferably on the side or at the end)

Story Planning

- Time lines
- Short bios of main sources
- Full text of speeches, reports, budgets or lists of winners
- Photos/graphics
- Multimedia (audio or video)
- Searchable databases
- Interactive elements: polls, games, quizzes, blogs, discussion questions or places for readers to post messages.

Writing Techniques

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to writing for the Web; choose the format that best suits the story or purpose. Is your goal to inform, entertain, or do both? If you're writing for a corporate or public relations website, figure out how to convey information quickly and clearly.

If you're writing news, the inverted pyramid is a good choice for breaking or serious news. If you want to tell a good story, a narrative form might be better.

The following are effective for web writing:

- Write concisely.
- Write for readers who scan Websites rather than reading thoroughly.
- Avoid "fluffy marketese" in your writing.
- Use everyday language rather than jargon.

- In the first two paragraphs, state the most important information.

Other writing guidelines that apply to most Web stories are as follows:

- Write a clear focus statement or nut graph early in the story, especially if you're using an anecdotal lead, so that readers understand what the story is about and why they're reading it.
- Avoid sentences with long clauses and complex sentences because reading on computer monitors is more difficult than reading in print.
- Be succinct.
- When the story lends itself to itemised information, use bulleted lists to help readers scan the text.
- Each paragraph should only contain one idea.
- Write in the active voice: Who did what, not what was done to whom; the student won an award, not the student won an award.
- Unless the source is well-known or the main character in the story, only use the last name on the second reference in subsequent screens or Web pages.
- Use the blocking technique to limit each source's comments to one block in the story so the reader doesn't have to scroll up and down a page or refer to a previous page to remember someone's name.
- Keep paragraphs to a minimum.
- Use a conversational tone, as if you were speaking to a single reader. Borrow from broadcast writing; the "you" voice works well online. Try to convey what the story means to the reader.

Briefs, Headlines, and Blurbs

The smaller elements of a story - headlines, summary blurbs, and briefs - are known as "microcontent," and they are the most important factor in determining whether someone will click into the story. Clarity is critical. The headline and a summary blurb of one or two sentences should accurately summarise the story. Readers in a hurry want to know exactly what they're getting when they link into a story.

Headlines

Write Short Headlines: Headlines with fewer than six to ten words generate more links than headlines with two or three lines:

Kids are solicited online, according to a study (or)
Kids are solicited online,

Some headlines may be written without verbs:

Top 10 diet tips to lose 10 pounds in five weeks (or)
Top 10 diet tips (no verb)

Put the Most Important Words First: Mickey Mouse was assaulted, according to police.

Avoid using the, a, or an at the beginning of a Headline:

Cheating is simple on the internet.

Not: The Internet facilitates cheating.

If the subject is interesting enough to entice readers, use question Headlines:

Is work causing you neck or hand pain?

Blurbs

The majority of news sites simply repeat the story lead for the blurb beneath the headline, which is fine if the lead gives the main point of the story. However, if the lead does not give the main point of the story, write a clear summary or use the nut graph as the blurb.

Blurb Advice

- Write a Clear Summary: Use the nut graph as the summary blurb if the lead is creative.
- Write summaries that don't repeat the headline.
- When it's appropriate, use the "you" voice to address the reader.

Briefs

A brief can stand alone in place of a story, whereas a blurb is meant to entice readers to read more. Sometimes there isn't much difference between a blurb and a brief. In most cases, the blurb and the brief repeat the lead or the first few paragraphs of the full text.

The main reason for using blurbs and briefs is to provide readers with a layering system: some Web users want to read only the headline, while others want a brief summary, and still others want the entire story.

EXAMPLE

HEADLINE: Long-lost pet reappears as a meal

BLURB: A woman claims to have found her family's missing pet rabbit at a neighbourhood barbecue, where it was served as the main course.

BRIEF: A woman claims to have found her family's missing pet rabbit at a neighbourhood barbecue, where it was served as the main course.

Online Research and Sources

Human Sources

Human sources are necessary for news writing to be credible and readable; information from eyewitnesses and participants gives a story immediacy, and direct quotes and sound bites make a story interesting. Human sources can be found in a variety of ways.

News Releases: Every news release includes a contact person, usually a public information officer or a public relations contact; contact that person first, but don't stop there; whenever possible, ask to speak with the people mentioned in the news release.

Up and down the Ladder: Who is in charge of the organisation or department? You could start at the top by contacting the department head, but for many other stories, you should also go down the ladder and try to contact the person who was closest to the incident. For example, if you're writing a police story, try to contact the officer who was on the scene, and if you're writing about a study, try to contact the professor or researcher who conducted the study.

Names in the News: When you read or watch a news story in a newspaper, on television, or on the Internet, don't just quote the story; contact the primary source—the person involved. This is especially true when you read about a survey or study.

Get to know the administrative assistants, sometimes still referred to as "secretaries," of officials in a corporation or department. This is especially important if you have a beat—a specific area of coverage such as education, government, police, or other specialties that you are responsible for covering on a regular basis—as you may not be able to access the sources you require without the assistance of the administrative assistant.

Leaders in your Community: Determine who the leaders of various groups are in your community and on campus; don't limit your sources to these individuals; however, they may be useful initial resources who can lead you to others.

Sponsorship: This technique entails introducing yourself to a source through a contact the source may know; someone you know can "sponsor" you in contacting the source you desire.

Self-sponsorship: If you have previously reported and written a news story about a subject of interest to the source you are attempting to contact, you can sponsor yourself by referring to the relevant article or newscast you reported when you contact the source.

Matchmaking: After you've contacted one source and want to find more, use the matchmaking technique, which is similar to the sponsorship method, and ask the source who else you should contact about the situation.

Fairness: If you're writing a story about a conflict, find sources who can give you both sides of the story, and don't report any accusations about someone without first contacting the person who made them.

Primary and Secondary Sources: When conducting an interview, if your source says something derogatory or controversial about another person, double-check with that person; the first source's statements may not only be incorrect; they may also be libellous. You should also double-check written information about sources to ensure that it is accurate.

Blogs: Internet postings from people who have written blogs about a topic can be good sources for you to contact; don't quote from a blog without first contacting the author.

Also, don't take information from blogs as news; blogs are typically opinion columns and personal

reflections, but they can be useful for locating human sources.

Anonymous Sources

Many people will talk to you if you promise not to use their names. (Most people use the terms "anonymous source" and "confidential source" interchangeably.) But should you make this promise? Most editors today would say no, unless there is no other way to get the information. And even then, many editors would refuse to grant that immunity from identification.

The Associated Press' policy on anonymous sources is as follows: "Reporters should proceed with interviews on the assumption that they are on the record; if the source wants to set conditions, these should be negotiated at the start of the interview; at the end of the interview, the reporter should try once more to move some or all of the information back on the record."

Written Sources and Human Sources

Even if you rely on Google and other Internet search engines, don't overlook some traditional printed sources for additional clues about human sources and other information.

Libraries

Encyclopaedias, almanacks, and other books of facts, population data, and financial records of major corporations are some of the most useful reference works, and many of these resources are also available online. Most college and university libraries also have a section devoted to federal and state documents and publications, where you can find transparencies of federal and state documents and publications.

Telephone Directories: The white and yellow pages of phone books are the most common places to find sources, and most local telephone books also include information about city and county government agencies, utilities, and other commonly used services.

Even when sources agree to be identified, they frequently request anonymity for portions of the interview, stating, "This is off the record," perhaps not knowing what the term means.

Here are some definitions of terms commonly used in interviews to establish ground rules:

On the Record: The source agrees that all information can be used in a news story and that he can be identified as the source. The easiest way to establish this understanding is to identify yourself as a reporter right away and state your purpose for the interview. If you're interviewing people who aren't used to dealing with the media, you may need to remind the source during the interview that you're quoting him about the material, especially if you're interviewing people who aren't used to dealing

However, it is preferable to take that risk during the interview than later in a courtroom after you have been sued.

Off the Record: You may not use the information from this source at all; however, you may use it if you can get the same information from another source; however, you may not attribute it to the source who told you off the record.

Not for Attribution: You may use the information as background, but you must not attribute it to the source.

Background: This is similar to the term "not for attribution," in that you can use the information but not attribute it. Some reporters define background as the ability to use the information with a general attribution, such as "a city official said." If you're unsure, ask the source how you can identify him during the interview and give the specific wording you intend to use.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *The Online Journalism Handbook: Skills to Survive and Thrive in the Digital Age, by Paul Bradshaw | Aug 14, 2017*
- ✓ *Journalism, Online Comments, and the Future of Public Discourse, by Marie K. Shanahan | Dec 10, 2019*