



UNIT-02 Researching and Recording Information

Learning Outcomes

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

- ✓ Describe the main differences between original and supplementary sources of information for journalists
- ✓ Understand the potential benefits and limitations of different types of information sources in journalism
- ✓ Draw distinctions between information that is accurate and tip-offs that may be misleading or deliberately malicious in nature

Unit 2

Researching and Recording Information

Introduction

From local and regional newspapers to national titles, from 'fanzine' magazines to specialist publications, from campus radio stations to local and national radio stations, and from community television stations to national and satellite broadcasters, there is a very broad range of journalistic practises.

Journalists, whether in the print or broadcast industries, rely on information sources to survive. As news stories, radio features, and television news packages, they provide the essential basic information for further development. Some argue that in this context, distinguishing between primary and secondary sources is largely academic. Is a video news clip of a witness describing an event secondary because it was recorded or primary because the person is providing first-hand information?

Many journalists still believe there is a distinction between primary and secondary information sources. In simple terms, a primary source is one that the journalist has personally researched through face-to-face interviews, visits, observation, and first-hand experience.

Secondary research is defined as the use of any existing material, whether it is written, stored on electronic databases, audio/video recorded on various formats, or found on the Internet.

Original and Supplementary Sources of Information for Journalists

Original Sources

Contacts

People who have provided valuable information to a journalist over a period of months or years are known as contacts. They could be a local pub owner, a member of a community or voluntary organisation, or a traffic cop who can be relied on to provide accurate information on a breaking story. The 'contacts book,' which contains the names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and other details of people they can contact for information, is an essential tool for all journalists.

Even with the advent of mobile phones and personal organisers, it is still a good idea to keep a written contacts book, as well as a backup in case the original is stolen or lost. Some journalists who are investigating sensitive areas tend to jot down information in code or, in extreme cases, memorise it.

Tip-offs

Tip-offs, whether from freelancers or members of the general public, are a valuable source of information for broadcasters. Some information may be valid and useful, but it is important to verify its accuracy because it could be completely inaccurate, a hoax, the work of a crank, or the work of

someone with a grudge.

Freelancers

Freelance reporters, also known as "stringers" or "correspondents," are typically experienced reporters who work part-time for a newspaper, radio station, or television station. They will either sell their information individually or as part of a local news agency to the appropriate organisation.

They are cost effective on the radio because they are only paid if their report is broadcast, but their newspaper copy may be a little 'colourful' to sell the copy. They are, however, a valuable source of material for overburdened newsrooms.

Routine Phone Calls

Routine calls, also known as 'check calls,' are an important source of data that are made on a daily or hourly basis as a matter of course by junior members of staff. Calls to emergency services such as police, fire, ambulance, hospitals, and coastguards are made on a regular basis.

Basic information is sometimes revealed by the services, but it may be necessary to combine data from some or all of them to form a more detailed picture of an incident (similar to the 'jigsaw effect' in court reporting). Some emergency service press releases are taped, and the quality of the information may vary in terms of depth and timeliness. Similarly, it is critical to contact the most appropriate and authorised person to obtain the information.

MPs, local council leaders, community and voluntary groups, press secretaries, undertakers, motoring organisations, health authorities, and others may be contacted on a regular basis.

Pressure Groups

Pressure groups are a good source of news, but they obviously have a vested interest in gaining publicity for their cause in the majority of cases. For groups such as trade unions, environmentalists, charities, and welfare organisations, freedom of access is desirable, tempered with a realistic and accurate approach. When dealing with unrepresentative activist groups, caution is advised.

Tribunals and Courts

A reporter's job includes court reporting on a daily basis. From youth and magistrates' courts to crown courts, coroners' courts, and tribunals, assignments can be varied. The use of such information must be accurate and clear in order to capture the reader's imagination without infringing on the rights and restrictions of journalists.

Local Government

Local government, from the parish council to the main local authority, provides journalists with useful information. Unless the meeting is deemed confidential or exempt, the press and public are welcome to attend all council meetings, and reporters must be provided with basic facilities.

Reporting council meetings is often seen as a chore by young reporters, but it can be a rich source of information for follow-up and investigative stories.

Community Affairs

Community affairs can provide a reporter with a wealth of information. Every community has clubs and societies. Arts and leisure organisations, schools, and churches are always looking for opportunities to gain exposure on local radio and television, as well as in the local and regional press.

Volunteer organisations, resident's associations, trade unions, local councillors and politicians, local 'celebrities' or 'in the know', as well as local employers, are all easily accessible sources.

Press Conferences

For a journalist, news or press conferences can provide valuable official and unofficial material. The majority of conferences require the setup of television recording equipment, while radio journalists will use a hand-held mike and press journalists will use a jotting pad and Dictaphone.

Only pre-arranged questions are usually permitted, but if they relate to areas rather than specifics, more in-depth follow-up questions may be necessary to elicit the required information.

Supplementary Sources

Letters

Especially in relation to community issues, planning decisions, central government policies, and environmental and heritage issues, letters to the editor or news desk frequently lead to good stories and reports. Permission to use the material must be obtained from the author, and the content must be checked for accuracy and libellous statements.

Classified Advertisements

The Births, Deaths, and Marriages section of classified ads, in particular, can lead to the development of human interest stories and features suitable for print and broadcast.

Publications

Public relations officers from commercial, voluntary, public, and official organisations send news releases and hand-outs to newsrooms on a regular basis. Most of them end up in the WPB (waste-paper bin) because they're just advertisements for a specific organisation.

Indeed, the person who sent the release may not be the most appropriate or well-informed person to be interviewed on a radio or television programme by broadcast journalists. The majority of news releases will include an embargo, which has no legal standing but requires that the information in the release not be published until a specific date and time.

Other News Sources

Other news outlets, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television, are good sources of information and ideas for further research and new perspectives. When looking for stories to develop for print and broadcast, it's important not to overlook local, ethnic, international, specialist, and even

the journalist's own publications. Keep in mind that the law of copyright does not apply to 'ideas.'

Syndicated Tapes

Syndicated tapes are frequently recorded interviews, announcements, or even entire programmes sent to radio and television stations without charge and without request.

They are almost always from public relations firms looking for free publicity or a boost on the airwaves, and they frequently include advertising. Before considering using the tapes, it is customarily necessary to check their content and technical quality.

Associated Press

News items are also sourced by press or news agencies and sold to the print and broadcast media. There are numerous international, national, and regional organisations, and the following is a list of some of the most important players in this field:

Reuters – provides a fast and reliable news service for broadcast and print media from a network of over 100 offices around the world. It provides a 24-hour news feed, news flashes, live coverage, and in-depth features via satellite, as well as similar online services via the World Wide Web.

United Press International (UPI) is a technology-driven news organisation that provides breaking news, live audio broadcasts, and news photos. It focuses on the Middle East, as well as business, sports, features, breaking news, and political events.

Agence France Presse (AFP) is a large French news agency that publishes news in a variety of languages. International news and picture services are provided to UK media, and UK material is collected for international distribution.

The Associated Press (AP) claims to be the world's largest news organisation and is owned by a group of US media companies. International news and picture services are provided to the UK media, and UK material is collected for American and other clients. The company's Web arm, AP Digital, provides text, audio, video, graphics, and multimedia services, as well as custom content categories, to meet the information needs of specific audiences.

The Press Association (PA) is the UK and Ireland's national news agency, which uses the latest satellite and computer technology to deliver a continuous stream of stories, pictures, alerts, and data to newsrooms of newspapers, broadcasters, and electronic publishers. Foreign news, sports, entertainment, health, and technology are all covered in detail, as well as in-depth coverage of parliament and politics, business and financial news, and weather forecasts. PA News, PA Sport, and PA Data Design are the three companies, with subsidiaries Tellex Monitors, which monitors and reports on news and current affairs on radio and television, and Two-Ten Communications, which provides comprehensive marketing support services to customers.

UK News, founded in 1993 by Westminster Press and Northcliffe Newspapers, provides national and international news, sport, and pictures to regional newspapers, as well as having lobby journalists at the House of Commons.

Press Cuttings Agencies

The Newspaper Licensing Agency (NLA) collects copyright revenue from organisations such as the BBC and the House of Commons that photocopy newspaper articles on a large scale. Charities and schools are exempt from the fees. It was founded in 1996 by a group of national newspapers, and it now represents a diverse range of national, regional, and local publications. Press Select, Tellex Monitors, The Press Data Bureau, and others are NLA-licensed cuttings agencies.

Photographic Agencies

British Library Reproductions, Camera Press, British Film Institute, Hulton-Getty, Action Images, Comstock, and other members of the British Association of Picture Libraries (BAPLA) publish an annual directory of over 300 members, including British Library Reproductions, Camera Press, British Film Institute, Hulton-Getty, Action Images, Comstock, and others.

Online Images

The Cyberpix Guide is a comprehensive guide to the best online photo-sample resources. Corbis, George Eastman House – International Museum of Photography and Film, Kodak, PhotoDisc, Publisher's Depot – PNI, and others are among the companies represented.

News Organisations

Independent Radio News (IRN) – the main UK radio news agency, which collaborates with ITN to provide bulletins and other services to most commercial radio stations. It is a commissioning organisation that is owned by the major radio broadcasting consortia.

ITN (Independent Television News) – ITN provides national and international news to ITV, Channel 4 and 5, as well as IRN. It is owned by a group of prominent cross-media companies. CNN International – Cable News Network International is a wholly owned subsidiary of Time Warner Inc. that broadcasts 24-hour news to more than 200 countries via satellite.

Worldwide Television News (WTN) – owns a large film and video archive collection and provides a 24-hour satellite news service to broadcasters around the world.

Reuters Television - After purchasing Visnews, an international television news provider, in 1992, Reuters Television was renamed and expanded its multimedia operations.

Parliamentary Channel – broadcasts live and recorded coverage of the House of Commons, the House of Lords, Question Time, the European Union, business statements, and Parliamentary Committees. All three American news networks – ABC, NBC, and CBS – have offices in London and provide American and international news.

Local Government

The Municipal Year Book is the most widely used annual directory and review of local government, providing information on councillors and officers. If this is too dry for you, The Local Government Information Unit publishes useful publications with informed debates on local issues from a less official perspective. Abstract of Accounts and Report on the Census are two other titles worth looking

into.

National Government

Information on Parliament can be sought by journalists from a number of publications, including Hansard – the daily verbatim account of Parliamentary speeches, Whitaker's Almanack, Vacher's Parliamentary Companion, Who's Who, Burke's Peerage, Dod's Parliamentary Companion, Keesing's Contemporary Archives, Civil Service Yearbook, Britain: An Official Guide, and other statistical data from the Central Office of Information (COI), the Office of Naylor's Parliamentary Companion, Keesing's Contemporary Archives (HMSO). Additionally, press releases from individual government departments, as well as the Internet, can provide useful information.

Audience Research Organisations

Audience research organisations are extremely useful in highlighting short- and long-term audience viewing, listening, and reading figures in the broadcast and print industries, as well as providing up-to-date and accurate information to journalists. The four main bodies are as follows:

The Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) examines how many copies of a newspaper or magazine were sold over a period of time. Its goal is to provide a benchmark for ad buyers to use when deciding between competing publications, as well as a promotional tool for media owners.

The National Readership Survey (NRS) is a trusted source of audience data for nearly 300 publications, as well as key marketing data. Unlike ABC, it focuses on audience readership profiles in terms of demographics such as age, sex, education, employment, income, and social status, rather than circulation data.

The Broadcasters Audience Research Board (BARB) is the UK's primary source of television audience data and provides information on all aspects of the industry. It generates crucial statistics on audience viewing for both broadcasters and the advertising industry. It also offers an audience reaction service that generates qualitative data on television programme ratings that is kept private from subscriber broadcasters.

RAJAR (Radio Joint Audience Research) is a joint body made up of the BBC and commercial radio stations that conducts detailed audience research by having listeners complete detailed listening diaries over a set period of time. The data includes details such as listening patterns, age, sex, finances, transmission area, and so on, and it gives advertisers and programme controllers insight into audience preferences, allowing for more targeted programming and advertising.

Media Directories

Print and broadcast journalists can benefit from media directories because they provide up-to-date information on all areas and aspects of the industry. Willings Press Guide provides a comprehensive guide to newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, business, and specialist publications in the UK and around the world, in addition to the titles mentioned previously in the section on central government.

BENNS Media has a similar directory that covers all aspects of the UK media industry, as well as European and International editions.

BRAD (British Rate and Data) is a monthly classified directory of advertising-carrying media in the United Kingdom and Ireland. National and regional newspapers, consumer and business press, new and electronic media, television, radio, cinema, posters, and outdoor advertising are all types of media. Subscriptions are also available for BRADnet and BRADbase.

The Media Guide includes a section on the Republic of Ireland and covers most media sectors in the UK. The UK Press Directory gives a comprehensive overview of the newspaper industry, whereas the Media UK Internet Directory lists all online media in the UK, including newspapers, radio, television, and magazines.

The Blue Book of British Broadcasting is an excellent reference source for contacts in TV, radio, and satellite broadcasting, and Kemp's Film, TV, and Video Yearbook is an important directory of international film and television production.

Radio journalists will find The Radio Authority Pocket Guide and The Radio Listener's Guide to be invaluable resources. The Royal Television Society Handbook is a guide and directory for its members, and the Radio Academy Yearbook is a directory of the leading professional society for the radio industry.

The World Wide Web

The Internet has revolutionised information research, allowing anyone to access limitless knowledge at the touch of a keypad. Journalists now have instant access to a wide range of news and information.

Many of the sources listed above have websites where you can find a never-ending stream of information in text, graphic, and moving image formats. A few Internet sites have been mentioned, but it is difficult to provide a comprehensive list; suffice it to say that the Internet is a significant and valuable addition to journalistic research, but it must be approached with caution and respect in terms of information accuracy and self-interest.

Please 'surf the Web' for information, but only as a 'tool, not a master.'

There is a tendency to use the information as it is, rather than coming up with a new angle to create an informative, investigative, and targeted news story for print and broadcast. The Internet provides instant access to a wealth of information that, in meeting a deadline, may actually hinder rather than help a journalist, and traditional sources of information may, ironically, take less time in the daily journalistic routine.

Finally, if used selectively and with discretion, the Internet can be a fantastic source of information for print and broadcast journalists.

Obtaining and Recording Information

Following the identification of information sources, the next step is to conduct research using a variety of methods and approaches, and to record the results in a clear, accurate, and consistent

format. This section will take a broad approach to information gathering and recording, with more specific guidance provided in the chapters on radio, print, and television journalism.

Interviews

Interviewing, whether in person or over the phone, is a common method of gathering information. An informal conversation in a shopping district, a pre-arranged formality with a local dignitary, a chance chat with a radio station caller, a follow-up telephone call, or a location interview for a television report are all possibilities for the interview.

The journalist's primary goal, regardless of the format of the interview, is to elicit information such as facts and opinions about a specific issue, situation, or person. Interviews can be used solely to gather information about the facts surrounding a specific incident or to gain insight into a person's personality for a human interest angle.

The interview may be highly investigative at times, resulting in a confrontational situation. In all interviews, care should be taken to ensure that the information being given is accurate and truthful, and that the interviewee is not withholding facts, intentionally giving false information, or using the opportunity for propaganda purposes for whatever reason.

Interviewing requires preparation, and a journalist should be aware of the background information and purpose of the interview before meeting the interviewee.

Some journalists prepare a list of key questions to ask, while others, particularly on radio, choose the first and last questions and let the interview flow as facts and opinions emerge. Whatever method is used, the journalist should keep in mind that the interviewee's opinions, not their comments, are what matters.

Telephone interviews are the quickest way to obtain information from an interviewee, but they are less rewarding than face-to-face encounters because there is no eye contact or body language assessment, the line may be of poor quality, and reporters must use precise questions when gleaning essential information because time is of the essence.

If no one is available to visit a location on short notice, a phone interview may be used as a temporary measure until on-the-spot information and accuracy can be obtained.

Another type of interview is the 'grabbed' or 'quickie,' which is defined as a brief interview consisting of one or two questions shouted at a reluctant subject who will invariably respond with 'No comment.' This type of 'interview' is usually conducted in the presence of rival journalists, news crews, and reporters, all hoping to elicit a response on a major or contentious issue – a non-response, especially if filmed, can be just as telling as an answer.

'Vox pop,' or "voice of the people," is a method of interviewing that allows a reporter to get a snapshot of public opinion on a topic.

One or two identical questions are asked of a random sample of the public, often in crowded city centres, and the resulting short quotations can be used as soundbites in television and radio features and reports, or as snippets in print features, often adding a colourful and interesting element to an

otherwise dull piece of reporting.

Depending on the medium, different methods of recording interviews are used. Shorthand or speed writing are commonly used by print journalists to record comments and important facts and figures in a notebook; a Dictaphone may also be used as an 'aide memoire' if the interviewee agrees.

Radio journalists will carry recording equipment and a notebook, while TV reporters will carry a notebook and a cameraperson.

Naturally, with multi-skilling, some journalists will work in more than one medium, and a single interview will be used for a variety of purposes and in various formats. Regardless of the format, all information should be well documented, accurate, and stored in a secure location for future reference.

Visits

Visits, whether routine such as court reporting, council meetings, and press conferences, or special events, are a valuable source of up-to-date information, yet more journalists are spending more time in the office using electronic news sources than ever before.

The public still expects a journalist to be present at a cricket match, a theatrical performance, a pop concert, and other live events so that they can read or listen to a report from someone who was there and can provide first-hand information.

Similarly, a journalist covering a breaking news story will be much more likely to obtain critical information by speaking with witnesses and observing the situation on the scene. In the case of a major ongoing story, a reporter may be required to remain at the scene of the incident for hours, if not days, in order to be the first to obtain the most up-to-date information and reaction.

The information gathered can be printed, audio, video, or still-image formatted, or it can be sent to base over the phone right away.

Obtaining Secondary Materials

Reading reference materials is part of the necessary research for checking background information on a subject that may be covered in part or in its entirety in a radio, print, or television report. Reading handouts, PR materials, letters to the editor, other newspapers and magazines, council meeting minutes, and court reports are all routine tasks.

Once the validity of the information has been verified, a cuttings file should be used to record and store this material in a logical and easily accessible manner. Standard works of reference, such as dictionaries and media directories, should be available at work; if not, the local library should have major publications in this field, as well as invaluable local information in the form of local archives and guidebooks.

Investigative journalism may entail scouring specialist libraries and organisations for industrial, governmental, subject-specific, and sensitive findings and reports. Secondary information can be found in film, television, and radio archives, and clips from previous recordings can be obtained for a

fee.

Of course, the Internet is a major source of information, and it is increasingly being used as an international reference library from which specific information can be obtained and saved in a variety of storage formats, as well as in hard copy form.

As more and more sources of information become available in the public domain, the future is indeed digital, and this has revolutionised research patterns for journalists in all media sectors

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Principles of Digital Audio, Sixth Edition (Digital Video/Audio), Part of: Digital Video/Audio (1 Books) | by Ken Pohlmann | Sep 16, 2019*