

**Dying in print and despised online:
New Zealand newspaper long-form
in an online age**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne Beston', is written above a horizontal dotted line.

Anne Beston

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Abstract

This case study explores New Zealand long-form journalism through ethnographic interviews with newspaper feature journalists. As a traditional form of print journalism that demands time of both journalist and reader, the research explores the challenges long-form faces as online imperatives such as brevity and immediacy increasingly drive news content.

The results of the research show journalists perceive long-form as being under threat and less valued than it once was. As newspapers increasingly prioritise online content, journalists believe long-form is in danger of being left behind online, with little investment in new and innovative ways of presenting longer stories.

The research mirrors the results of other international studies which suggest print journalists are struggling to adapt to new online digital technologies. In this study, feature journalists also show resistance to new forms of computer-mediated communication such as social media. Further, interviewees show a high degree of uncertainty about the future of journalism in general and print feature journalism in particular. The research suggests the concept of the converged newsroom is far from being realised even as the online newsroom becomes increasingly dominant within newspaper companies.

This study is thought to be the first of its kind on feature journalism in New Zealand, while very little research appears to have been done internationally on how long-form journalism is faring in the digital era.

Chapter One: Introduction

In *The Past is Prologue*, Reddin van Tuyll (2010) observes that journalists have always been an hysterical lot. As early as 1765, American journalists were proclaiming the end of the free press thanks to a Stamp Tax imposed by the British Crown (Reddin van Tuyll, 2010). Despite the cries of impending doom, the free press survived. But a cataclysmic future for journalism is once again being foretold, this time because of what former *Reason* editor Matt Welch calls “history’s greatest distribution channel” – the internet (2011, p. 218). Far from being in endangered however, Welch argues that journalism is in robust good health, with more journalism being produced and consumed than ever before. What is really happening, he says, is that the health of journalism as a whole is being mistaken for the health of traditional mainstream media companies. For Welch, and many critics like him, the two are far from interchangeable. Instead, it is the era of these mass media companies and the mass audiences they once attracted that is coming to an end:

The Authoritative Voice is in full retreat, from Readers Digest to the editorial page of Newsweek, as customers shift loyalty from those who tell them how to think to those who best equip them to think for themselves. And most transformational of all, the consumer now owns the means of production, attached to history’s greatest distribution channel (2011, p. 217-218).

This impact of the web on journalism, and newspaper journalism in particular, (Schudson, 2008; Singer, 1997) is at the heart of this thesis. While a significant amount of research has looked at the impact of the internet on newspapers, little work has been done on seeking to understand its impact on specific journalism genres. At a time of significant change in the media landscape, this case study uses ethnographic interviews with feature journalists to ask how longer forms of journalism are being impacted by new communication technologies.

1.1 Long-form journalism in a contemporary media landscape

Feature journalism, also referred to as long-form journalism (the terms are regarded as interchangeable in this thesis so that both are used throughout), provides a useful lens through which changes in journalism and the transformation of news media may be studied. From the “quick read” feature on the *New Zealand Herald* website, introduced in 2012, to social media site and news disseminator *twitter*, news on the web is increasingly driven by the imperatives of brevity and immediacy, produced and

consumed in ever-smaller forms. The rise of shorter forms of journalism is perhaps best illustrated by the popularity of *twitter* which has become a breaking news destination for millions of users worldwide who instantly share messages with their followers around the globe – messages that must adhere to a strict 140-character limit (Hernandez, 2012). In this environment, journalism that takes time to produce – and to consume – can be seen as antithetical, belonging more to a world where news is delivered once a day through the printed newspaper or broadcast evening news to mass audiences - what Welch (2011) calls the top-down, few-to-many model of scarcity-driven news gatekeeping (p. 218).

This qualitative case study seeks to understand in what ways long-form journalism is being influenced or changed by online journalism and how its place in major New Zealand newspapers may be changing or evolving. The research examines the ways in which New Zealand feature journalism is being adapted for online readers and considers to what degree new multimedia and digital elements are being incorporated into features online.

Through ethnographic interviews (Singer, 2009a) with long-form journalists from New Zealand mainstream newspapers, the research explores how print feature journalists from New Zealand's two major newspaper companies, APN News & Media and Fairfax Media, perceive their role in an increasingly online-driven environment including whether they perceive long-form journalism still has a valuable – and valued - place in both the print and online newspaper. The research also explores journalists' level of engagement with, and attitude towards, new forms of computer-mediated communication such as social media and online reader forums. This aspect of the research is aimed at exploring how traditional roles in journalism are changing and how particular groups of journalists are adapting – or not – to the demands of an online world where new media forms are becoming increasingly influential and helping shape the future of news.

1.2 Challenges for long-form in the age of the web

As online journalism evolves, a number of imperatives for successful online practice are now widely accepted within the industry. These include immediacy, multimedia, updating, audience participation, web metrics and the use of social media and blogs (Singer, 2003). While studies have explored these aspects within single organisations,

across multiple organisations and across national borders, few have looked at the impact of the taken-for-granted web imperative of moving away from longer stories. This has been an accepted imperative of the web because of perceived difficulties of reading long chunks of text online (Singer, 2009) but, as British blogger and journalist Andrew Sullivan notes, the great paradox of the web is that its space and time is infinite “but we really only want three minutes’ worth” (Sullivan, 2011).

1.3 Theoretical context and aims of the research

If, as Williams argues, technology is socialised through everyday practice – a rejection of McLuhan’s technological determinism - and if it is social norms and everyday understandings through which technology becomes a part of cultural practice and economic, political and social life, how do journalists articulate, explain and make sense of a world where their role is increasingly questioned and indeed contested? How are taken-for-granted production practices and journalistic values and norms being challenged by online forms of communication? How do journalists in the specialised field of long-form journalism, which in many ways can be seen as antithetical to the web’s imperatives of immediacy and brevity, construct reality and make meaning in their working lives?

This thesis explores the perceptions and understandings of a sub-group of journalists working in a particular genre in order to better understand the impact of online news on print-based newspaper journalism. By focusing on a group of journalists working in this specialised field, wider issues of the effects of new online imperatives and practices on traditional journalistic values and norms are explored.

As newspapers adapt to an increasingly web-centric, digital environment, the future of long-form can be seen as at best uncertain and at worst, dire. In an online world where the 350-word inverted pyramid story dominates so much news content on the web, long-form journalism can be seen as being in conflict with online imperatives such as immediacy and brevity. As Schudson (2008) notes, long-form journalism has traditionally been provided by newspaper companies but as their economic struggles continue, so do the prospects for this type of journalism. And few online news providers, particularly those outside mainstream media, appear interested in filling the gap (pp. 16-17).

1.4 Gap this research aims to fill

Despite perceptions of feature writing as a pinnacle of professional journalism (Doyle, 2005), it has attracted little recent attention from scholars. As Steensen (2009) notes, the majority of studies exploring online journalism have focused primarily on news. Early research exploring the attitudes of print journalists towards the new online world focused primarily on news journalists (Boczkowski, 2004b; Singer, 2003; Singer et al, 2011).

This study, focused on long-form journalism, appears to be the first of its kind in New Zealand while international scholarly research on long-form is scarce. While Steensen (2009) looked at the remediation of print feature journalism as it appeared online, little attention has been paid to the reverse: the influence of the web on print journalism, and print long-form in particular. If the work of print feature journalists can be seen as being in conflict with best practice online, as Steensen (2009, p. 13) observes, then its future must be open to question.

The current place and future of long-form newspaper journalism is explored through the following research questions:

1.4.1 Research questions

RQ1: How is long-form newspaper journalism faring in a rapidly changing media environment?

RQ2: How are feature journalists adapting to the demands of a digital media environment including use of new computer mediated communication such as social media?

RQ3: What imperatives of online news may be influencing or impacting on the work of feature journalists?

1.5 Structure of the thesis by chapter

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter One includes an introduction to the research, the aims of the research and the gap it seeks to fill. Chapter Two outlines the challenge for newspapers as the world moves increasingly online. Chapters Three and Four comprise the literature review while Chapter Five gives details of the methodology used in this research and the rationale for doing so. Chapter Six gives the findings of the research while Chapter Seven discusses the findings. Chapter Eight draws conclusions

from the research, outlines the limitations of the research and identifies topics for further research.

1.5.1 Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter One provides a rationale for the thesis, an introduction to the context and background within which the research was done and the gap in the body of knowledge it seeks to fill. It also details the theoretical context for the research and provides a short summary of each thesis chapter.

1.5.2 Chapter Two: The Challenge for Newspapers

This chapter looks at the challenge for newspapers in an online world. It provides statistics on circulation and readership decline of newspapers with particular attention paid to New Zealand and Australia. The debate over whether newspapers are worth saving is also explored in this chapter.

1.5.3 Chapter Three: Long-form newspaper journalism

This chapter examines long-form as a journalism genre and explores long-form as a field of practice in New Zealand. It situates long-form journalism in relation to Schudson's (2008) six key functions of journalism and Tully's (2008) definition of feature writing in New Zealand. It also explores the challenge the web poses for longer stories and whether, far from killing off long-form, the web could be its saviour.

1.5.4 Chapter Four: Williams and Technological Determinism

Chapter Four provides a theoretical context for the thesis looking specifically at the concept of technological determinism and the writings of Raymond Williams. It discusses the implication for journalism of online technologies and looks at key elements of the changing media landscape including convergence of staff and content, participatory journalism and online metrics. It also explores the challenge the internet poses for journalists' professional identity and occupational values and norms. Lastly, Chapter Four examines the influence of print journalism on evolving practices of journalism online and looks at one of the few studies on feature journalism online.

1.5.5 Chapter Five: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this research and rationale for the approaches taken. It discusses case study research and the constructivist approach along with ethnographic interviews as a research method. It gives details of the data analysis including an outline of Rubin & Rubin's (2012) model of responsive interviewing and how this approach was used for the identification of themes. It also details the coding method used to identify themes from the interviews. The chapter provides details of how the interview sample was selected and addresses issues of generalisation and representativeness and of confidentiality.

1.5.6 Chapter Six: Findings

This chapter presents the results of the research from the ethnographic interviews with seven feature print journalists working at major New Zealand newspapers. It presents the perceptions and understandings the journalists have of their work and the role of feature journalism in New Zealand newspapers and how they see that role as under threat and as having been devalued. It also looks at the attitudes of feature journalists to new forms of computer-mediated communication including social media and reader forums.

1.5.7 Chapter Seven: Discussion

This chapter discusses the research findings in terms of the research questions detailed in Chapter One.

1.5.8 Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The final chapter reviews the theoretical context for this study and situates the findings within this context in order to offer insights from the response of interviewees to issues such as convergence and the challenges online poses for journalistic values and norms. It discusses the major findings of the study and looks at what these might mean for long-form as a specific genre and for print journalists working in mainstream newspapers. The chapter finishes with some reflections on the future of long-form newspaper journalism drawn from the findings of this study.

Chapter Two: Newspapers in a changing media landscape

Introduction

Looking at the challenges newspapers face in an increasingly online world, this chapter provides statistical information tracking the decline of newspapers over time, with a particular focus on New Zealand and Australia. It also explores the debate over whether newspapers are worth saving.

2.1 Journalism and technology

The internet is not the first technology to impact on journalism. From the invention of the printing press to the move from manual typewriter to computer keyboard, technological innovation has regularly and radically transformed the news business (Paterson & Domingo, 2008, p. 204; p. ix). Powers (2011) notes the massive transformation early computerisation brought to newsrooms, with no aspect of production left untouched (p. 27). As far back as 1979, Hynds noted that computer developments in the 1960s amounted to an “electronic revolution” in newspapers which brought an entirely new set of challenges, including staff resistance to reading onscreen for hours at a stretch and higher workloads for journalists (1979, pp. 148-149).

But the rise of almost limitless consumer choice in news and information that digital technology provides means the print newspaper, with its reliance on ink and newsprint and a physical transport system, can be seen as hopelessly outmoded. While newspaper readership has been declining since the 1960s with the rise of television (Meyer, 2004, p. 124), there is strong evidence its days can now be numbered. While Meyer calculated that the last print edition would roll off the presses in 2043 (as cited in Thurman & Myllylahti, 2009, p. 691), many believe it will be a lot sooner. Speaking at Britain’s Leveson Inquiry into the Culture and Practices of the Press in April 2012, the man who perhaps more than any other is associated with newspapers, Australian-born media mogul Rupert Murdoch, mused that the print newspaper could be gone within a decade (O’Carroll, 2012). Addressing the inquiry a month later, BBC journalist, author and former *Independent* editor, Andrew Marr, noted newspapers were in a “very, very parlous state” (Sabbah, 2012). Starr (2011) sees the current recession as worsening this

situation, so that newspapers may be in a “tailspin” from which they either will not recover, or will emerge as “shadows” of their former selves (p. 18).

In this environment, digital advertising revenues from newspaper websites and mobile platforms are often hailed as a potential saviour. However in its 2012 State of the News Media report, the US Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism notes that the industry’s claim rising digital revenues are off-setting a fall in print advertising revenues is difficult to verify (Matsa, Olmstead, Mitchell & Rosenstiel, 2012) . The Pew report cites Newspaper Association of America statistics showing that, while online advertising was up \$207 million industry-wide in 2011 compared to 2010, print advertising was down \$2.1 billion (Edmonds, Guskin, Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2012). Professor in Economics and Finance at the University of Michigan, Mark J. Perry, calls the drop in newspaper advertising revenue a “Schumpeterian” gale of creative destruction:

It took 50 years to go from about \$20 billion in annual newspaper ad revenue in 1950 (adjusted for inflation) to \$63.5 billion in 2000, and then only 11 years to go from \$63.5 billion back to about \$20 billion in 2011. (Perry, 2012, para. 5)

Apart from circulation and readership statistics, demographics also point to a gloomy future for newspapers. As Gitlin notes, the average American newspaper reader is fifty-five years old. Only one-fifth of younger Americans - 18 to 34 years – claimed to read a daily newspaper and the average amount of time they spent doing so has also declined (Gitlin, 2011, p. 95).

2.2 Tracking readership and circulation decline in

Australasia

Former digital editor for the Dominion Post, now Christchurch Press editor, Joanna Norris, describes the challenges facing print newspapers as a “crisis” (Inside Story Blog, 2012). In the face of this crisis, major changes have been announced by newspaper companies in both Australia and New Zealand. In September 2012 APN News & Media, owner of the New Zealand Herald, launched its new “compact” version of its former broadsheet format, the move described by the company as the single biggest change in the paper’s 150-year history (Sold On APN, n.d.). The Herald’s website also underwent a major re-

design. Both appeared, initially at least, to be welcomed by both readers and media agencies with street sellers and supermarkets reporting a rise in sales (Fahy, 2012). However, by March 30, 2013, the rise in sales was estimated at 3% (Jarrett, 2013)

In Australia, APN rival Fairfax also announced major changes to its Australian papers during 2012, with the flagship Melbourne Age and Sydney Morning Herald papers switching from broadsheet to compact format and print and digital journalists and resources to be shared between the titles for the first time. Around 1900 staff were to be made redundant over the following three years (Drinnan, 2012).

2.2.1 New Zealand

In Australasia, as elsewhere, rather than telling a dramatic story of precipitous decline, the figures show a steady and unrelenting fall.

In New Zealand, the number of people buying or reading a newspaper is calculated in two ways: audited circulation and readership surveys. The New Zealand Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) publishes audited figures every quarter while research company Roy Morgan publishes readership figures based on reading “habits” and how many readers a publication “reached”. Nielsen Media Research takes a similar approach. Consequently, readership is usually a much higher figure than circulation. But looking at both, the overall trend is clear.

Nielsen Media Research New Zealand found total readership declined for all dailies and metropolitan newspapers in the year to October (Fahy, 2012).

Readership figures in the Roy Morgan readership survey show all newspapers lost readers in the 2010/11 year compared to 2011/12 (Roy Morgan Research, 2012). Declines ranged from a drop of 1000 readers for the New Zealand Herald, Otago Daily Times and Timaru Herald to the loss of 19,000 readers for the Dominion Post.

For audited circulation, the picture looks far worse. Looking at metropolitan dailies between 2001 and 2012, the New Zealand Herald dropped from an audited circulation of 211,117 to 169,555. In 2001, the Christchurch Press had a circulation of 91,024. In 2012 it was 77,011. The Dominion Post figures are complicated by the fact that, in 2002, Wellington’s morning and afternoon papers, The Dominion and The Evening Post, were merged. But if we look back at

circulation prior to merger, the two papers had a combined circulation of roughly 124,500. In June 2012, circulation for the sole surviving Dominion Post was 68,571.

Over a shorter time period, and using the most recent figures available from the New Zealand Audit Bureau of Circulation, the drop in readers is evident. All daily newspapers over 25,000 circulation shed readers, the New Zealand Herald by 2.53%, the Christchurch Press by 4.77% and the Waikato Times by 10.47%.

In the highly-competitive Sunday newspaper market, the Herald on Sunday, launched by New Zealand Herald owner APN in 2004, is sometimes touted as something of a success story, showing steady increases in readership to reach 102,385 circulation as at June 2012 and only one of three papers (along with the Whakatane Beacon and Greymouth Star) to show a slight increase in readers over the past year. However, the rise in circulation for the HoS does not appear to have expanded the Sunday readership market – instead, it has coincided with a steep circulation fall for its main rival, the Fairfax Media-owned Sunday Star Times. In the past year to June 2012, circulation for the Sunday Star Times fell 14.31%.

2.2.2 Australia

Research by Australian media marketing website Mumbrella shows that, in 1991, 160 people out of every 1000 read a newspaper. Two decades later, the figure was 110 per 1000 (“Australian newspaper sales decline began two decades ago”, 2011). As the website notes, Australia’s population increased by 25% over that time yet there was no corresponding increase in the popularity of newspapers. More recently, figures released in August 2012 by the Audit Bureau of Australia show a drop in overall weekday circulation for all newspapers of 5.7% for the 2011/2012 year. Commenting on circulation figures released for Australia’s press in 2012, Sydney-based media analyst Steve Allen noted that annual newspaper sales fell on average by 10 percent between 2006 and 2011 (Dyer, 2012). Fairfax announced a A\$2.73 billion net loss for the 2011/2012 year, with print revenue dropping A\$88 million while digital revenue rose to just A\$33 million.

2.3 Are newspapers worth saving?

The plight of newspapers is met with a range of responses, many of them far from sympathetic. Long-time journalism scholar James Curran wryly observes the “joy” with

which foes of traditional news companies, such as UK *Guardian* columnist George Monbiot, greet the prospect that the decline of the press may be terminal (2010, p. 464-466). Critics such as Monbiot argue the press itself is a threat to democracy, going so far as to accuse newspapers of being champions of the “overdog” - protector of powerful elites such as business and the police (p. 464-466). Fortunati and Sarrica (2011) also question journalism’s commitment to democratic ideals. They argue that journalists can be seen as allies of the political and economic elite, protecting their own status as an exclusive occupational group rather than truly serving democracy (p. 140-141). Starr (2009) characterises this view as the “reviled” mainstream media finally getting its comeuppance – summing up this attitude as “Let the bastards suffer” (p. 19).

Many others however, both inside and outside the newspaper industry, mourn the potential loss of the daily newspaper and the journalism it contains (Schudson, 2008; Gitlin, 2011; Starr, 2011; Starkman, 2011). These defenders of newspapers argue that without a free press, democracy will suffer (McChesney, 2009; Starr, 2011; Schudson, 2008, p. 49). In this view, a free press is pivotal to the ideal of democratic freedom, exemplified in the media’s watchdog role (Gans, 2004, pp. 10-11). This is often articulated within the profession itself as “speaking truth to power” (Gans, 2011, p. 5). Starr (2011) argues that if newspapers disappear, there will be fewer journalists to hold the powerful to account. He notes a 2003 study by American researchers which showed a strong correlation between the circulation of free newspapers and a country’s level of government corruption: the lower the circulation of free newspapers, the higher a country stood on the World Bank’s political corruption index (p. 20). He also points to studies showing broadcast news follows the agenda set by newspapers. A typical newspaper in the United States in 2006 was producing seventy news stories a day while a typical half-hour of broadcast news covered ten to twelve (pp. 19-20). He claims no online news website has even begun to equal the level of original reporting done by newspapers.

A key notion linked to the concept of a healthy democracy is the idea of the informed citizen. This concept sees it as vital that the public are able to make informed choices so that those in public office carry out their duties according to the wishes of those who elected them (Aalberg & Curran, 2012, p. 3). Starr (2012) cites Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism director Tom Rosenstiel who concludes that, as newspapers struggle financially in a new media landscape and resources for journalism

disappear from old media faster than they can be replaced by new media, “more of American life will occur in the shadows” (p. 20).

In their comparative study of the preference of consumers and journalists for public affairs stories, Boczkowski & Peer (2011) note that media organisations can contribute to democratic life by performing a watchdog role over other powerful actors in society through the publication of issue-based public affairs news (p. 870). But their study found news consumers had a strong and pervasive preference for non-public affairs stories and warn this has implications for the ability of news media to play a strong watchdog role in the future (p. 870).

Schudson argues that no other form of news media has invested in news gathering to the extent newspapers have, arguing they cannot be dispensed with even though the economic model they have relied on for more than a century may no longer be enough to sustain them (2008, p. 25). Starr argues that despite the emergence of alternative sources of news online, newspapers have continued to produce most of the original news reporting and to field the highest number of journalists to produce it (2011, p. 19).

Chapter Three: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter constitutes the beginning of the literature review. It examines long-form as a specific journalism genre and as a field of practice in New Zealand. It locates long-form journalism in relation to Schudson's (2008) six key functions of journalism and Tully's (2008) definition of feature writing and explores the notion that, far from killing off long-form, the web could be its saviour.

3.1 Long-form newspaper journalism

Feature journalism has traditionally been popular in New Zealand. By the 1990s, this country had a higher per capita magazine readership than Australia, the UK and the US (New Zealand Press Council, 2001). Also in the 1990s, New Zealand newspapers, following their overseas counterparts, began broadening the scope of their content, in particular expanding coverage of sport and entertainment (Hynds, 1979, pp. 144-149). A Sunday edition of the now-defunct *Auckland Star* dates back to the newspaper's beginning in the late 1880s and while it closed in 1991, its Sunday edition was merged with the *Dominion Sunday Times* to create today's *Sunday Star Times* which has traditionally been a vehicle for long-form journalism. In 2004, the *New Zealand Herald's* parent company APN News & Media launched a competitor to the *Sunday Star Times*, a Sunday edition of the *Herald*. The two papers contain long-form content in the form of weekend magazines and dedicated feature sections with a strong emphasis on lifestyle and consumer stories. However the *Weekend Herald* – published on a Saturday – also retains a dedicated section for what can be seen as traditional feature stories in its *Review* section.

3.2 Defining long-form

As Jensen (2002) notes, works of art or texts that share common features can be grouped by genre. Most texts belong to larger classes or types of texts so that within the newspaper industry, handy labels can be applied to texts for both production and marketing purposes. Newspaper story genres can be seen as a contract or understanding between the paper and its readers that some texts will share basic features and discursive qualities (pp. 132-133).

As Steensen (2009) observes, the line between news and feature journalism is blurred. He defines feature journalism as a genre family, a recognisable form of social practice which is often a discourse of fiction with a narrative structure in which the writer tells a (non-fictional) story through which the reader is entertained (p. 16). Steensen bases his formulation for feature journalism on Bolter and Grusin's (1996) theory of remediation and Fairclough's (1995) description of discourse analysis as "the language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view" (Fairclough 1995, p. 56, as cited in Steensen, 2009, p.14). He differentiates feature stories from the inverted pyramid news story as being less time-sensitive; employing subjective description, reflections and assessments; being more personal and emotional; containing strong visual components such as large, colourful photographs or multiple illustrations "in delicate layouts". While these characteristics are not present in every feature, one or more of them is likely to be a dominant characteristic, he argues, aligning with Jensen's (2002) observation that texts have common features rather than being exact replicas of each other. Instead, text genres develop into a prototypical form through recurrent practice which is institutionalised and codified.

Tully's 2008 text, used in New Zealand journalism schools, defines feature writing in the New Zealand context as a separate and distinct genre within newspaper journalism. Differentiated from news reporting in journalism education texts (Tully, 2008; Tucker, 1999) and annual media awards (cannonmediaawards.co.nz), the feature story is expected to tell the reader what is really going on; what it all means; who this person really is; what it was like to be there (Tully, 2008, p. 244).

These elements of feature writing can in turn be linked to Schudson's descriptions of the key functions of journalism, particularly the functions of providing information, investigation, analysis and social empathy (2008, p. 12). Schudson's analysis function aligns to Tully's definition of feature writing as telling the reader what's really going on and what it all means (2008, p. 244). According to Schudson, the analysis function of journalism provides "coherent frameworks of interpretation to help citizens comprehend a complex world" (2008, p. 12).

Another of Schudson's (2008) functions of journalism is "social empathy" which again can be seen as a key discursive function of feature journalism and directly relates to Tully's (2008) imperatives of telling the reader "who this person really is" or "what it was like to be there". Steensen (2009) calls this a "discourse of intimacy" where a

subjective, personal or emotional perspective can create empathy in the reader, for example empathy for Hispanic train-jumpers (p. 16). In Tully (2008), Nicola Shephard defines a feature story as evoking a time, place, person or event that also includes impressions and perspectives that “deepen understanding” of other worlds or other groups (p. 243).

Schudson’s (2008) third key function of journalism is “investigation”. Investigative journalism has been a traditional practice of long-form and is tied to fundamental norms and values of professional journalism, particularly its claim to a watchdog role. This aligns to Tully’s definition that feature journalism can tell the reader “what is really going on” and in turn also aligns to Steensen’s (2009) characteristics of feature stories as telling a story at length in order to explain complex ideas or social events. However, as Jensen (2002) notes, while texts may perform similar cultural or social functions, each text within a genre does not necessarily perform the same role. Feature journalism as a genre in New Zealand often performs the investigative role but this is not always the case. Therefore investigation is seen in this study as one function of feature journalism but is not treated as a separate genre.

Of Schudson’s (2008) information and mobilization functions, it is axiomatic that long-form not only provides information but does so in-depth. His concept of mobilisation, where news media serve as advocates for political programmes and serve as catalysts of support for those programmes, is less relevant to New Zealand practices of feature journalism. New Zealand media do not have a history of partisan political campaigning. Similarly, while Schudson’s (2008) “public forum” function is often performed by feature writing, it does not fit easily within Tully’s (2008) definition of the feature writer’s role. However the analysis, social empathy, information and investigation functions can be seen as commonly-produced, prototypical characteristics of feature journalism in New Zealand which may, or may not, serve a public forum function.

3.3 New Zealand newspaper feature journalism

Journalism as a field of practice in New Zealand can be seen as largely following that practiced in countries with similar democratic and socio-cultural traditions such as Australia, Britain and the United States. The move by the New Zealand Herald from broadsheet to compact format was described by the Association of New Zealand Advertisers as reflecting “an international trend” (ANZA, n.d.). In their exploration of

New Zealand news culture, Hirst, Phelan & Rupa (2012) observe that New Zealand journalism shares characteristics of other Anglo-American cultures so that its “form, structure, content, and design” largely follow that of journalism found in the UK and the US (pp. 18-19). When asked to list the values and norms that define their work, New Zealand journalists articulate the same norms and values as journalists working in other liberal Western democracies: accuracy, objectivity, balance, and occupational autonomy. New Zealand media self-regulation also follows the general norms of ‘liberal media systems’ found elsewhere (Hirst et al, 2012, pp. 18-19). In his exploration of journalism as a global occupational ideology, Deuze (2005) concludes that in elective democracies, journalists share “similar characteristics and articulate similar values” (p. 445) and that newsrooms, whether print, broadcast or online, “look remarkably the same all over the world” (Deuze, 2007, p. 159). In a geographically diverse collection of studies into online news, Paterson (2008) reflects that, overall, there are “striking” similarities and consistencies in journalism cultures across countries as diverse as Argentina, China and Belgium (p. 6).

These similarities can also be found in feature journalism in New Zealand compared with overseas publications. For example, the *New Zealand Herald’s Canvas* magazine can be compared to similar weekend magazines published in the *New York Times*, *Melbourne Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Long-form journalism in New Zealand, as elsewhere, has also traditionally been regarded as a journalistic pinnacle. As Doyle (2005) observes, feature writing is often aligned with notions of the very best of what journalism has to offer:

It’s about taking risks and discovery. Through exhaustive research, narrative drive and the use of fictional techniques like scenes, dialogue and character development, a long-form piece provides the context and analysis that a short piece cannot. It pulls readers in and gets them engaged. A long article, done well, teaches and encourages readers to learn more. (Doyle, 2005, para 4)

In an environment where newspapers are struggling to survive, this type of relatively expensive journalism can be seen to be in jeopardy. In the 2007 NZ Journalism survey, New Zealand journalists listed a need for more analysis and in-depth treatment of issues as an explicit concern (Hollings, Leadland, Samson & Tilley). They complained that the demand for an unending supply of instantly-delivered news was seen by newsroom managers as superior to a single, time-consuming and more complex story that was not quickly and easily understood by the average reader (pp. 187-188).

3.4 The online challenge for long-form

Much like newspapers themselves, longer stories are competing for reader attention at a time when the web offers an almost limitless choice of instant news and information - often in bite-sized chunks. When long-form journalism is discussed, it is usually observed that the web has killed – or is killing – it off, not only because consumers have no time to read it, but because in their struggle for survival, newspapers can no longer afford to produce it (Singer, 2008, p. 128). *New York Times* media writer David Carr observes in a blog post that the kind of “deeply reported” journalism that involves writers taking time out to pursue a story, often over a period of weeks if not months, is “going the way of the fax machine” (Carr, 2011). In his blog, Carr also quotes *Atavist* founder and former *Wired* journalist Evan Ratliff observing the paradox that the “infinite space” of the web has resulted in shorter, rather than longer, stories (Carr, 2011).

Instead, in an environment of ever-shrinking revenues and cost-cutting by newspaper companies, long-form journalism in newspapers is seen as a luxury (Curran, 2010, p. 469). Jim Giles, co-founder of *Matter*, an American online site dedicated to long-form stories on science and technology, says long-form has struggled to make the transition from print to the web (McAthy, 2012) while editor-at-large for online long-form site *The Atavist*, Alissa Quart, argues a “tweeting culture” of short attention spans and constant distraction is “at odds” with the demands long-form makes on readers. In a panel discussion at the *South by Southwest* digital media conference in 2011, Ratliff noted that word counts for longer stories had been falling for more than a decade while at the same time the market for longer journalism, particularly the magazine market, had shrunk. In a digital environment, he suggested writers who might once have been employed by mainstream media to write feature stories would now have to become self-employed, publishing and selling their work through digital platforms such as Kindle Singles (Ratliff & Linsky, 2011). In 2013, Columbia Journalism Review editor Dean Starkman noted in his *Audit* column a sharp decline in story length for major US newspapers including the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* – although the latter’s record was, as Starkman (2013) notes, more mixed: it published 25% fewer stories over 2000 words compared to a decade ago but stories over 3000 words had risen around a third in that time (Starkman, 2013). Data for the other major papers showed significant decreases in longer stories

with the *Los Angeles Times* publishing 86% fewer stories longer than 2000 words in 2012 compared to 2003; the *Washington Post* published about half as many longer stories over the same time period and the *Wall St Journal* published 35% fewer stories over 2000 words last year than it did a decade ago (Starkman, 2013). Starkman noted that while the data was not definitive, the reduction in long-form stories occurred in the context of a “general industry decline”.

3.5 The long-form debate

Starkman’s piece drew a strong reaction from American journalism academic and author Jeff Jarvis who posted a response on *twitter* saying that story length was often a “proxy for ego, bad editing and wasting readers’ time” (Jarvis, 2013). In a piece written in the *Columbia Review of Journalism* in 2011, Starkman had singled out Jarvis for special mention because of comments the latter had made in regard to long-form. Jarvis, author of the best-selling book *What Would Google Do?* is an avid social media user with more than 100,000 followers on twitter. In a 2009 blog post, he adopted the persona of a fictitious journalist to characterise long-form as a journalistic affectation, even likening it to a form of oppression:

“It’s *my* job as the storyteller to tell *you* the story, got it? That means *I* decide what the story is. *I* decide what goes in it. *I* decide what doesn’t go in it. *I* decide what’s the beginning and the end because the story has to have a beginning and an end, so it fits in the hole I put it in...When you question the form of a story, you’re trying to put me out of a job.” (Starkman, 2011)

But while Jarvis later partially retracted these comments, saying that, rather than denigrating the long-form article he wanted to “elevate” it, Starkman responds: “don’t believe it” (p. 9). Starkman maintains opposition to long-form journalism is not confined to new media evangelists such as Jarvis but is shared by newspaper owners and managers, including Rupert Murdoch who once called it journalists-writing-for-other-journalists (2011, p. 13).

3.6 The web as saviour of long-form

An alternative view of the web and long-form is that the former will be the latter’s saviour. This argument sees the open and interconnected nature of the web as ideal for the sharing of long-form content among like-minded enthusiasts through social media sites such as *twitter* (Tenore, 2011). *Twitter* handles such as *@longform* and

@longreads already curate what their editors consider the best writing on the web and share it with thousands of followers. Other dedicated long-form sites on the web include *Byliner*, *The Awl* and, as mentioned above, *Matter* and *The Atavist*.

While many of these innovations are American-centric, in the past year, in what it calls an “experiment”, Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper has used its open platform to collate the best long-form from its website and re-publish it on *thelonggoodread.com*. Few details are provided on the experiment or what the ultimate aim might be but this initiative followed another by the *New York Times* in 2011 to showcase its best long-form writing in the 6th *Floor* column curated by *Times*’ editors, writers, designers and photo editors.

Along with *Matter*, another project seeking funding through online fund-raiser *Kickstarter*, is *narrative.ly*, a multi-platform long-form website devoted to in-depth stories about New York (narrative.ly, n.d.) Long-time media commentator and New York journalist Joe Pompeo (2012) argues that sites like *narrative.ly* are part of a wider trend to breathe new life into long-form. Technology such as Kindle Singles – which allow users to download and consume longer stories anywhere, anytime – are an “industry success story”, he says, and along with other online sites such as *Byliner* and *The Avatar* are challenging the online orthodoxy of “small bites rather than five-course meals” (Pompeo, 2012). As well, sites such as *Instapaper* provide a simple and instant method of book-marking web pages through a “read it later” tool, giving readers the option to consume longer stories at a more convenient time.

New developments related to long-form on the web are often hailed as the next new thing that will help preserve it or even increase its popularity. However, in the rapidly developing online journalism space, it is difficult to draw conclusions as to where these initiatives will eventually lead or to what extent they will be successful.

Chapter Four: Literature Review - Williams and Technological Determinism

Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical context for the thesis looking at the concept of technological determinism and the writings of Raymond Williams. It discusses the implication for journalism of online technologies and key elements of a changing media landscape. It also examines the influence of print journalism on evolving practices of journalism online.

4.1 Williams' critical thinking on media

A key figure in critical thinking about media was Raymond Williams, whose writings from the 1960s to the 1980s form a solid body of critical theory on media that can be seen as still relevant today (Freedman, 2002, p. 425). In the preface to the 2003 Routledge Classic Edition of Williams' writings on television, Roger Silverstone calls Williams' work "extraordinarily influential" within the media and communication field (p. viii). Freedman (2002) calls him one of Britain's "outstanding social and cultural analysts" (p. 425).

Williams emphasised both agency and intention in the uses to which technologies are put, rather than seeing technology as having an inescapable or inevitable internal logic (Freedman, 2002, p. 425). For Williams, technological innovation had to be situated within the specific social and economic contexts in which it was adopted so that there was no pre-determined outcome of new technology but a series of complex interactions between technological innovation and the world into which a new technology emerged:

Williams helps us challenge the simplistic proposition that "the Internet has changed our world" and enables us to understand instead the ways in which contemporary social relations set limits on the development of the Internet as a democratic medium.
(Freedman, 2002, p. 425)

Williams linked intense technological development to periods of political, economic and social change, arguing that developments in telegraphy were linked to industrialisation and the rise of international trade and transport which had profound effects on modern societies. As an example, Williams noted the development of radio in

the aftermath of World War Two during “a phase of general social transformation” (1974/2003, pp. 8-11).

In a new time of technological change marked by the rise of digital communication technologies and the internet, McChesney (2007) mirrors Williams’ analysis, calling the post-war period a “critical juncture” when professional journalism – the formal separation of the media owner from the editorial function – emerged against a backdrop of the severe economic crisis of the Great Depression. McChesney (2007) argues critical junctures are marked by three central elements: a revolutionary new communication system; discontent or dissatisfaction with the existing media system including questions over legitimacy and credibility; and, thirdly, a period of major political crisis or “severe social disequilibrium”. McChesney (2007) believes we may be entering just such a critical juncture in the second decade of the 21st Century. He argues the first two elements have already emerged while the third remains a “great unknown” (pp. 10-11).

4.2 Technological determinism

New communications systems are at the centre of a long-standing debate in media and communication theory. A central question for scholars has been whether technological innovation determines changes in society or whether it is not until technological innovation is adapted into existing social and cultural conditions that it becomes sociologically significant. The most famous proponent of the former view was Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan whose “the medium is the message” is one of the most famous catch-phrases in the history of communications theory (Laughey, 2007, p. 33). McLuhan’s medium theory argues that it is not the message that is crucial to understanding the impact of new technology but the way technology – the channel itself - transforms “patterns of leisure, domestic life, education and ... work” (Laughey, 2007, p. 33). What mattered for McLuhan was the way in which a particular technology, such as television, mediated the message rather than the message itself (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009, p. 191).

But as Laughey notes, McLuhan’s medium theory attracted a number of critics, including Williams, who rejected what he saw as its “technological determinism” which he called an “untenable notion” because it regarded technology as a determining cause of social behaviour. Instead, Williams argued that technology cannot be “de-socialised”

- removed from everyday social practice - and left to “run itself”. He argued that technology is subject to social, political and economic intention and - as with television content for example - is “selected and controlled by existing social authorities”. In other words, media messages are mediated by those who source and produce them (Williams, 2003/1974, pp. 131-133). So dismissive of McLuhan’s work was Williams that he believed “the particular rhetoric of (his) theory of communications is unlikely to last long” (p. 131). The irony is of course that McLuhan’s most notable phrases are still part of popular discourse in the 21st Century. His proclamation of a future “global village” - the concept of a “retribalisation” through electronic media – while perhaps largely unrealised in a literal sense, can be seen as foreseeing a world in which millions of people across the globe are able to connect and communicate instantly via the web.

The internet, and the digital technologies it has spawned, continues to be an area of academic study and debate. Much of this work however rejects the concept of technological determinism. Instead, scholars have often aligned largely with Williams, finding that socio-cultural practice plays a determining role in shaping technical innovation. In their research into the piloting of multimedia technologies at a new BBC news centre during the late 1990s, Cottle and Ashton (1999) found that the technologies of news production were “socially and culturally shaped and embedded within corporate and professional contexts and practices” (p. 22). Technology was not an “independent causal force”, they argued, but “socialised and put to work within determinant social environments” (p. 23). They argued that the role of changing media technologies and their part in news production required theoretically-informed empirical study to understand the complex interaction between evolving news technologies and journalistic practices (p. 27). Domingo (2008) also argues that comprehensive analysis of the social adoption process of a technological innovation requires an understanding that technology is socially constructed, not “a monolithic element” that appears from nowhere and “imposes its own logic” on social actors. Domingo rejects a technologically deterministic model whereby technology is “unproblematic or pre-determined” (Paterson & Domingo, 2008, p. 19-20).

4.3 Technology and journalism

Looking at the implications of the web for journalism, Schudson (2009) warns that journalism can no longer take for granted its “lofty pre-eminence” in the world of political information and that journalists must now share the stage with online

alternatives such as blogs which “reach citizens directly without the intervention of professional journalists” (p. 369). Deuze (2007) goes further, asserting that “journalism as it is, is coming to an end” (p. 141). Traditional concepts of professional journalism are being challenged as digital technologies raise fundamental questions over journalism’s role. The rise of social media, the - often idealised - concept of civic journalism and newspapers’ struggle to maintain readership are just some of the elements of this changing media landscape (Pavlik, 2004, p. 28). The internet raises fundamental questions over who is a news consumer and who a news producer as the internet and mobile digital devices allow – at least potentially – anyone, anywhere, to do work previously done only by journalists. In their introduction to *Participatory Journalism*, Singer, Hermida, Domingo, Heinonen, Paulussen, Quandt, Reich and Vujnovic (2011) explore the transition newspaper journalists in particular are experiencing as readers comment on, criticise and correct the media content journalists alone once controlled (p. 1). As Deuze observes, people have always engaged with media but new media technologies are making this engagement truly visible to professional journalists (2007, p. 95). This participatory engagement is made possible not only through more established online technologies such as email and reader comment forums but newer and rapidly evolving forms of consumer engagement such as social media.

Researchers recognised the importance for journalism of the internet relatively early. Key studies emerged using a range of methodological approaches to explore the effect of internet technology on the day-to-day work of journalists (Singer, 1997, Singer, 2003, Singer, 2004; Boczkowski, 1999, 2004a, 2004b; Pavlik, 2004; Deuze 1999, 2003, 2007). In 2009, reviewing the research into online news over the previous decade, Mitchelstein & Boczkowski argue a consensus emerged in the communications field to reject “deterministic explanations”. Instead, technological innovation was seen as mediated and shaped by “initial conditions and contextual characteristics” (p. 566). This consensus, they argue, included a focus on the organisational and institutional influences that shaped online journalism in different settings. Scholars discovered a tension between traditional ways of producing news - the once-a-day production of the morning newspaper for example - and the imperatives of online journalism to disseminate news faster and to a larger audience than ever before (Deuze, 2008, as cited in Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009, p. 576).

Mitchelstein & Boczkowski (2009) also argue in favour of a historical perspective for the study of online media so that the novelty of the internet is not over-emphasised but rather recognises “historical antecedents and evolutionary paths of contemporary practices” (p. 576). For Boczkowski (2004a), this approach “historicises” new media so that it is seen as “evolutionary” rather than revolutionary and so that new technologies are not seen as arriving from nowhere but are part of a continuum of technological development and change (2004b, pp. 2-3).

This approach can be seen as largely aligning with Williams: that technology cannot be removed from everyday social practice so that it is left to “run itself” but is subject to social, political and economic intention.

4.3.1 Convergence

A key aspect of online journalism that has attracted the attention of scholars is its potential to transform the way journalists do their work. Writing about online journalism in 1999, Deuze asked what it was and what made it different from established forms. He identified three characteristics: interactivity, personalization and convergence. While news media such as radio and newspapers traditionally provided a form of interactivity such as talkback or letters to the editor, Deuze (1999) argued that the speed and ease with which the audience could interact with news media marked a significant departure from these traditional forms. Personalization he defined as the ability of the audience to choose individualised content such as sports or weather in a way that had not been possible previously. Convergence he defined as the melding of traditional elements of story-telling in a single media product – video, text, audio and hyperlinking to original material such as archives – as well as convergence of staff and physical resources within the newsroom itself (pp. 377-378).

By the late 1990s to the early 2000s, a number of studies were published exploring changes in the work places where journalism happened (Singer, 1997, 2003, 2004, 2004a; Boczkowski 2004a, 2004b). In her 1997 ethnographic study of the way in which the internet was challenging journalism’s traditional gatekeeper role, Singer rhetorically asked whether journalists at online newspapers were “still guarding the gate”? She surveyed journalists at three US newspapers that were considering or already producing online news. Using participant observation and interviews with 66 reporters and editors, this early study uncovered many of the issues still being debated today: the demands of immediacy; the “wild west” connotations of audience interactivity; the

conceptualisation by journalists of their role as “less about regulating the quantity of information than about ensuring its quality” (Singer, 1997, p. 87).

After a decade of study, with the model of the converged newsroom becoming established at leading daily newspapers such as London’s *Daily Telegraph* (Reece, 2006) and the *New York Times* (Glaser, 2005), it could have been assumed that convergence had become an industry norm. But as Deuze (2007) observes, the implementation and “consequences of convergence” differed not only between news organisations but also between countries (p. 150). Convergence came “in different shapes and sizes” and appeared to be strongly influenced by internal practices and routines along with external factors such as the regulatory environment, marketplace competition, stakeholders and publics (p. 151). Convergence efforts were often seen as being “forced onto a reporter’s plate” with journalists frustrated and confused by a technologically-driven enterprise that was seen as time-consuming and inefficient (p. 151). When, eight years on from that 1997 study, Singer (2004) again went into the newsroom to research how media companies were adapting to the internet, she found the concept of convergence – both in terms of content and in terms of newsroom organisation - still met resistance as journalists perceived these new production routines clashed with core occupational norms and professional values and beliefs. She found that while notions of professional journalism were being expanded in the face of new technologies, the “ingrained habits and learned skills” of print journalists in particular were “more resistant to change” (p. 838). She noted that while the long-term trend of newsroom convergence seemed likely to continue, a major obstacle to convergence were the “cultural clashes” between print and online reporters (pp. 149-150).

In his much-cited study of innovations in three online newsrooms, Boczkowski (2004a) found that, rather than looking at convergence as an outcome of the technological “logic of digitization”, it was individuals who created “convergent products” out of new digitised infrastructure. He argued for a research approach to convergence that emphasised the agency of individual actors as much as it did the capability of technology. He too examined the journalists’ role as gatekeeper in relation to technology but, rather than seeing an end to gatekeeping as an “editorial effect of technological change”, he looked at whether gatekeeping determined how multimedia and interactivity were adopted. He found that organisational structures, work practices and representations by users all played a part and that technical considerations were “inextricably tied” to editorial issues such as who got to tell the story, how the story was

told, and what public it addressed. Noting that he was studying newsrooms at a time when there was an “asymmetry” in the resources of print and online newsrooms so that the “presence of the former in the routines of the latter” affected the routines of technology use, Boczkowski noted “this may change as online news becomes more central in the media scene” (pp. 200-210). This potential change in the relative positions of traditional and new forms of news, as Boczkowski identifies here, can be seen as an overarching theme of the present study where the impact of online journalism on a particular genre of journalism – long-form – is explored through ethnographic interviews with long-form print journalists. Given Boczkowski’s study was published almost a decade ago, it may be possible to make some observations in the present study as to whether the relative positions of online and print have changed in the intervening eight years and how these changes have affected print long-form journalists in particular.

4.3.2 Participatory journalism

Participatory journalism has been a key focus of researchers for its radical connotations of the empowered audience (Singer et al, 2011; Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2009, 2012; Boczkowski & Peer, 2011). This has given rise to renewed focus on Habermas’ concept of the public sphere where the internet is seen as a key tool in reinvigorating “civic engagement” (Habermas, 1989, as cited in Mitchelson & Boczkowski, 2009, p. 575).

Other participatory journalism studies have focused on how new models of audience interactivity are being adopted in different countries. Singer et al (2011) studied participatory journalism in ten countries and found that, while there were similarities that suggested some changes transcended national boundaries (p. 5), there was also an “extremely rich diversity” (p. 93). In an overview of the studies contained in the book, Quandt (2011) observes one factor that influenced journalists’ attitudes to participatory journalism was age. Younger journalists were “more supportive” of the idea of participatory journalism and had a more “technophile” view of their job while older journalists “seemed more fearful or at least cautious” (p. 156). Given these factors, it might have been expected that online journalists themselves had a relatively consistent attitude towards participatory journalism but this was found not to be the case. Quandt reflects this might have been because of the diverse backgrounds of the journalists interviewed which in turn might explain “why we encountered such varied reflections

on the field *within* the field” (2011, p. 157). As he noted, for print reporters, the move to online came after some years in the industry while younger reporters may have begun their careers in the new medium so that just a few years’ difference in age could produce very different attitudes among journalists (2011, p. 157).

4.3.3 Online metrics

Along with participatory engagement by consumers, precise measurement of audience behaviour online is a key aspect of digital and online technologies. For the first time, news media are able to plot exactly how many people are reading a particular news story at any given time, a technological development with wide-ranging implications for journalism. While research into the market dynamics of news is not new (Gans, 2003, p. 92), audience data has traditionally been dominated by relatively inexact measurement tools such as television ratings, radio station phone surveys and newspaper reader focus groups. But web metrics are far more quantitative, providing the ability to track consumer behaviour in real time.

Another focus of research has been the effect on journalistic norms of online audience metrics that can now measure preferences of news consumers more accurately than ever before. In their 2011 study, Boczkowski & Peer looked at audience metrics to explore whether there was a divergence of choice between journalists and readers in relation to story preference. They found a significant “choice gap” between the two groups, with consumers showing a stronger preference for non-public affairs stories than journalists (p. 867). Given the findings of this study, they noted that if consumer behaviour becomes a more determining factor in story selection by journalists, then reduced coverage of public affairs might be used to try to close this choice gap which in turn raises questions of the media’s ability to play its traditional watchdog role (pp. 869-870). That concern reflects similar concerns expressed by journalists in Singer & Ashman’s (2009) work in the UK, Anderson’s Philadelphia study in the US (2011) and in Singer et al (2011). Boczkowski argues that less public affairs journalism might not just be bad for the mainstream news organisations that produce it “but also all of us” (Boczkowski, 2010b, p. 26)

In his 2010 study of the web imperative of rapid news dissemination and how this might conflict with traditional journalistic values, Reinardy found that print journalists in particular believed audience metrics were increasingly driving the news agenda. Groves & Brown (2011) observed that, in the *Christian Science Monitor*’s switch to web-only

publication, audience metrics became a centrepiece of daily editorial meetings. Anderson (2011) found journalists and editors felt they were losing autonomy in editorial decision-making as news content was increasingly influenced by this new quantitative tool. However he also found that the use of audience figures to decide content was not consistent across news companies and that, while the rhetoric of the empowered audience had grown, journalistic values and beliefs were still a significant determining factor in editorial decision-making (pp. 563-564).

4.3.4 Professional identity and occupational norms

Deuze (2005) believes it is possible to speak of a dominant occupational ideology of journalism on which journalists base perceptions of the profession and enact these in daily routines and norms (p. 442). These practices and norms include a conception of their public service, or watchdog, role; the journalistic value of objectivity where journalists are seen as impartial, objective, fair and thus credible; a professional claim to autonomy so that journalists are independent of outside influences or constraints; immediacy so that speed is an inherent practice in news production; and ethics that allow journalists to claim validity and legitimacy (Deuze, 2007, p. 163). These occupational values and norms are adopted and internalised by news workers through journalistic culture, he argues, a powerful agent whereby reporters and editors “reinforce, reiterate, and thus reproduce certain ways of doing things”. At the same time, outsiders are kept at bay by the “self-referential” nature of newswork so that the opinion of colleagues is deemed more important than viewer ratings, hit counts or sales figures. Deuze argues that through this occupational ideology, enacted through newsroom culture, newcomers adapt to and adopt these dominant perceptions of what journalism is (2007, pp. 169-170).

As Deuze (2005) notes, serving the public interest is a normative value of journalism. Singer (2007, p. 81) calls it a “foundational ethic” and argues it is an “overarching norm” among professional journalists who believe their primary purpose is to provide information that fosters an informed citizenry (2007, p. 79). This concept – information in the public interest that results in an informed citizenry – can be seen as closely aligned with notions of journalism’s role as the Fourth Estate and its contribution to democracy as discussed in the introduction to this chapter.

But, as Schudson (2008) argues, despite these claims to a critical role within democracy, there is little clarity about exactly what journalism’s contribution is. In an

attempt to define exactly what it is that professional journalism contributes to the public good, Schudson draws up a list of what he sees as journalism's key functions, the "six or seven things" news can do for democracy. Firstly, he notes the public service role as one of informing citizens and defines it as a duty to alert the public to the dangers and opportunities looming in society so that they can effectively participate in self-government (p. 13). Schudson sees the second role of journalism as that of watchdog, of making the powerful "tremble". This watchdog role can be seen as essentially negative:

It is designed to foil tyranny rather than to forward new movement or new policy; it prevents bad things from happening or continuing rather than advancing the cause of the good (2008, p. 14)

Although closely aligned with the notion of providing the public with information in the public interest, the watchdog role is not the same thing, he argues. Instead the watchdog role of the media assumes that things will be hidden from public view and must be uncovered and that journalists have an obligation to seek the truth which may lie behind a "deceptive wall of pretence". Unlike the simple reporting of facts in a public service notion of news, the watchdog role is an investigative function where persistence and suspicion are seen as key journalistic virtues (p. 15).

Schudson also identifies "analysis", or "explanatory journalism" as a key function of news media - the capacity to understand a complex situation and transmit that understanding to a broad public. This type of journalism, he argues, goes beyond conventional news to articulate a silence, or foreground what was background, so that a complex situation is better understood. It is "invaluable" for democracy, which would suffer without it (2008, pp. 16-17).

Schudson's fourth role of journalism is "social empathy", where human interest stories – a standard element in journalism since at least the 1970s – are used more "instrumentally ... to draw readers or viewers into a larger tale" which may be linked to wider social issues and events. Schudson cites Hurricane Katrina coverage by the *New York Times* by way of example and argues this role is one of the great achievements of contemporary journalism, closely linked to "democratic values" (2008, p. 18-19).

For Schudson, journalism also provides a "public forum", traditionally through letters to the editors of newspapers but which, as he notes, has been "cracked wide open" with the creation of the web. The web's potential for audience interactivity in is contrasted in

particular with the style of television news which Schudson sees as having remained relatively stagnant since the days of the famous US news reader Walter Cronkite and his “and that’s the way it is” nightly sign-off. The value of journalism’s public forum function lies not in its ability to give a voice to the individual, Schudson argues, but in its “easy and agreeable democratic sociability” (2008, pp. 20-21)

Lastly Schudson identifies “mobilization” - or partisan journalism - as his sixth function of journalism. Partisan journalism, which was widespread in the US press in the 19th Century and early 20th Century, enlists the heart as well as the mind and gives the audience not just information but a cause. In contrast, the non-partisan, objective, information-providing role of contemporary news organisations may actually have a demobilising effect, he argues, where the public perceives that nothing can be done and an “undertone of cynicism” in news reports is reflected in an increased cynicism in the general public (2008, p. 21-22). As he notes, in America at least, the ideal of professional journalism as “playing it down the middle”, has become a cherished ideal so that fact-centred, aggressive, energetic and non-partisan journalism remains “practically sacred” among American journalists (Schudson, 2008, p. 35).

4.4 Challenge to journalistic norms and values

But how well professional journalism is fulfilling these functions is a matter of open, and often passionate, debate. New York University journalism academic Jay Rosen is an outspoken and ardent critic of journalism’s objective ideal, too often expressed, he argues, as “she said, he said” news reporting which he calls “one of the lowest forms” of journalism in existence (Rosen, 2011). Rosen observes that he-said-she-said reporting is closely tied to notions of journalistic balance – where each side of the story must be told in order to achieve the objective ideal. He notes journalists find it “oddly comforting” to be attacked from both sides of the political spectrum because if both left and right are critical, then balance and fairness can be seen to have been achieved (Rosen, 1999, p. 29). In delivering a critique of this type of reporting, Rosen uses the example of an abortion item aired on America’s *National Public Radio* where the “he said, she said” reporting model serves to protect media organisations from accusations of bias but short-changes the audience:

‘He said, she said’ is a kind of three-way pact among journalists and the two most obvious sides in a predictable dispute. Groups on the left get their quotes; groups on the right get corresponding quotes.

The journalists at *NPR* get protection. It's the listeners who get screwed. (Rosen, 2011)

In a special issue of *Journalism* in 2009, Deuze and Marjoribanks observe a tension between the demands of the new media marketplace where journalists are expected to perform a more “liquid” occupational role, and their public service function and commitment to objectivity and ethical standards (p. 557). As they - somewhat drily - observe, the ideal journalist is now “flexible and rigid at the same time”. They argue that organisational constraints play a key role in determining how well journalists are able to enact professional values and beliefs and that working within “hermetically sealed” media organisations works against these ideals. They argue that media organisations are not conducive to the empowerment of journalists:

The primary function of the organisation of newswork is not so much the liberation of the media professional from the constraints of technology and the market so she can do her best work, but rather to prevent the individual voices and talent of journalists from being heard, seen, or featured at all. (2009, p. 558)

4.5 Print journalism in an online age

The influence of print journalism on the practice of journalism online has been noted by scholars ever since mainstream media began transferring content to websites. In documenting the evolution of online news as it both converged and diverged from the legacy print product, researchers have sought to understand how online news was evolving and what these developments might mean for the future of mainstream media and journalism. In order to understand how journalism was grappling with the changes brought about by the web, researchers undertook ethnographic studies in the newsroom itself and made a key finding: a “clash of cultures” between print and online journalists (Domingo, 2003; Huxford & Duda, 2000, as cited in Boczkowski, 2004a, p. 199-200; Singer, 2004; Singer, 2004a; Singer, 2003). In his 2003 study of online journalism in four Spanish newsrooms, Domingo (2008) noted how online and traditional journalists “tended to mutually ignore each other” as they went about their daily routines. There was a lack of collaboration between the two groups who were characterised as living “parallel lives” with print journalists seldom visiting their own outlet’s websites (p. 120-121). Given this research was done in 2003, the latter finding is somewhat startling in hindsight and, it could be argued, would seldom be the case today. In his epilogue to Paterson & Domingo’s collection of online news studies, Deuze (2008) observes that evolving online news operations in the early 2000s were “messy, open, and relatively

unmanaged” workspaces with little or no collaboration or even contact with existing news staff, so that “the basic conditions for exploring mutual possibilities, knowledge-sharing, or indeed any other kind of professional ‘bonding’” were not met (p. 207).

But just a few years later, by the late 2000s, and as Boczkowski (2004a) hypothesised, the relative positions of online and traditional newsrooms had undergone a significant shift, with the digital characteristics of online news beginning to override traditional journalistic practices and norms. Reinardy (2010) explored this development through organisational development theory, examining how print journalists in particular were adapting to an organisational shift “created by shrinking newsrooms, the internet and generational attitudes” (p. 71). Reinardy interviewed 48 reporters, columnists, photographers, designers and editors from 23 US newspapers to explore the effect of technological change on news workers and whether age and experience were affecting how they adapted to change. An overwhelming majority of the study’s respondents cited the web as the primary reason for changes in newsroom routines (42 out of 48) including increased emphasis on immediacy, “hard news” and “hyperlocal” reportage. They also believed audience metrics were driving the news agenda. A prominent issue was the perceived lowering of journalistic standards, with less editing resulting in more errors as newspapers rushed to post content in a highly competitive online news environment. Veteran journalists were concerned about their ability to learn new technological skills, saying “young people” were taking over the newsroom and mocking older staffers who struggled to adapt. In turn, younger journalists expressed frustration with their older colleagues’ lack of “technological savvy”. Older journalists worried about a dumbing-down of content online with one accusing an editor of being interested only in celebrity gossip, while government, or public affairs, stories were regarded as “boring”. A majority of veteran staff expressed a willingness to adapt to new routines and practices in the newsroom but were concerned that the necessity for faster, softer and piecemeal web “nuggets” meant quality was being sacrificed. Reinardy concluded that “journalistic philosophy” and core newspaper values were being overridden by the need for immediacy. He noted that, while journalism had always been impacted by technology - from typewriters to computers - for veteran editorial staff, the web was different. Its emphasis on immediacy was perceived to be undermining the premise of producing good journalism, “the very thing that enticed them into the newsroom to begin with” (pp. 76- 80).

The challenges faced by news organisations as they transform from print-based production to online is also documented in Robinson (2011) who studied the attitude of print journalists as their media outlet migrated entirely to the web. In this ethnographic study, she examined a mid-West US newsroom as it quit its 17,000 daily print product to focus solely on its website. She noted the changes leading up to this shift, including layoffs (a staff of 55 editors and reporters in 2008 was reduced to 35 by 2009). As well, company managers told staff they were now pioneers on a “digital frontier” and had to be “web-centric”. This approach was articulated by company managers as a renewed focus on creating fresh content for the website, adding multimedia and interactive components to stories and engaging with audiences “in new realms”. In order to achieve its goals, the company changed newsroom seating arrangements so that print and online reporters and editors were in closer proximity – the convergence of staff. This was referred to – perhaps inevitably - by some journalists as moving the “deck chairs around on the Titanic” and many rejected the technology-will-save-all model as not “real journalism”.

Conversely, the printed newspaper – which remained in the form of a weekly magazine - was seen as closely aligned with reporters’ sense of professional values and identity, where a by-line symbolised journalistic authority and validation. Robinson noted the values of print journalism carried over to the digital operation, with print reporters expressing frustration that digital versions of their stories got “lost” – were less prominent or harder to find - online. Reporters asked for by-lines and photos to accompany online stories to reinforce their sense of professional identity and regarded stories on the website as somehow less important than those in print (2011, pp. 1128-1135).

4.6 Adaptation of print on the web

One of the few academic studies with a focus on how long-form is evolving online is Steensen (2009) who also notes the scarcity of research on the topic (p.14). He cites two previous studies, one by Tankard (2004, as cited in Steensen, 2009) on literary journalism techniques and new media technology and the other by Engebretsen (2007, as cited in Steensen, 2009) on innovative uses of technology in feature stories at thirteen Scandinavian online newspapers.

Steensen's (2009) own investigation into online feature journalism looked at discourses and genres in feature journalism as it was remediated online. He chose one media outlet in the US and one in Norway to explore how online production and publication imperatives altered the generic characteristics of feature journalism; what the communicative purposes were of online feature journalism and whether these differed from traditional print feature journalism. He also looked at whether an analysis of feature journalism revealed anything about genre development online.

Using Bolter and Grusin's (1996) theory of remediation, Steensen (2009) argues that, because media texts are usually creative discursive practices that embed a range of genres and discourses, then the internet and its potential for social and cultural change could have led to an expectation that journalism online would involve an even greater level of creative discursive practice. But he concludes that, overall, online newsrooms are struggling to differentiate their online product from "old media journalism". He also argues that the traditional characteristics of feature stories in print - a discourse of intimacy or adventure through subjective, personal and emotional language - "clash" with the imperatives of online. This is evident in a *dagbladet.no* story on Saudi women buying cars, where twenty-one hyperlinks – which connect readers to original material but navigate away from the story – creates what Steensen calls a "conflict" with the story's narrative structure. By inviting the reader to navigate to another website, the sense of intimacy which feature journalism often provides is lost, he argues. He characterises the *dagbladet.no* story as a "cannibalization" of the traditional feature story "eaten up by discourses of online communication" (2009, p. 22).

The next feature in his study, from *palmbeachpost.com*, a US online newspaper, appears simultaneously in print and online as a multimedia Flash package with photo slideshow, text boxes and audio. The story, about poor Hispanics trying to immigrate to the US by jumping trains, is accessed under a "Multimedia and Special Reports" section on the website. Steensen (2009) notes the story has elements of cinematic production with the introduction playing like a movie trailer. But it is recognisably a feature story, he argues, with a narrative introduction, multimodal elements that are visually appealing and which take the reader "for a ride" through the story complete with train sound effects. The story plays on emotions and is personal – the reader "meets" the strangers who are jumping the trains – so that Steensen concludes it draws on traditional feature storytelling elements, including discourses of adventure, intimacy and fiction. Overall, it follows a linear, narrative structure despite elements of interactivity including readers'

ability to stop and start the story, to replay chapters or to skip backwards and forwards. There is also a comment space for reader feedback but notes a difference with the *dagbladet.no* story where readers could simply post comments whereas here they are invited to “share your thoughts” (2009, p. 25). Despite strong multimedia elements, Steensen argues the discursive practices in the *palmbeachpost.com* story have characteristics of traditional feature journalism and this may be because feature content is created by newspaper staff and therefore can logically be expected to follow a more traditional form of feature journalism even though the story is told in the form of a Flash package with multimedia elements more often associated with movie trailers or online computer games where the consumer has some control over the way content is delivered (2009, p. 24). While Steensen’s 2009 study focuses on content, rather than the journalists who produce it, it provides a useful exploration of how feature journalism is being remediated online.

More recently, in December 2012, the *New York Times*’ *Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek* was hailed as something of a watershed moment in new and evolving forms of telling longer stories online (Greenfield, 2012; McAthy, 2013). Divided into chapters, the story tells of the death of three skiers in Washington’s Cascades mountain range using text, video, photos and graphics. The piece won a number of awards including a coveted Pulitzer for author John Branch.

But among the plaudits, many expressed doubts that ‘Snow Fall’ pointed to a brave new future for long-form online. Writing in *The Atlantic*, Derek Thompson called the piece “magic” and a “visceral adventure story” but observed that few media outlets would have the time or resources – the story took six months and involved a design and production team of 11 people - to devote to a single story. He further noted that not all stories lent themselves to the kind of visual elements that made “Snow Fall” so compelling. For those reasons, stories like ‘Snowfall’ were likely to remain rare (Thompson, 2012, December 21).

Chapter Five: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology for this study and rationale for approaches taken, along with an explanation of the model followed for the data analysis. It also addresses issues of generalisation and representativeness and of confidentiality.

5.1 Qualitative paradigm and the constructivist model

This thesis is grounded in the qualitative paradigm which, as Silverman (2010) observes, tends to work with smaller groups of people or cases, and is prepared to sacrifice scope for detail “to illuminate aspects of people’s understandings and interactions” (p. 104). Following Silverman’s framework for qualitative, as distinct from the quantitative, or positivist approach, this study follows a constructivist model. O’Leary (2004) defines the constructivist model as an understanding that meaning does not exist empirically but is constructed by human beings as they go about their daily lives, interacting and engaging in interpreting their world (p. 10). This model provides a framework for looking at social realities (p. 109) including questions of what? and how? Specifically, its focus is on how phenomena come to be what they are through close study of interaction in different contexts.

The present study utilises a constructivist model to explore how long-form newspaper journalists are constructing and making meaning of profound changes brought about by the impacts of digital and online technology. Through in-depth, ethnographic interviews, the research seeks to discover if the place of long-form journalism in newspapers is changing and what these changes might signify both for the future of feature journalism and print journalism in a New Zealand context.

In this study, long-form journalism is investigated through a series of ethnographic, in-depth interviews with feature journalists working at New Zealand’s two major newspaper companies. As writers of long-form journalism, feature journalists can be seen as occupying a distinct role within the wider journalism field. They produce longer stories which take time - not only to produce but to read. Their work often encapsulates the key democratic functions Schudson (2009) identified: informing the citizens, investigating governmental power, analysing a complex world, creating empathy

towards those less fortunate, communicating the perspectives of diverse groups within society and advocating on behalf of particular political or social programmes (p. 12).

The research uses a case study approach (Singer, 2009a; O’Leary, 2004; Silverman, 2010) including ethnographic in-depth, semi-structured interviews of a purposefully-selected sample of long-form journalists. It follows Rubin & Rubin’s (2012) responsive interviewing model. In responsive interviewing, the researcher gathers narratives, descriptions and interpretations from an array of conversational partners and puts them together in a reasoned way. It recreates the culture or process of actors in a way they would recognise as real (p. 7). In this interviewing model, the researcher responds to and asks further questions in response to interviewees rather than relying on a list of predetermined questions. Three key question types form the core of the model: main questions, probes and follow-up questions. This accurately describes the interview model followed here.

5.2 Ethnographic interviews

Noting the popularity of ethnographic methods in general in the study of journalism, Singer (2009a) notes widespread agreement with Lindlof & Taylor’s definition of ethnography as “a holistic description of cultural membership” which emphasises subjects’ frames of reference and remains open to their understandings of the world. Discussing the similarities between journalism and ethnographic research where on-site observation and interviews can be seen as comfortingly familiar to journalism academics because of their similarity to journalism work, Singer (2009a) warns against confusing one with the other. This pitfall can be avoided, she argues, through the use of “thick description”, the deep probing for meaning in order to understand what is going on in the lives of research participants. She warns against “anecdotalism” where simple quoting from transcripts must be replaced by evidence of interpretation and contextualisation. Meaning is drawn from the “usual patterns of social life exhibited by those being studied” and contextualisation of those patterns. She notes that while ethnographic research need not test a theory, it should have clear connection to a framework of knowledge and interpretation that extends beyond the immediate study - how what was learned from any particular study fits into a larger, theoretical, whole. Finally, she notes the responsibility of the ethnographic researcher to “do no harm” (2009a, pp. 191-194).

Fieldwork is widely considered to be intrinsic to ethnographic study, or as Singer notes, what Delamont, 2004, (cited in Singer, 2009a, p. 193) calls “proper ethnography” involves fieldwork, typically participant observation or on-site observation with comprehensive field notes forming a central part of the data. There are two points to make in regard to this. Firstly, in his discussion of ethnography, Davis (2008) acknowledges Singer’s and others concerns over the use of the term ethnographic which can, he says, be used “too loosely”. He notes that in the anthropological tradition of ethnography, lengthy periods were spent by scholars immersed in the field, “the field” often being a culture different to the researcher’s own. But he also notes “media/communication academics tend to conduct rather more limited ‘participant-observations’ and/or interview series under the ethnography label” (2008, p. 67). I take Davis to mean ethnography can involve interviews alone, and such is the case here. A second point is that as a former senior journalist, I am familiar with journalism culture, its everyday practices and norms, its professional values and production processes. While this may go some way towards lessening the need for fieldwork, it also raises questions in regard to objectivity and validity. I therefore outline in detail below my approach to data analysis which is designed to allay concerns over researcher bias.

5.2.1 Ethnographic Case Study

As Singer (2009a) notes, most ethnographies are case studies, a key strength of the case study method being “that it enables the researcher to probe deeply for meaning in a particular, real-world environment” (p. 194). As O’Leary (2004) argues, case studies allow the study of any unit of social life. Case studies often rely on interviews and document analysis “to obtain rich qualitative data” (p. 118).

5.3 Generalisability and representativeness

According to Mason (1996, as cited in Silverman, 2010, p. 140), simple description of an “idiosyncratic case” is not enough in qualitative research, findings should also have a wider resonance. The exploration of the occupational values and norms as articulated by a specialised group of feature writers can be seen as providing this wider resonance. The journalists can be seen as an occupational sub-group whose experiences, attitudes, professional practices and values have relevance not only for other New Zealand newspaper journalists but journalism as practiced in other Western democratic nations with which New Zealand identifies, such as Australia, the UK and the US. As Deuze

(2007) argues, an occupational ideology of journalism is evident across national borders even if ideal-typical values of journalism vary.

The journalists selected for the study can also be seen as an example of critical case sampling - those that can make a point dramatically or are particularly important in the wider field. While broad generalisations to a wider group are not necessarily possible from a critical case sample, as Patton (2002) notes: “logical generalisations can often be made from the evidence produced” (pp. 236-237). What I hope to do here is demonstrate that this research “relates to things beyond the material at hand” so that findings are extrapolated to a wider realm. As Silverman notes, extrapolation rather than generalisation might better capture the typical procedure in qualitative research (Alasuutari, cited in Silverman, p. 150).

5.4 Data analysis

As Jensen (2002) observes, interviewing is one of the most widely-used data collection methods used in media and communication research. A commonsensical reason for this may be that the easiest way to find out what someone thinks is to ask them. However, interview data must be analysed and interpreted in order to create meaningful understanding of socio-cultural phenomena. Analysis of interview data goes beyond taking interviewees’ words at face value; it requires understanding that all communication has a purpose and a context (p. 240). Simply put, people do not always mean what they say or say what they mean; the researcher must bear in mind the question of how far people attach a single meaning to their experiences and whether there may be multiple meanings articulated in different contexts - including to each other or in an occupational setting (Silverman, 2010, pp. 47-48).

Patton observes there are no precise and agreed-on terms to describe the variety of data analysis methods and processes that can be employed in qualitative research. Jensen (2002) reiterates this point, noting that what constitutes analysis, particularly between qualitative and quantitative traditions of media studies, has been “a central area of controversy” (p. 245). However, he argues that qualitative research is distinguished by the defining and redefining of key concepts and other elements of the research “as part of the research process itself”. He argues that synthesis of findings – rather than analysis – is not a single concluding act but a continuous activity throughout the research. Discussing three variants of data analysis – thematic coding, grounded theory and

discourse analysis – he also notes that thematic analysis usually involves comparing, contrasting and abstracting “the constituent elements of meaning” from a dataset. It is the occurrence of a theme or frame in a communication context which is of primary interest in qualitative studies, and such is the case in this study.

5.4.1 Responsive Interviewing

The comparing, contrasting and abstracting of the constituent elements of meaning in this study is done through the identification and analysis of themes following Rubin & Rubin’s model of responsive interviewing (2012). They argue that qualitative interviewing is not mere story-telling but allows the researcher to examine in detail the experiences, motives and perspective of others and thereby create understanding of complicated socio-cultural processes (p. 3). It also allows the researcher to explore contradictory or counterintuitive discourses and explore multiple perspectives of an issue (p. 4). Interviews usually focus on a single topic and investigate in-depth rather than “skipping from one matter to another” (p. 5). As O’Leary (2004) explains, the main goal of all analysis involves moving from raw data to “meaningful understanding”. Understanding is built through a process of discovering and uncovering themes and by interpreting the implication of the themes for the research questions (p. 195). As Rubin & Rubin (2012) observe, clusters of themes are often contained within the stories interviewees tell (pp. 195-196). A theme is also often marked by words such as “because”, “therefore” or “so that is why”. Themes are often implicit in metaphors or comparisons: when a concept is wrapped in a metaphor, it can be seen as the interviewee struggling to make meaning or sense of their situation and usually suggests a theme.

5.4.2 Themes and Coding

Themes from the interviews were identified and coded (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, pp. 196-200). Rubin & Rubin define themes as summary statements, causal explanations or conclusions which show the relationship between two or more concepts. Concepts that emerge from ordinary speech often convey goals, values, perceptions or attitudes and represent strategies that frame action. Themes were identified through close reading of the interview transcripts to identify topics, events and attitudes that the interviewees themselves emphasised and by referring back to the research questions. Where themes significantly overlapped or were closely related, this was also noted and is included in

the findings. As O’Leary (2004) observes, coding is not preliminary to identifying themes “but is part and parcel of interpretative practice itself”. This is done through a process of inductive and deductive reasoning to first, generate themes, and, second, to interpret their meaning. Themes emerge from “rich engagement” with the data which involves reading, over-viewing and annotating concepts, linguistic devices (such as metaphors and analogies) and non-verbal cues (such as tone or emotive feeling such as laughter). Once texts have been explored for relevant themes, an exploration of the relationship between various themes can be carried out (pp. 196-199).

Coding was done by initially coding two interview transcripts to see if the codes could be applied to a third interview and to identify new themes from the third interview. Some changes to themes were made at this point – by either combining themes that suggested a more over-arching theme or by separating out a single theme into two or more separate themes. Each theme was given a name and assigned a symbol. The process of recognising existing themes or identifying new ones was done by reading each transcript in turn until all seven interviews had been coded within the transcript text. Finally all transcripts were read closely twice more to check whether coded themes were significant, and to check whether all significant themes had been identified. This process was also informed by checking back to the research questions in order to ensure the thematic analysis was focused on answering the research questions.

Themes were then examined to explore whether they were in tension; whether some themes influenced others, whether one or more themes had a magnifying effect and whether some themes were causes or consequences of others. While body language and vocal responses were not a significant part of this study, where a response by the interviewee added to the context of a remark or story told, this was noted. As Rubin & Rubin (2012) explain, tension between what a person says and the emotion they express might suggest a theme (p. 196) while, as noted above, O’Leary (2004) observes that analysis can include looking for the “non-verbal cues” through which people convey thoughts, feelings and attitudes (pp. 196-199). As Rubin & Rubin (2012) also observe, no matter how far analysis is taken, the researcher must have ample and explicit evidence to back up every conclusion so that responses of interviewees with a strong emotional element can be seen as further evidence in reaching conclusions from the data or generalising from the data (p. 211). Rubin & Rubin also advise acting as one’s own “devil’s advocate” by ensuring the data do actually support the theme and that examples

are consistent with it (2012, p. 208). This was a particular focus of the final analysis of all seven interview transcripts.

Coded themes were examined to see how they might be linked, in tension or conflict and to explore whether themes suggested a tentative or significant finding or provided evidence to suggest a theoretical question. Findings were then explored to discover if they might apply to other settings. As Rubin & Rubin (2012) observe, even if the findings do not hold for all cases, some generalisation should be possible.

In the Discussion and Conclusions chapter, the final stage of the research, what the data says and what it might mean, is documented. This was done by testing themes and tentative conclusions against the data to ensure there was ample and explicit evidence for any conclusions drawn and to help answer the research questions.

5.5 Method: Interviews with long-form journalists

New Zealand's media sector is small by international standards and the number of specialist reporters and writers smaller still. The number of participants in this study reflects this. But as Silverman observes, qualitative research often focuses on small groups of people in order to "say a lot about a little", and that it is possible to "celebrate the partiality of your data and delight in the particular phenomenon it allows you to inspect" (Silverman, 2010, p. 133-135). Further, as O'Leary observes, the selection of cases in a case study is usually non-random and the theoretical selection is often to select a case that takes advantage of a particular event – in this case the advent of online journalism and its impact on traditional print forms of journalism – to "bring new understandings to the fore" (O'Leary, 2004, p. 116).

5.5.1 Conducting the interviews

All interviewees signed a consent form prior to interview and were given an Information Sheet explaining the research in detail and providing contact details of the researcher's supervisor. Interviews were recorded using a digital recording device and transcribed by the researcher. Interviewees were promised confidentiality and advised that no material collected by the researcher from the interviews would be published without their prior knowledge and consent.

5.5.2 Confidentiality

Issues of confidentiality were identified early as being a challenge in this study. As noted above, New Zealand's media market is small by international standards and it is relatively easy to identify people by job title. Therefore the generic term "journalist" is used to describe participants even though they may have had a more senior title or may write for specialised publications or sections of the newspaper. However, no interview data has been changed, omitted or distorted in order to prevent the interviewee being identified. Instead, where comments or anecdotes related by participants during interviews would have clearly identified them, these comments and anecdotes have been generalised to omit identifying factors such as the name of a special publication or section.

As well, all interviewees were provided with a draft version of the Findings chapter so they could raise any concerns they may have had over confidentiality. Three interviewees requested small changes to some direct quotes which contained highly distinctive language or phrases that may have led to their identification.

Chapter Six: Research Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the research and the perceptions and understandings interviewees articulated during interviews.

Seven journalists were interviewed from New Zealand's two major newspaper companies, Fairfax Media and APN News & Media. Six interviews were done face-to-face, one by telephone. Interviews lasted between forty minutes and an hour and a half. Journalists worked in Auckland and Wellington.

Within the New Zealand newspaper industry, interviewees can be seen as senior and experienced, with careers spanning from ten to 30 years. They held a variety of roles within their organisations with some writing in specialist areas and for specialist publications. All interviewees strongly identified as print feature journalists.

This section of the thesis is set out under headings of significant themes found through the data analysis. Sub-headings are used to break up the text and organise it under appropriate sub-topics.

6.1 Long-form Under Threat

A majority of the journalists saw long-form journalism as under threat and this can be seen as an overarching theme to emerge from the study. This theme is inextricably linked to a second major theme: the perceived devaluation of long-form through both content and organisational changes. As Rubin & Rubin (2012) note, themes are often interrelated and overlap, while some themes can be seen as a consequence of others. The threat to long-form and the devaluation themes can be seen as both overlapping and as in consequential relation to each other: long-form was perceived as under threat by the journalists through a series of key events and developments which they believed had devalued their work.

6.1.1 Death discourse

The use of words such as “dying” or “death” often served to make the threat to long-form theme explicit, as when one journalist described the decision by news executives to merge a formerly separate long-form section into another section of the newspaper as,

“another death knell or nail in the coffin for long-form”. Here, the threat-to-long-form theme is expressed through a discourse of death which includes images commonly associated with dying or funerals. Another interviewee described the demand for shorter stories by editors as, “they’ve cut our absolute life blood”, and referred to the long-form writers he worked with as “the sort of diehards”.

This discourse of death or dying can be seen as closely linked to a second distinctive theme to emerge from interviews, a discourse of extinction, or the “dinosaur” discourse. Journalists both perceived themselves as dinosaurs and believed it was a perception shared by others. The discourse was marked by words such as “dinosaur” or “dodo”, and was used both when talking about long-form in general and in answer to specific questions - particularly questions about engagement with new digital technology. This quote is typical of the discursive characteristics of this discourse:

“I was just saying to someone this very lunchtime ‘I’ve got dodo written on my forehead’, and he said, ‘no, I’ve got it written on my back’. We are an endangered species, features is seen as a luxury I think. It often involves older journalists and older journalists who have a particular ... they actually want to write something with substance and gravitas and they want to write important stories but not sexy stories in terms of selling newspapers.”

Here, the journalists not only see themselves as dinosaurs but believe it is also the way others see them. So while the journalist characterises himself as a “dodo” – he also quotes his friend as not only agreeing, but humorously inferring that in fact he is a target, and his days as a feature writer may be numbered.

Another veteran characterised feature journalists as “dinosaurs” and believed the perception was shared by management because it was accurate: “It’s not just their [management’s] fault, it’s us as well. We are dinosaurs.”

The dinosaur discourse was articulated both in relation to long-form journalism and during questions about engagement with new forms of media, such as social media site twitter. The interviewee quoted directly above noted that, while younger colleagues – “half the newsroom” – were on twitter, the features team were “luddites” and not from “that era of social media so we are dinosaurs”. This meant it was not management’s “fault” but it was “us as well” – confirming this was how the feature writers saw themselves so that management could not be blamed if they also saw the features team this way.

While the dinosaur discourse can be seen as an oblique description of the perception that long-form journalism was under threat, this was also expressed more directly:

“[Long-form] is under threat, no doubt about that. If you have to cut costs what’s the first thing to go? It’s the most expensive form of journalism.”

This journalist said it was obvious there was a “finite life-span” to his job because he was paid more than younger, less-experienced daily news journalists and he incurred travel costs which younger reporters did not. Another interviewee mirrored this comment by comparing her output with that of online news reporters: “[Long-form] is massively resource intensive; you know I could spend a couple of weeks on a story and what else could I be doing in that time? I could be writing 50 stories about celebrities and their cats.” That long-form was under threat was, she said, a matter of “pure economics”.

The threat-to-long-form theme was also present when journalists talked about the future. All expressed concern about long-term job security:

“I figure I will carry on doing it while it’s still a great job, and I don’t know how much longer that will be, might be five years, might be ten years if I’m lucky but realistically I am imagining I will have to have a second career.”

Another described the future as “scary” while yet another said she did not know “how long this job will exist in the way it does now”. Questions on future employment were often greeted by the journalists with a smile or laughter, however this response can be characterised as sardonic, or cynical, rather than genuine humour.

Only one interviewee expressed confidence she could make the transition to web feature journalism from print newspapers and this interviewee was the youngest in the study. However, she saw a high probability she could be forced to leave journalism eventually, linking this to the wider economic troubles of mainstream media and newspapers in particular: “We know we could get an email at any point saying hundreds of jobs are on the line”.

6.2 Devaluation of long-form

As Rubin & Rubin (2012, p. 206) note, themes discovered through data analysis sometimes reinforce each other, magnifying the effect. And as noted above, some themes can be seen as a consequence of others. The theme of long-form under threat can

be seen as a consequence of this second theme, devaluation of long-form. As well, the devaluation theme can be seen as reinforcing – and magnifying - the perception that long-form is under threat.

The devaluation theme is marked by specific events and stories. As Rubin & Rubin (2012) note, stories can be a rich source of values and warnings where interviewees give special emphasis to some perceptions or events over others and which often suggest a theme (p. 195-196). Interviewees discussed five developments and events that can be seen as comprising the devaluation theme: the merging of long-form sections into other sections; a demand for shorter stories; failure to flag feature stories on the website homepage; the moving of feature journalists into the main print newsroom; and a perceived over-reliance on focus group research by senior editors. These five developments can be seen as themes in their own right but, taken together, form an overarching theme of devaluation of long-form journalism.

6.2.1 Section changes

The merging of sections occurred at both companies but at different times. As newspapers struggle to compete in the online age, merging sections can be seen as one way to cut costs (Nauman, 1996, p. 24), (Zimmerman, 2009, January 31). For the journalists, the disappearance of a separate, dedicated long-form section was seen as a devaluation of their work: “They got rid of our section. That was huge for us, it was a loss of that serious side of the paper on the weekend,” one said. Another said: “By the time we arrived in [another section], that was the end of it as far as I could see, the opportunity to do any decent long-form feature writing was gone.” A journalist from the other company, where the section he wrote for was about to be merged with another said: “Not having your own standalone section diminishes the importance of it really. It’s kind of saying ‘we don’t think it’s important enough to have its own section’”. Another journalist described the merging of a long-form section as managers getting “rid” of it so that her work felt “a bit more meaningless”.

This discourse can be seen as linked to the issue of prominence, where a story on the front page is regarded as more important than one on page five (Tucker, 1999, p. 53). By not having a separate features section – with its own front page - long-form is seen as less prominent and therefore further down the hierarchy of what senior editors consider important.

6.2.2 Story length

The section changes at one company roughly coincided with a demand by editors for shorter stories. Interviewees believed this was a gradual development but was encapsulated by the acronym TLDNR – Too Long Did Not Read which was put on stories that editors believed should be shorter. One journalist described this development as leaving features staff “quite distraught”. “The overall drive was to reduce the length of features, they decided that people did not want to read long stories anymore and therefore this was the new way,” she said. Another said, “We all kind of laughed at [TLDNR] at the time but it kind of became a reality ... we got told [our stories] had to be shortened, no-one wants to read these big slabs of print”. He described the new edict as cutting “our absolute life blood” and said that, while the general perception of online journalism was that stories were shorter, “it was the print that was attacked”. Another recounted a conversation with his editor in which he warned that the story he had just written was 3000 words: “She said ‘2600 is the limit’ and I said, ‘what happens at 2601, do they stop reading?’”

The demand for shorter stories was seen by journalists as a breach of feature writing norms that ran counter to strongly-held values and beliefs. These values and beliefs were variously articulated as a “decent read” and “good stories” told honestly and fairly. Most used the term “in-depth” to describe why longer stories were important. Interviewees saw length as a defining characteristic of their work which in turn was closely aligned with core values and beliefs:

“You can’t tell the whole story in 200 words, you can’t make an intelligent and in-depth examination of an issue in 300 words or in half an hour. And if you think that journalism has an important democratic function ... that it has a role in society and in holding people to account, then it’s important that you have those bigger-picture stories.”

The issue of length can also be aligned to Schudson’s (2008) six functions of journalism. In the following comment made by one journalist about a story she had written focusing on the day-to-day life of a family from a marginalised societal group:

“Empathy can come out of a story like that, [you hope that readers] come out with a better understanding ... and that they’re moved by it, touched or moved, and they understand what it’s about. But also [you want to write it so that] it’s engaging.”

This comment can be seen as closely reflecting Schudson's (2008) empathy function and is articulated by the interviewee as a core value of long-form.

6.2.3 Re-location of features staff

As well as content changes – section changes and shorter stories – staff at one company were moved back into the general (print) newsroom. The move was made so that the online newsroom, which had been on a separate floor, could move onto the main editorial floor.

Interviewees linked the shift into the general print newsroom to not only a devaluation of their work but a down-grading of their status as feature writers. One said: “We were always under threat of being moved back into the newsroom ... and that has now come to pass.” Another said: “We got cleaned out of [there], down to the main newsroom”. These discourses connote a loss of status: the move had always been threatened and once it happened, the journalists saw themselves as being “cleaned out”.

Once the move was made, they described themselves as being “shunned”, as “increasingly irrelevant” and “isolated” within the general print newsroom, with one journalist describing their position as “this little row at the back”. Another said they had been “put in our place in no uncertain terms” in relation to a period when, as a group, they queried a number of editorial decisions they felt would negatively impact on their work.

Work done by Robinson (2011a) is highly relevant to the perceptions of the journalists towards their re-location. As she notes, the industrial workplace has traditionally been made up physical divisions such as offices that impart a “variegated authority” among different classes of workers (pp. 147-148). Space can be seen as denoting workplace power or status – the idea that a corner office confers more status than a corridor one for example. Secondly, Robinson observes that the process whereby new technologies displace traditional routines and the traditional place of workers within the hierarchy has “potentially devastating side effects” (2011a, pp. 147-148). These include a “waning legitimacy” and workplace “isolation” for some workers (Barley, 1996; Gumpert & Drucker, 2007, as cited in Robinson, 2011a, pp. 147-148). These concepts of waning legitimacy and isolation are explicit in the journalists’ perceived position after the move: they felt “shunned”, “increasingly irrelevant” and “isolated”. The journalist who described their new location as “this little row at the back” also said: “so we’re just the

feature writers.” The perception of occupying a lower place in the hierarchy and of having less importance within the organisation can be seen as explicit in the journalists’ comments and contributed to a sense that, through occupying a less important place in the organisation, they had lost value as workers and therefore their work had also lost value or had been devalued.

6.2.4 “It’s not what readers want”

Reinforcing the devaluation theme was a perception that reader focus group research was used by management to argue long-form journalism was not valued – or wanted – by readers. Comments by interviewees showed how audience research was cited as a reason for the demand for shorter stories: “We got told our stories were too long” said one. “They don’t want long features because research shows that people will stop reading”, said another, adding that he had seen research which showed readers were “cold” on longer stories.

Journalists responded in two distinct ways to the use of audience figures to back editors’ arguments that readers didn’t want long-form. Firstly, the journalists questioned the research’s validity; and secondly, they called for editorial decision-making to be based on traditional journalism practices and norms rather than focus group research.

On the validity argument, one respondent called focus group research a “blunt instrument” and questioned whether it was “scientific”; another said readers were known to express views within a focus group environment that did not correspond to their actual behaviour, “and there’s research that shows that”. Another interviewee said that he had had to “face down” attempts by editors to implement content changes based on research and had told editors the focus group was made up of “half-wits” and questioned why decisions were being based on what focus group participants said. Another interviewee said: “[Senior editors] seem to come to these conclusions based on the research they do but I wonder how reliable it is, focus groups and other market research.” Hager (2012) alludes to this characterisation of media consumers, arguing that the perception in commercial news organisations is that the public is “trivial”, “self-centred” and uninterested in serious news but that this assumption is open to question. Hager argues ordinary people show a preference for good journalism more than they are given credit for (p. 224).

A second response by the journalists was the upholding of occupational practices and beliefs to argue that *journalism* was the only valid decider of editorial content. This can be seen as an articulation of professional journalism's belief in professional autonomy. As studies have found (Deuze, 2005; Singer, 2007), journalists claim freedom to tell the stories they deem important without regard to "extra-journalistic forces" such as public criticism (Deuze, 2005, p. 448). This comment from one interviewee closely aligns with the concept of occupational autonomy:

"There was an overriding propensity to use focus groups to determine what ... a feature was; [focus groups] were used over and above any reliance on journalism."

She defined journalism as "old-fashioned news values judgement" which, in turn, can be seen as an articulation of the traditional values, practices and norms of professional journalism.

6.3 Increasing dominance and influence of online

Although all participants in this study identified as print journalists, they were united in seeing online publication of their stories as essential. This was a significant theme to emerge from the data. This perception was often articulated through the notion of prominence (Tucker, 1999, p. 53). For long-form journalists, failure to have their stories appear prominently online was seen as a down-grading or devaluing of their work which in turn links to both the threat to long-form theme and the devaluation theme and can be seen as having a magnifying effect on the devaluation theme. The theme of increased dominance and influence of online journalism is clearly present in the following discourse where one journalist describes representations by feature writers to news executives to have their content clearly flagged on the website homepage:

"Oh we just cannot understand it. For years we've asked could you just put, just at the weekend, just put [the long-form section name], or features or something, a tag with our stories in it ... it was something that used to really annoy us because for a while there what they thought was topical and worth writing about depended on how many hits it had on the website so if people go on the website and they don't even know you've written a story that week, how are they supposed to hit on it? They never made room for us on the net."

Another interviewee said: "We tackled them about it and they said, 'no, it's not what readers want, it's not what online people are looking for'."

The importance of online prominence, as evident in the discourses above, was echoed by a majority of journalists and marks a significant shift in the attitude of print journalists from the pioneering days of newspaper websites. In an early study by Singer, Tharp & Haruta (1999), researchers found online staff felt they were not taken seriously by print colleagues and that the print newspaper took precedence over the website (pp. 42-43). As Powers (2012) notes, when newspapers began setting up websites in the mid-1990s, online newsrooms were not only separate from print newsrooms but “subordinate” to them (p. 27).

Findings in this research show attitudes by print journalists have changed markedly. Online publication had an assumed importance so that interviewees saw it as important as print, if not more so. One said, “These days, if it’s not online it’s like it doesn’t exist.” A key reason for this change in attitude can be seen as the desire to reach the widest-possible audience, a finding that aligns with Deuze (2002) who found journalists placed strong emphasis on reaching the greatest number of readers or viewers (p. 141). A journalist in the present study said:

“If you’re not online, you become irrelevant. As a journalist, the reason you write things is so that people will read them and you are going to have the widest possible audience if it’s online.”

Another likened the time-lag between her stories being published in print and their appearance online as the worst type of “snail mail”. Another said if his stories did not appear online relatively promptly after the print edition, he complained to his editor.

6.3.1 Disparagement of online journalism

Closely aligned to discourses on the importance of online was a paradoxical discourse of disparagement of online journalism, a distinct theme that emerged during interviews. The two themes – importance of online publication coupled with denigration of online journalism – can be seen as an example of what Rubin and Rubin (2012) call themes in tension or opposition (p. 206).

While interviewees all saw online dissemination of their stories as vital in order to reach as many readers as possible, paradoxically, online journalism in general was seen as lowering journalistic standards and breaching occupational values and norms. One key reason for this was that the news agenda was perceived as being driven by the number of hits or page views stories attracted on the website rather than norms of professional journalism such as gate-keeping (Singer, 1997). As Singer (1997) observes, the

gatekeeper role – the idea that journalists decide what people should know – is often so taken for granted within professional journalism that it is not made explicit (p. 73). First defined in 1950, Singer notes the gatekeeper role is “deeply-ingrained” in journalists’ self-perception. But as she also notes, the gatekeeper role is one that is clearly challenged by technological change (p. 74).

Journalists were concerned that not only were audience metrics such as page views dictating news content, but that this spilled over into influencing the value of long-form content, as previously noted through comments that long-form wasn’t what consumers were looking for online.

This was articulated by an interviewee who said thousands of “clicks on Brangelina” by readers meant “serious” feature stories were no longer wanted. She described an incident where a senior editor asked her to write more positive stories: “[He] said, ‘oh I think we need some forward-looking stories’”.

Phrases used in relation to online journalism often contained discourses of carelessness or a lack of skill. When talking about online, interviewees said stories were “just whacked up” on the website; another said a story online was there one minute and gone the next, characterising online journalism as “goldfish journalism”. Two other journalists noted the number of errors online and saw the lack of accuracy as emblematic of online journalism as a whole.

This finding mirrors traditional attitudes to online journalism almost since the latter’s inception when, as Singer (2003) notes, online journalism was regarded as operating at a lower ethical level than traditional journalism (p. 151). What is notable here is that, a decade on from Singer’s 2003 study, attitudes of traditional journalists towards the online operation have persisted to such a degree. Online journalism continues to be regarded by print journalists as operating without the traditional values and norms profession journalism claims for itself.

6.3.2 Audience metrics tied to performance

As detailed in the Literature Review, audience engagement as a determining factor in news selection has been studied by a number of scholars (Boczkowski & Peer, 2011; Anderson, 2011). In their research, Boczkowski and Peer (2011) found a divergence between stories selected for prominent display by journalists and stories preferred by readers. As the authors note, the implications of this divergence raises questions over

journalists' ability to fulfil a watchdog role: if consumers didn't want public affairs stories, then logically journalists might provide less of them or display them less prominently. Overall, Anderson (2011) found that while occupational norms were still a determining factor in news decisions, journalists felt audience metrics were becoming increasingly influential.

The findings in the present study suggest the increasing dominance of online, with its need for rapid dissemination of content, indicates that the changes the web has wrought show no sign of slowing. Print journalists appeared fully aware of the importance of online publication to their work but at the same time bemoaned a perceived loss in journalistic control – through gate-keeping - and a danger in allowing hit counts to become the sole arbiter of what gets published and what doesn't.

This was illustrated through a story related by one interviewee who described how, for the first time, in the third quarter of 2012, news executives circulated a “by-author” monthly metrics report to news staff. This report listed the highest number of readers or viewers for individual journalists' stories. While features staff did not receive the report directly, copies were quickly and eagerly shared by email within the newsroom. Of note is that, far from being an established routine, measuring performance through audience metrics for individual journalists was new: it had not happened before. While the measurement of individual journalists' work by the number of hits it has received could be viewed as a logical outcome of the technology available, the by-author report was in fact a novel event.

The interviewee related the incident in a relatively humorous tone:

“My pod mate said, ‘oh my god, what’s this?’ ... In the email [news executives] said ‘oh the only reason we do it is because we’re interested and reporters shouldn’t read anything into it but well done the people who are on top’ ... it’s probably only a matter of time before your pay rise gets tagged to your metrics.”

Three distinct discourses are of note here. Firstly, and as noted above, staff regarded the report as a significant development but also received it with a degree of alarm. Secondly, news executives appeared aware this would be the case by offering reassurance that staff shouldn't “read anything” into the report while – paradoxically - offering congratulations to those with the highest story count. A third notable discourse is supposition by the interviewee that, in future, story view counts could be tied to pay.

These discourses can be seen as reflecting a central dilemma for journalism in the digital online world: that in order to survive in an increasingly fragmented and competitive news environment, the temptation to use consumer preference as an overriding determiner of content is strong. As Deuze notes, while audiences have always engaged with media, never before has this engagement been so visible to journalists (2007, p. 95). At the same time, newspaper owners and managers are fully aware that consumers as determiners of content can be seen by journalists as a breach of occupational norms – implicit in management’s caution that staff not “read anything” into the circulation of the report to staff. But also implicit is that, what Reinardy (2010) calls journalism’s “mission”, is under increasing strain if not threat – journalists with the most hit-upon stories were congratulated.

6.4 Convergence: two tribes

This study explored the relationship and interaction between feature journalists and the online newsroom in order to discover whether convergence is being realised within mainstream newspaper companies. Three key themes emerged in this part of the research. They are discussed under the appropriate sub-headings below. However, the overarching theme of this section of the data analysis suggests that convergence has remained an ideal, rather than a fully realised, industry norm. Print and online journalists emerge as two distinctly separate groups while the concept of content convergence through multimedia story-telling appears also to have remained largely unrealised.

It should be noted here that the two companies discussed in this study had differently-configured newsrooms at the time of the research. At one company, online and print staff, whether working in Auckland or Wellington, sat in one large room. At the other company, the online newsroom was in a separate area so that you needed to walk between the two. This latter set-up was undergoing change as this thesis was being written. When quoting interviewees, it is noted which newsroom they worked in as this may have had a bearing on the findings.

6.4.1 Separation of print and online

Asked about his interaction with online, a journalist in the merged newsroom said: “You can have someone sitting a few seats away who you’ve never spoken to.” Another working in the merged newsroom said she had “pretty much” no interaction with online:

“I know who they are, they often come over ... to see what they’re going to put up online ... but that’s honestly about the limit of it.” She described online as a “very different culture”.

At the company with separate newsrooms, the features staff had little interaction with the online newsroom, describing it as “a foreign world” whose workings were “mysterious”. One older journalist said: “We were never very involved with them and I was probably one of the journalists who was most involved and that wasn’t much.” He usually communicated with the online newsroom via email, describing his relationship with online as “not very close. It’s just, ‘here’s my [work] can you put it up?’” Another journalist from the same company said there was “very much a separateness” between online and feature journalists. Another said: “We have no control about how or when [our] stories go up online. It just goes up. We don’t hear from them, we don’t have discussions.” Another attributed the separation of print feature journalism and the online operation to the historical development of the newspaper’s website: “They just kind of set it up as a separate entity, [they] haven’t ever really looked to blend the skills [we have] with the digital format.”

A theme of ongoing separation between online and print feature staff is a key theme of this study. None of the journalists had a close working relationship with online staff and one had trouble remembering the name of an online staff member with whom he had quite regular contact. Overall, whether working in a merged or relatively separated newsroom, convergence of staff was far from being realised, certainly for the feature journalists interviewed in this study.

6.4.2 Convergence of content

Overall, interviewees’ attitudes towards content convergence was marked by contradictory discourses and decidedly mixed responses which contained a high level of uncertainty and, in some cases, resistance. Uncertainty and resistance to multimedia can be seen as the two major themes to emerge in this part of the research.

One older journalist characterised multimedia story-telling incorporating elements such as video as “just not me”. Another said that, because multimedia stories might not have “the background of research and analysis to kind of back it up”, it was “not very intelligent”. A third expressed the view that being “multi-skilled” and more “flexible” was essential for journalists in a changing media environment but a short while later he

said he was “just parroting the company line there in some ways” and was sceptical about the benefits of new technology. One of the younger journalists said a feature with hyperlinks, audio and video and graphical elements meant the story was “a different beast” to a traditional text feature.

A majority of feature journalists in this study had no experience of multimedia storytelling techniques and very little or no training in online formats such as video and audio. As with ideals of convergence of staff, convergence of content appears to be far from being achieved at either company - for feature journalists at least. (For reasons of production routines, questions on multimedia production were not relevant for one journalist, however her attitude toward it is included).

Only one journalist in the study had consistently tried to produce multimedia elements for feature stories but said it was an uphill struggle to get online staff to include these elements when they uploaded the online version of her work to the website. Often it was only because a “pointer” – or flag – to multimedia content such as video had already been promoted in the print edition – and gone to press - that online staff were persuaded the multimedia element needed to be included with the online version of the story. She described their attitude as: “They’ve left it to the last minute and then they go, ‘oh, she’s put a pointer on this so we have to do it’, kind of thing. I got the sense there wasn’t a lot of interest, really, [it was seen as] make-work. Features is always down the list in terms of priorities [for online].”

Contradictory discourses were evident in a veteran journalist’s description of making a video for the website. He said the emotional part of the process – a piece to camera describing his feelings about a disastrous event – “made me feel ill” because he felt his job as a journalist was “not to put yourself in the story”. This can be seen as an expression of the objectivity or impartiality norm of professional journalism (Deuze, 2007, p. 163). The interviewee also felt worried he would be laughed at as he addressed the audience directly through the camera: “I didn’t want to make a dick of myself”, he said. He found the video-making process “nerve-wracking” and described it as a lot of work “for very little result”. He also called the video a bit of “nonsense” and “simple-minded”. Conversely, when the video was complete, he felt it was “quite good” and enjoyed the experience of making it which, in working with a video editor, he found “quite collaborative”. Overall he felt journalists could not put their “heads in the sand”

about new technology: “Print journalists are silly to say ‘look print journalism is all I do’. I think you’ve got to be prepared to look at other areas.”

These comments on video journalism can be seen as revealing both uncertainty and resistance to multimedia story-telling. For this veteran journalist, the making of a video felt foreign and strange. Putting himself “in the story” was seen as a breach of the journalistic norm of objectivity. The idea of video or audio as opposed to text ran counter to his identity as a print journalist. But despite these concerns, overall he felt the experience in making video was positive and believed print journalists would have to adapt to new forms of online story-telling.

The theme of uncertainty was most marked in the response of another veteran journalist who was asked if a story made up of various elements such as video, audio, hyperlinks and photo gallery could be regarded as a feature story. She answered: “To me it’s not. It’s a multimedia feature as opposed to a text feature. What is a feature? Well a feature can be anything I suppose.” This discourse begins with the upholding of occupational norms: multimedia long-form is seen as such a significant change from traditional text forms that it cannot be regarded as a feature at all. But it calls into question the definition of a feature at a time of technological change so that the journalist rhetorically questions exactly what a feature is and concludes it can be “anything”. This discourse can be seen as embodying the uncertain response of traditional print journalists when confronted with technological challenges to long-accepted norms. The uncertainty expressed by this interviewee is quite clear: when faced with questions about multimedia content in feature writing, she concludes a feature “can be anything I suppose”.

Another response by interviewees to multimedia was to cite a lack of opportunity to expand their skills in this area. As noted in the discourse above about online staff only including multimedia elements in stories when they had to, a younger journalist said she had made sustained efforts to develop multimedia content for features but her attempts were often met with resistance from online staff: “The couple of times I’ve tried to introduce any kind of multimedia elements into the stories, I dunno, I got the sense there wasn’t a lot of interest really.” This can be seen as an example of what Boczkowski (2004a) calls the agency of individual actors who create “convergent products” through their own initiative or where they feel technically competent. In his study of online newsrooms’ adoption of multimedia, Boczkowski (2004a) argued for a research

approach that included an understanding that convergence did not happen through a “technological logic” but was often a more complex process best understood through a “lens” that emphasised individual agency as much as technological capability (p. 210). In the present study, individual agency can clearly be seen in the attempts by this journalist to adopt new forms of feature journalism. However, notably, it is the online newsroom that can be seen as resisting convergence here rather than the traditional print journalist.

Overall, uncertainty marked the journalists’ responses to multimedia. This mirrors findings by Sarrica et al (2010) that journalists resist new editorial strategies that demand “trans-media knowledge and competence”. However the experiences of the younger journalist offer a counter view: in her comments, it can be seen that, in some instances at least, convergence is being resisted not just by traditional print journalists but by online journalists. This finding offers an interesting insight into how contemporary arrangements for convergence are evolving and the complexities involved in attempts to ensure a fully convergent newsroom. Further study might help reveal whether resistance to converged media products is happening on both sides of the digital divide – print and online – and how assumed occupational practices and routines for specific groups of workers are being diffused within organisations so that that digital divide not only remains but is routinely sustained. It also raises questions of whether some journalism forms – in this case features – are regarded as being antithetical to the imperatives of online so that it is given a lower priority for inclusion and presentation on the website than other forms.

6.5 Ambivalence and resistance to new forms of computer-mediated communication

Journalists were asked about their engagement with, and attitudes towards, aspects of new communication technologies such as social media, audience interactivity and citizen journalism, in order to explore how they saw their role in what Singer (2009) calls the increasingly “shared space” of online (p. 3).

6.5.1 Audience interactivity

Journalists’ level of engagement with readers online and their attitudes towards that engagement varied markedly within this study. Interviewee responses to engaging with audiences ranged from strongly positive, to lukewarm to extremely negative. The

negative response is perhaps best exemplified in the comments from a veteran journalist who called online reader comment streams “a disgusting cesspit of inbreds having their say” which often degenerated into “abusive crap” which he tried not to read because “I really despise it”. Conversely, the youngest journalist in the study saw reader engagement by journalists as vital and had made significant efforts to ensure she could connect with readers online even though print production routines made this difficult.

Even journalists who were quite positive about audience interactivity, and conscientious about replying to comments and emails from readers, characterised it somewhat negatively as “online talkback”. The following response was relatively typical: “I think it’s a way to stimulate debate and it’s great to see that ... but where it’s more bantering back and forth ... I perhaps don’t feel that that’s quite so useful.” A veteran journalist was also equivocal: “I agree there’s lots of feedback that is complete nutter feedback but it’s not all that... [I’ve always found it] quite good on the whole.” As one of the first feature journalists to include his email at the bottom of stories, he noted with amusement the sceptical response of colleagues at the time: “They said ‘why have you done that? You’re going to get lots of people emailing you’!” The initial response by his colleagues can be seen as a challenge to the one-to-many communication model of traditional print media and an upholding of the occupational norm of autonomy. Again, this mirrors Deuze (2005) who noted that the overriding concern of journalists that they must be free from censorship includes the notion that they must also be free of “extra-journalistic” forces, including public criticism (p. 448). Equivocal responses in this study can also be seen as mirroring Singer’s (2009) study of user-generated content at the UK’s Guardian newspaper which found “considerable ambivalence” among journalists to the interactive domain (p. 17).

Overall age was not a reliable indicator of how journalists would view interactivity. Veterans were quite positive about engaging with readers as were both of the youngest journalists. But a difference of only five years separates the “quite positive” response to the journalist who was strongly dismissive of online reader forums. However, again, the difference in length of time in the industry was significant between these two journalists: ten years as compared to twenty-two years, so that length of career may be a more reliable indicator of attitude to new technologies than age.

6.5.2 Social media

None of the veteran journalists interviewed for this research was consistently and regularly active on social media sites. Three were strongly derogatory of social media site *twitter* in particular. And, notably, the dinosaur discourse was often evident in discussion by older journalists of social media. The most overtly negative response to social media is exemplified in this statement from one of the longest-serving journalists in this study: “You are dealing with someone who chooses not to embrace a lot of the social networking stuff. I just prefer not to communicate like that.” The same journalist dismissed *facebook* as somewhere “where I post pictures of my cat”. Another said *twitter* was “about as much use as a fart in an empty room”. Another said none of her colleagues was engaged with *twitter* because “we are dinosaurs”. “We call it twerping,” she added. Another said, “I’m one of these dinosaurs. I haven’t got time to be sitting there tweeting people, I’m just trying to get good stories and tell them.”

When analysing the responses of interviewees, as Rubin & Rubin (2012) note, themes are often present when respondents wrap concepts in a metaphor and this is perhaps best – and most colourfully - exemplified in the “fart in an empty room” comment. This comment can be seen as an expression of the time-waster theme where journalists cited “getting the story” as a priority which overrode other, non-core, work routines. However, because they did not engage, they characterised themselves as “dinosaurs” or used terms such as luddite as in the following discourse from one veteran journalist: “I’m one of these dinosaurs that it’s going to be a real struggle to make the shift because I’ve always been a bit cynical about [social media]”. He thought social media was “a waste of time ... so I’m a bit of a luddite in some ways.” Another veteran said: “We’re just sort of older, we’re not from that era of social media so we are dinosaurs.” She attributed this to age, saying “half the newsroom” was on *twitter* but “they’re the younger reporters”. Another said: “I suspect it’s something you should be doing to build your brand but again, I’m a little old-fashioned in that respect, I can’t be arsed.” This interviewee worried about how much time social media took up, “all those people on *twitter*, I wonder what they are doing all day. I’d much rather give my time over to getting the story, researching the story, things like that.” This can also be seen as an articulation of the time-wasting theme and a perception by interviewees that traditional core work routines such as “getting the story” overrode new forms of work such as engagement with social media.

The responses can also be seen as mirroring Powers (2012, P. 32) who found journalists saw new forms of work as alien, subordinate or even dangerous to core occupational

practices such as “getting the story”. In general, core occupational values overrode engagement with social media which was seen as distracting from core routines and priorities such as finding and researching stories.

The upholding of traditional routines and norms can also be seen in the response of a younger journalist in this study. She said: “I don’t like to blur the line between professional and personal point of view so I’m not ‘friends’ with anyone that I have professional dealings with.” This can be seen as an articulation of the objectivity norm which, as Deuze (2005) notes, can be seen as a key element in the self-perception of professional journalists. Objectivity is seen as synonymous with concepts such as neutrality, impartiality and professional distance (p. 448).

However social media in a professional, organisational sense drew a very different response from one veteran journalist whose personal views on *twitter* were negative. He was highly critical of editors who had failed to set up social media channels for particular publications in the paper:

“There’s no room for us to have a facebook page or tweet or anything and I think that’s absolutely the wrong attitude. I think that one of the things that social media does and absolutely allows for is a conversation about something. You have the opportunity to engage with readers about your story.”

These two responses would seem to indicate that print journalists do see social media as a valuable tool as long as it aligns with more traditional norms and values of print journalism i.e. both journalistic autonomy and objectivity are maintained. So while in the discourse above the journalist discusses engaging with readers online, this is done in a wider organisational sense rather than one-on-one between reader and journalist. The previous discourse on maintaining professional impartiality indicates a similar attitude: that engagement with readers through social media meets with a more positive response from print journalists when it aligns with traditional norms such as maintaining distance with professional sources (Deuze, 2005, p. 448).

A number of journalists at one company noted that senior editors were regularly posting on *twitter*. They saw this as both somewhat surprising and as prioritising alternative channels of communication ahead of communicating directly with staff. One journalist in particular was highly critical of editors posting messages in a social media forum when he felt they didn’t communicate with employees: “I think, well, why don’t you

talk to us?” Another said, “often you find out things on twitter before they send an email out”.

Overall, journalists saw online engagement as distracting from core occupational routines and as potentially conflicting with occupational norms and values. As well, journalists saw *twitter* as overriding or undermining traditional forms of internal communication such as email. Their response to senior editors communicating on *twitter* was to question editors’ commitment to communicating with staff.

Themes identified in the research suggest a range of characterisations of social media including time-wasting, a distraction and as outside core occupational roles. These responses were articulated by a majority of journalists in the study. Only one journalist was unequivocally positive about *twitter* and she was the youngest journalist in the study. However, it should be noted once again that the issue of age in this research is a complex one. While one veteran journalist attributed the response of the features team as a whole to social media to their age, less than a handful of years separated one of the most adamantly negative responses about social media from a more equivocal and positive response. A more significant difference between these two journalists was length of time in the industry: ten years as opposed to twenty-two years. This suggests that length of career may be a more determining factor in journalists’ responses than simple chronological age so that seniority, and long familiarity with the norms and practices of traditional print journalism, may be a determining factor in the adoption of social media among journalists.

6.5.3 Citizen Journalism

This question probably elicited the most convergent response of any in the study. The theme to emerge in this part of the research is one of professional norms and practices being upheld to dismiss the concept of the citizen journalist. All interviewees in this study, no matter their age, background or employer, believed the practice of journalism belonged with professional journalists. This finding aligns with Singer’s 1997 study, which found journalists were sceptical of “civic journalism” and felt the journalist’s role remained one of choosing what information to make available, checking its accuracy and making sense of it (1997, p. 86).

What is notable perhaps is the length of time between her study and this - and the very little change in attitude of professional journalists in that time.

In one of the earliest studies of newspapers and online journalism, Singer (1997) asked rhetorically whether journalists were “still guarding the gate?” at online newspapers. In the present study, interviewees were united in upholding occupational norms to largely dismiss the concept that “anyone can be a journalist now” - as one interviewee somewhat archly observed.

The most positive response to the concept of citizen journalism was still highly equivocal. A younger journalist thought that, while it was good to have “so many people out there with cellphones and cameras all over the city being able to see what’s happening and feed that back”, she believed that any reliance on the public to fill the role of journalist was potentially “really dangerous”.

6.6 Blurring of the line between ‘church and state’

The separation of advertising from editorial content can be seen as journalism’s version of the Western democratic ideal of the separation of church and state (Singer, 2003, p. 154) or, as Boczkowski (2004b) less loftily observes, the separation of editorial and advertising is pervasive in the newspaper industry (p. 158).

But as far back as Tuchman’s 1978 study of television news, (as cited in Jensen 2002, p. 86) the business side of the news operation was found to seek influence over the evening newscast to please advertisers. More recently, reflecting on the state of newspapers, Starr (2011) notes that the digital environment is “more open to bias and journalism for hire”. The danger, he says, is not just more corruption in government or business, but corruption of journalism itself (p. 21).

A theme of increasing commercial pressures on editorial independence emerged from interviews in the present study even though no questions were specifically asked about this. It is important to note here that this concern was articulated by journalists from one company only. Journalists from the other company did not mention the issue, and in a follow-up question, did not cite it as a key concern.

A younger journalist said increasing commercial pressures on editorial independence was the main reason she would consider leaving the industry:

“It’s just a constant erosion of editorial independence and commitment to giving people time to think about things and do a proper job. It’s very disturbing. There are still individuals who staunchly defend [editorial independence] but I guess the problem is

that as advertising revenues drop and we become more and more desperate to hold on to what we have, you become increasingly vulnerable. Newspapers, or news, will have to continue in some form but it's a question of whether it's in a form I want to be part of."

Another interviewee said that, during a temporary appointment to a more senior role, she was regularly asked for more "integration" of editorial and advertising. She said that while the publication she was working on at the time followed accepted newspaper standards of not giving copy approval and not doing advertorial disguised as editorial, she believed pressure to blur the line was getting worse: "We're feeling more pressure from advertising than we used to." Another journalist from the same company described a particular print publication in the paper as being "advertising driven", saying: "The advertisers have a lot of power over it ... they get a bit too much of a say in what goes on I think. It doesn't conform to the usual rules of journalism."

As Deuze (2005) observes, journalists believe their work must be protected from outside influence, an articulation of the autonomy role, and this influence includes commercial pressures. Professional journalists believe they can only thrive in a "company that saves its journalists from the marketers", an alternative articulation of Boczkowski's observation that separation of advertising and editorial is pervasive in newspapers (2004b).

This theme can be seen as significant within this study as a whole, however it must be noted that only one group of journalists articulated concerns over editorial independence. Even in a follow-up question, journalists from the other company did not cite it as a concern. It is therefore difficult to draw conclusions from the evidence provided here on the overall state of the newspaper industry in relation to increased commercial pressures. Or to understand in exactly what configurations tensions between commercialisation and editorial independence might be playing out in New Zealand newspapers.

However if the finding in this study was found to apply to newspapers more generally, it would be a significant development with potentially serious ramifications for professional journalism's claims to professional autonomy. Further research in this area might yield insight into how the migration of advertising to the web, and the increased ability of advertisers to bypass mainstream media to reach their consumers directly, is impacting on newspapers' ability to hold the line against overt commercial influence.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

Introduction

This research sought to understand the ways in which long-form journalism is being influenced or changed by online, and how the place of feature journalism in major New Zealand newspapers may be changing or evolving in response to the web. Through ethnographic interviews (Singer, 2009a) with New Zealand feature journalists, this case study (O’Leary, 2004) sought to understand in what ways the internet is impacting on a specific form of journalism: long-form. The theoretical context of the study follows Williams (1974/2003), who situates technology in relation to social developments rather than seeing them as being a determinant cause of those developments.

The place of long-form, and its possible future, was explored through the following research questions:

RQ1: How is long-form newspaper journalism faring in a rapidly changing media environment?

RQ2: How are feature journalists adapting to the demands of a digital media environment including use of new computer mediated communication such as social media?

RQ3: What imperatives of online news may be influencing or impacting on the work of feature journalists?

This chapter discusses the findings of the research in regard to the research questions.

7.1 Theoretical and research context of study

Williams saw technology in relation to social developments and transformations rather being a determining cause of them. He argued that McLuhan’s theories on media failed to take account of the social and historical context into which new technologies emerge. For Williams, McLuhan’s work assumed a “false causality” between technological innovation and changes in society where the emergence of new technology inevitably led to social change. Instead, Williams saw technological innovation as inextricably bound up with wider social transformation which in turn was influenced by new technology (Williams, 1974, as cited in Freedman, 2002, p. 429). Far from seeing

McLuhan's ideas as radical, Williams believed McLuhan's famous catch-cry, 'the medium is the message', fatalistically played into the hands of the media establishment:

It gives the gloss of avant-garde theory to the crudest versions of their existing interests and practices, and assigns all their critics to pre-electronic irrelevance. (Williams, 1974, as cited in Freedman, 2002, p. 433)

For Williams, McLuhan's ideas were technologically determinist – a view that ascribes autonomous power to technology. Freedman (2002) discusses the concept of technological determinism as a belief there is a "common sense" way of adopting technology so that the public, government and regulatory authorities are convinced there is no alternative to the way it is eventually adopted. But this process of persuasion happens precisely because different models for the technology are technically possible, Freedman (2002) argues. Because technology is *represented* (emphasis in original) as being socially new, the justification for, say, loosening the regulatory environment to allow it to be used in a particular way is presented as a technical justification rather than a political one:

Technological determinism, therefore, is a discursive means of highlighting novelty and paving the way for structural changes that are then seen to be necessary. (Freedman, 2002, p. 432)

A significant new technology in Williams' time was television, one he wrote about at length both in popular essays which featured in Britain's *Listener* magazine and in his book *Television*, published in 1974 (Williams, 1974/2003). In his work, Williams argued that it was the most powerful groups in society that determined the shape of technologies and this helped explain why the *potential* (emphasis added) social benefits of television went unrealised. Instead of enhancing democracy, Williams argued that television could be seen as subject to state or corporate interests which prioritised profit-taking over citizen participation (Freedman, 2002, p. 431).

But as noted in an earlier chapter, Williams was certainly wrong to predict McLuhan's ideas would quickly fade; on the contrary, McLuhan's work has become part of contemporary culture, perhaps, as Freedman (2002) suggests, because of the profound transformation digital technologies are having on media and our attempts to make sense of those changes (p. 428). As the media landscape is transformed by digital and online technologies, with new forms of social engagement online and the rise of mobile devices that allow people to access media almost anytime, anywhere and which

connects millions of across the globe, McLuhan's concept of the 'global village' has remained part of contemporary discourse (Laughey, 2009, p. 25).

But Freedman (2002) argues Williams' work is no less relevant than McLuhan's in attempting to understand the impact of the web on media. Williams reminds us that technological innovation is no magical panacea to the social, political and economic issues of contemporary life. Nor is it an autonomous force over which we have little or no control (Freedman, 2002, p. 440). Williams' picture of technological innovation allows for complexity, it situates the development of new technology as being in contingent relationship with not only the priorities of dominant groups but also a wider process of sociological struggle and change.

It is for these reasons Williams remains an influential theorist in the media research field. In his study of the adoption processes of multimedia and interactivity in online newsrooms, Boczkowski (2004b) observes that early research on computerisation of newsrooms either explicitly, or by omission, saw editorial effects as being generated by technological developments. He cites Cottle (1999), who argued that, for those with an understanding of the processes of social construction, consideration of the technological effects on the production of news could "all too easily slide into simplistic ideas of *technological determinism*" (as cited in Boczkowski, 2004b, p. 207, emphasis in the original). In his own study, Boczkowski (2004b) suggests that convergence of media products, for example, may be influenced by many factors including the actions of individuals operating in local settings who are both constrained and enabled by the resources available. This finding aligns with Williams' theory that technology is shaped by "real" individuals in particular contemporary and historical circumstances (Freedman, 2002, p. 429). For Domingo (2003) too, technology is seen as socially constructed, not "a monolithic element that appears from nowhere and imposes its own logic" on social actors (Paterson & Domingo, 2008, p. 19-20). Deuze too argues technology is not an independent factor that influences the work of journalists from the "outside" but must be seen in terms of its implementation and how it extends and amplifies what journalists already do (2007, p. 153).

7.2 Threat to Long-form through devaluation

In answer to RQ1, through ethnographic interviews, most of the journalists believed long-form journalism was under threat, an overarching theme to emerge from this study.

A series of key events and developments culminated in journalists arriving at this conclusion, all of them strongly related to the influence and growing dominance of online journalism and the strategies being adopted by their organisations in a changing media environment.

The perception that long-form was under threat was expressed through the self-characterisation of interviewees as “dinosaurs”. Not only did interviewees – usually self-deprecatingly and with wry humour – see themselves as dinosaurs (or in one case a dodo) but assumed this was how others saw them. This was articulated by one journalist in answer to a question on whether the features team regularly saw online audience or readership figures: “No, but I mean it’s partly because we’re luddites in that area, you know, we’re not ... we’re just sort of older and we’re not from that era of social media so we are dinosaurs. What I’m saying is, it’s not just their fault, it’s us as well; we are dinosaurs.” The “their” in this discourse refers to editorial managers who, the interviewee suggests, cannot be blamed for seeing feature journalists as luddites because that is how they see themselves. The interviewee concludes that it is therefore natural that new forms of online metrics would not be shared with feature journalists.

The threat to long-form was also expressed through a discourse of dying or death, with one journalist describing the decision by newspaper managers to merge a formerly separate long-form section into another section as “another death knell or nail in the coffin for long-form”. Another described the demand for shorter stories by editors as cutting “our absolute life blood”, while the long-form writers he worked with were “the sort of diehards”.

The threat to long-form theme is inextricably linked and in close relation to a second theme: a perceived devaluation of long-form journalism. Through a series of events and developments, long-form journalists felt their work was not as valued as it had once been and concluded – reasonably, in their view - that it was under threat. As Rubin & Rubin (2012) note, a theme that represents a conclusion is often suggested by other themes which offer explanations, causes or consequences for that conclusion (p. 206). The conclusion by the journalists that long-form was under threat theme can therefore be seen as a consequence of the devaluation theme.

The series of events and developments included a demand by editors for shorter stories. This was seen as a violation of the core role of long-form journalism: to tell a story in depth, so that that length is axiomatic to long-form as a genre. In Groves & Brown

(2011), *Christian Science Monitor* journalists believed explanatory, contextual journalism that avoided sensationalism and provided “thoughtful” analysis and assessment of major social, political and cultural issues was a core mission (pp. 15-24). The journalists in this study conceived their role in similar terms, variously characterising their work as the creation of empathy for minority groups, of speaking truth to power, of writing with accuracy and fairness in-depth and of serving democracy. Taken together, these discourses can be seen as an overarching articulation of the public service role of journalism, one that is valued – if not cherished – by professional journalists. Without space or length, long-form was seen as being less able to fulfil its public service function. One interviewee described the call for shorter stories as making her work feel “a bit more meaningless”.

While the demand for shorter stories occurred at only one company, two out of three journalists at the rival company also saw long-form journalism as being under threat. One said: “I think the long-term future of long-form is in jeopardy but hopefully enough people in the right places see it as important enough to maintain it.” Another said, “you’d like to think that [long-form] will go on but in quite what form, I don’t know”.

Section changes were another development that interviewees saw as devaluing their work. By merging distinct long-form sections into other sections of the paper, editorial managers were accused of “watering down” long-form so that it was no longer geographically distinct from other newspaper content: “it’s kind of saying we [management] don’t think it’s important enough to have its own section”, said one interviewee.

For journalists at one company, a key event linked to the devaluation theme was the move of features staff back into the general print newsroom. Robinson (2011, 2011a) provides highly relevant context here although her work is situated within an organisational development research tradition rather than communications and media studies. But her observation that the introduction of new technology has brought sometimes dramatic changes in labour situations, particularly the information industries, (2011a, p. 147) lends added context to the perceptions and responses of journalists in the present study. She notes that, traditionally, space in the industrial workplace imparted a “variegated authority” among different classes of workers (2011a, p. 148). She observes the traditional place of workers within the hierarchy may change as new technology is introduced which may have positive effects such as workplace cohesion

and better inter-employee relations but also has potentially devastating effects. These include a “waning legitimacy” and workplace isolation for some workers (Barley, 1996; Gumpert & Drucker, 2007, as cited in Robinson, 2011a, pp. 147-148). Both the “waning legitimacy” and “isolation” effects can be seen in the discourses of interviewees as they describe being “cleaned out” of the old features department after “always being under threat” of being moved back into the general print newsroom. Their new position is described as “this little row at the back” where they are “isolated” and “sort of shunned”.

The move back to the newsroom can be seen as a key event within the devaluation theme: the journalists saw it as a physical manifestation of the devaluation of their work and also linked it to a second physical – or geographical – event, the merging of sections within the pages of the newspaper itself. The journalists’ perceived that a change in attitude towards their work was reflected in both these changes.

7.2.1 Audience metrics

While a degree of scepticism is arguably a prerequisite for a career in journalism (Singer, 1997, p. 86), in the current environment this scepticism may be heightened as journalists doubt their company’s ability to navigate the new digital landscape and question the wisdom of management decisions. This was the case in regard to reader research where journalists believed there was an over-reliance on focus group data to make key editorial decisions; one describing a reader focus group as “half-wits” and questioning why editors were making decisions based on this type of research. Another veteran journalist questioned how reliable focus group research was: “Focus groups say things for a variety of reasons and then they will [do] the opposite. There’s research that proves that.”

They saw focus group opinion as being used by editorial managers to devalue long-form instead of a reliance on *journalism*. A reliance on journalism was defined as “old fashioned journalism news judgement”. One interviewee said, “Until we return to that as the main method in choosing what we write about, we’re going to be a little bit fucked, as long as we go by what focus groups say.” This last comment can be seen as an articulation of professional autonomy, and a rejection of the concept that “extra-journalistic” forces (Deuze, 2005) should influence the work journalists do. This interviewee further defined old-fashioned journalism news judgement as “speaking truth to power”, of performing a watchdog role and prioritising “serious” editorial content

over “infotainment”. This can be seen as the upholding of the traditional occupational norms of professional journalism, in particular the key notion of its public service role.

7.2.2 Convergence: Staff & Content

This study explored the concept of convergence, both in terms of staff and media content. Findings suggest that, for these print feature journalists at least, print and online staff remain distinctly separate groups of workers who are living what Domingo (2003) called “parallel lives”. This was widely perceived by interviewees as a failure of management, which, “rather than involving us in [online], they just kind of set it up as a separate entity, [they] haven’t ever really looked to blend the skills [that] we have with the digital format”, as one journalist said. The online newsroom was variously described as “foreign”, “a very different culture” where there was a “separateness” between online and print operations. Interestingly, it did not seem to make a significant difference what type of newsroom journalists worked in, (journalists in this study worked in both merged and separate newsrooms) their perceptions of online were fundamentally the same. This was summed up by one senior journalist who worked in a merged newsroom but who said he might not have spoken to someone sitting just a few seats away.

Most interviewees were unsure of production routines and work practices in the online newsroom. They were unsure whether it had its own subbing operation or whether online journalists did any original reporting. One said he had little idea what “so many in that online department actually do job-wise”.

On the question of convergence of multimedia and content, the only journalist who had consistently tried to produce multimedia elements for her stories felt long-form was “always down the list” of priorities for the online newsroom. Along with one veteran journalist in this study, she asked for online training and requested to spend time in the online newsroom but this had not eventuated. She believed this was because “these things just get lost” and online staff were so busy that “nothing ever gets done”. The older journalist mirrored her comments, saying: “It’s not a priority for [management] ... and it’s difficult, you know it’s like a pain in the arse to organise I presume.” Both saw their lack of familiarity with online production routines as a barrier to ensuring their work remained relevant and widely read: “I have no opportunity to learn any of the things I need to learn ... to help the migration of features online”, said the veteran

journalist, while the younger interviewee said features stories risked being “left behind” if features staff were not encouraged to learn new forms of story-telling online.

Although these two journalists were separated by a significant number of years in both chronological age and length of time in the industry, they shared very similar views, illustrating once again that chronological age was not always a reliable indicator of journalists’ attitudes and perceptions. Another journalist, in the industry for more than twenty years, said if online journalism training was offered, “I’d take it up I think”.

In sum, convergence of staff or content - for print long-form journalists at least - is far from being achieved despite willingness on the part of journalists to take up training and to experiment with new forms of online story-telling. This aligns with Singer’s (2004) findings that while print reporters saw convergence as challenging, they showed a willingness to adapt – even if it was only to ensure future employment in the industry (p. 850).

7.2.3 Feature journalism online

A key development for interviewees from one company was the decision by senior editors that feature content would not have its own tab on the website homepage. During interviews it was clear this was an ongoing cause of anger and resentment. One respondent said: “The major problem with presentation of our features on our website is that they’re not presented, they’re just this fucking long thing ... they treat features as bullshit ... they’re hard to find.” Another said: “How would you know [features content] was there? We tackled them about it and they said, ‘no, it’s not what readers want, it’s not what online [readers] are looking for’.” Another questioned how editors could conclude long-form was not popular with online readers if it wasn’t clearly flagged: “We just can’t understand why they never made room for us on the net.”

The decision by managers to display website content using very similar tabs to other major newspapers around the world such as the *New York Times* and *The Guardian – Life and Style, World, Business, News and Sport* etc – was strongly contested by interviewees at the company. The issue can be seen as one of prominence. As Deuze (2002) found, journalists place strong emphasis on reaching the greatest number of readers or viewers (p. 141) so that, in the present study, interviewees saw the failure to flag long-form content prominently online as a breach of professional norms. The theme of prominence can be seen as interwoven with both the threat to long-form and

devaluation themes: lack of prominence online was seen as a devaluation of long-form journalism and therefore long-form was seen as under threat.

7.3 Attitudes of interviewees to new forms of digital and online journalism

The second research question asked to what degree print feature journalists were adopting new digital communication tools and incorporating new forms of multimedia journalism into their work. This question sought to understand how long-form journalists, who identified strongly as print journalists, perceived their role in an increasingly digital world where new forms of engagement with audiences and new social media channels are evolving into new industry norms. Attitudes of interviewees showed both significant convergence and divergence in this part of the research.

A diversity of response was most marked on questions related to social media and in particular, microblogging (Cohen, 2008) site *twitter*. Responses ranged from what might be termed outright hostility: “I just couldn’t give a fuck about that stuff, it’s not me, especially twitter” to another interviewee who said, “I love it”. As previously noted, the two youngest journalists in the study were generally more positive about social media.

As discussed in the previous chapter, it is tempting to see chronological age as a determining factor in this part of the research but length of time in the industry may be a more accurate gauge of whether journalists embrace new forms of digitally-mediated communication: the journalist with the most strongly negative attitude to *twitter* was just four years older than the journalist who did engage with *twitter* (even if she was relatively equivocal in her response). However the difference in length of time spent in the industry between these two journalists was significant: ten years as compared to twenty-two years. As well, another veteran journalist, while dismissive of *twitter* personally, saw social media in general as a potential saviour for long-form journalism and thought the company should be implementing an overarching editorial social media strategy. He strongly criticised editorial managers for not setting up branded social media sites aligned to the newspaper’s feature publications in particular.

It is unlikely *twitter* would have provoked such a diverse range of response – and strength of feeling – unless journalists did not feel at least some obligation to engage in new forms of professional behaviour outside what has traditionally been seen as their core role. This was evident in the comments by two veteran journalists who were

dismissive of *twitter*, with one saying he knew he “should” engage with it but “I can’t be arsed”.

Overall, in this part of the research, interviewees can be seen as upholding traditional notions of their core role and resisting or rejecting new forms of computer-mediated communication. Their identity as print feature journalists meant *twitter* was seen as outside this core role, encapsulated in the comment by a veteran journalist that “it’s just not me”. Core traditional tasks were seen as overriding or having a higher priority than new forms of online engagement so that “just getting good stories and telling them” was seen as a core role while *twitter* and social media was a distraction: “I haven’t got time to be sitting there tweeting to people all day.”

This view was generally reflected by the majority of interviewees in the study who saw social media as a waste of time or as pointless, perhaps expressed most colourfully in the “as much use as a fart in an empty room” comment. The veteran journalist who said he chose not to engage with social media but preferred to communicate in other ways, was drawing a clear dividing line between what he regarded as part of his job and what he did not. Another noted that “everyone else” was engaging with social media and while this was mostly younger newsroom staff, senior editors were also using it. She wondered whether this meant that eventually all staff “might have to” engage with social media. This implies that if senior editors are using new forms of audience engagement, then this is likely to filter down through the organisation so that all staff will eventually have to follow suit. Senior staff can be seen as potentially leading a change in organisational and professional norms so that where they go, the rest will surely follow.

It could also be hypothesised that, as a site for “micro-journalism” or “micro-blogging” (Cohen, 2008), *twitter* exemplifies key aspects of the new digital realm, including the notion of “short-form” journalism. At a maximum message length of 140 characters, *twitter* can perhaps be seen as the antithesis of long-form journalism. This may have had some bearing on the responses of interviewees in this study.

7.3.1 Citizen Journalism

In contrast to divergent attitudes towards social media, interviewees showed strongly convergent views when asked about citizen journalism. All interviewees, regardless of age, background or employer, largely dismissed the notion that, as one interviewee

wryly put it, “anyone can be a journalist now”. This finding aligns with Singer’s 1997 study, which found most journalists were sceptical of “civic journalism” and felt the journalist’s role remained one of choosing what information to make available, checking its accuracy and making sense of it (1997, p. 86). These professional norms were upheld by journalists in the present study to reject the concept of the citizen journalist: “I hate it,” was the response of one. Another said that while she welcomed the idea of many more eyewitness accounts of major breaking news events, “relying on [citizen journalists] for more than that I think can be really dangerous”. As Deuze (2004, pp. 442-447) observes, professional journalism has emerged in elective democracies around the world as a distinct occupation with “claims to an exclusive role and status in society”. The ideal-typical values of journalism he cites – providing a public service, maintaining objectivity and autonomy and having a sense of ethics, validity and legitimacy – were cited by interviewees in the present study to preclude the notion of the citizen journalist. In turn, these notions of professional journalism can be seen as reinforcing and upholding that “exclusive role and status in society”.

7.3.2 Audience interactivity

As with social media, reader feedback and comment has become incorporated into everyday journalistic routines so that, arguably, it is assumed journalists are engaging with audiences to a greater extent than they once were. Interviewee attitudes to audience interactivity were varied but the theme that emerges is one of obligation: most journalists in this study felt duty-bound to engage with readers, but there was a marked lack of enthusiasm. As Singer (2009) observed in her study of user-generated content at the UK’s Guardian newspaper, journalists conveyed considerable ambivalence to the interactive domain. In the present study, discourses about audience interactivity were marked by relatively negative characterisations of readers as “nutters” and “in-breds” while overall, reader feedback was likened to “online talkback”. One journalist said he responded to emails but questioned whether it was “a wise thing to do”. On the other hand, “most of the feedback you get is complimentary”, he said. Another said he had found engaging with readers online “quite good” while another said it was “great” to be able to stimulate debate “but when people talk about whether they are the boss of their pets, or their pets are the boss of them, I perhaps don’t feel that it’s quite so useful”. The overall tone and context of comments by interviewees conveyed a sense of duty: positive comments about reader engagement were often expressed in a very low-key way.

However, the youngest journalist in this study was far more positive about audience engagement. She thought it was vital to engage with readers and bemoaned the fact that print publishing deadlines often meant conversations with readers reflected the “worst kind of snail mail”.

7.4 Increasing dominance of online

As a traditional form of journalism practice in New Zealand, feature journalism was founded in the norms and practices of the print newspaper, a product relying on predominantly 20th Century technology with an ink-on-paper business model, one that can seem hopelessly outmoded in the second decade of the 21st Century. In the globally-networked environment that is the internet, with its vast array of producers and consumers and constantly evolving information formats and platforms, the overriding imperatives of immediacy and brevity in online journalism can be seen as having become profoundly influential in the way journalism is done. Singer (2003) noted the ability for online to be a “warp speed” version of journalism a decade ago (p. 152) and the rapid pace of the daily news cycle shows no signs of slowing. Brevity has also become an overriding imperative online: perhaps no better example of this is the “Quickread” feature introduced on the *New Zealand Herald* website in the latter half of 2012. By clicking on the “Quickread” icon, readers get a one-hundred-word summary of a story which may have merited only slightly more than that in the full version. This type of innovation can be seen as clearly aligning with the key online imperative of brevity. Long-form can be seen as running counter to this. It demands time, not just from the reader but from the journalist. Its function can be seen as encapsulating Schudson’s (2008) six key functions of journalism by which journalism contributes to democratic ideals - it explores major social, political and economic issues in-depth and at length. It investigates issues of incompetence or corruption in government and business. It may evoke empathy for minorities or advocate on their behalf or it may seek to mobilise public opinion in order to effect social change. While the news product also seeks to perform these functions, feature journalism can be seen as encapsulating, in what might be seen as ideal form, journalism’s core occupational value of serving the public interest. With online innovation so focused on providing the briefest amount of information to the reader, a move away from long-form can be seen as almost inevitable.

The third research question explored the impact of online journalism and how the imperatives of online may be influencing or impacting the work of feature journalists.

Significantly, all interviewees in this study saw online publication as vital, a theme that marks a significant change from the early days of newspaper websites when, as Singer et al (1999) found, online staff felt they were not taken seriously by print staff and the newspaper took precedence over the website (pp. 42-43). While interviewees expressed a range of views on specific forms of digital media and computer-mediated communication, publication of their work on the website was regarded as vital. As one veteran said, “These days, if it’s not online, it’s like it doesn’t exist,” while another said, “if you’re not online, you become irrelevant.” Even when not explicitly stated, online journalism was seen as increasingly dominant and highly influential in editorial decision-making, including decisions affecting feature content. A key decision by editorial managers – not to post feature content to the website under a tab that would clearly identify it to people browsing the website - appeared to be an ongoing cause of frustration for feature journalists at one company. Again, as Deuze (2002) notes, journalists place strong emphasis on reaching the greatest number of readers or viewers (p. 141) so that prominence can be seen as a key element in the desire of the journalists to have feature content assigned its own dedicated tab on the homepage.

Another theme to emerge in discussions of online journalism was an antithetic theme of disparagement of much of the content that appears online. While journalists saw online publication of their work as vital, they were paradoxically dismissive of online journalism. A key reason appeared to be a perception that content online was driven by page-views and hit-counts which were not seen as legitimate deciders of editorial content. Interviewees characterised news online as “infotainment” with one interviewee remarking that the news agenda was increasingly driven by “clicks on Brangelina” rather than traditional news values. She cited a request by an editor that she write more positive stories as an example of a dumbing-down of feature content which in turn was an attitude driven by the imperatives of online. Online readers were presented with “lots of enticing things here and there to click on” so that features content was “almost not what online’s about”. Another veteran journalist characterised online news as “goldfish journalism” and noted the rapid pace at which stories appeared online and then quickly lost prominence as the website was regularly updated throughout the day.

So while online was perceived as increasingly important and influential at both companies, it was also criticised for being celebrity-driven and entertainment oriented rather than as serious journalism. As Rubin & Rubin (2012) note, themes are sometimes in tension or opposition and the two themes - importance of online coupled with

denigration of online journalism – can be seen as creating a tension for journalists between wanting to reach as wide an audience as possible but perceiving the channel by which they could do so as less likely to adhere to traditional values and norms.

Further evidence of the growing dominance of online journalism was a story told by one interviewee about the distribution of an online metrics report. As Rubin & Rubin (2012) note, stories told by interviewees can be a rich source of themes where interviewees place emphasis on some aspects of an event over others. Stories can also serve as an indirect way of answering a question to convey values and warnings (p. 196-196). The story told by the interviewee about the release of a “by author” online metrics report sent to all newsroom staff by managers can be seen as an articulation of the growing dominance of online but also an expression of a number of key values and a warning. The interviewee characterised the response of a colleague to the report as one of alarm although the tone was relatively humorous: “My pod mate said, ‘oh my god, what’s this?’” The interviewee went on to note two key messages from managers contained within the report: firstly, editors said staff shouldn’t read too much into it; secondly, and paradoxically, they congratulated those who came top of the list. The first message from managers was that staff should not feel bad, or assume there would be wider ramifications from the report’s data. The second message from managers, congratulating those with a high hit count, can be seen as articulating the occupational value of reaching the greatest number of readers (Deuze, 2002, p. 141). Those who were seen to have done this, by coming top of the list, had therefore fulfilled this core occupational role.

The story is a compelling example of an anecdote which contains a key warning. This can be seen in the interviewee’s conclusion that “It’s probably only a matter of time before your pay rise gets tagged to your metrics” – is a key warning that, in future, quantity in the form of numbers of stories produced (rather than length) could be the sole arbiter of journalistic worth. The story also exemplifies the theme of increasing dominance and influence of online and, as discussed above, it could be speculated that web metrics will play a bigger role in future in deciding which journalists are the most valued within the newsroom. When asked about this specifically - whether the interviewee felt the future had suddenly arrived – she responded with an emphatic, “Well yeah!”

How news media are tying the popularity of individual journalists work to their pay and conditions may be an emerging development in news online but without further evidence, it can only be noted here as a potential issue perhaps worthy of further study. Further research would be needed to explore whether online metrics are becoming increasingly influential on individual journalist's careers and whether hits online is having a determining effect on the employment conditions of journalists working in mainstream media.

7.5 Blurring of the line between editorial and advertising

The final theme that emerged from the data in this study was a perceived blurring of the line between editorial and advertising content. This was the perception of journalists from one company only and was articulated by all the journalists from this company despite no specific questions being asked during interviews. Journalists from the other company did not mention this as an issue and did not cite it as a concern in a follow-up question.

As Boczkowski (2004b) notes, the separation of editorial and advertising content is a newspaper industry norm. Singer (2003) refers to journalists' concept of the separation of "church and state" or the "wall" between the editorial and business sides of news organisations (p. 154). And, as Deuze (2005) argues, journalists claim occupational autonomy, free from outside influence, which includes commercial influence. Therefore the perception of a blurring of the line between editorial and advertising is seen as a breach of occupational values and norms which one interviewee described as "very disturbing". Another observed that advertisers had too much power over editorial content in a particular section of the newspaper so that the content did not therefore conform to "the usual rules of journalism". Another said, "we're feeling more pressure from advertisers than we used to." As Deuze (2007) observed, journalists face many changes in the new digital online world, so that newswork has become "more uncertain, stressful and market-driven than in the past" (p. 153). However it is important to note this issue was cited by journalists from one company only. It would therefore be difficult to draw any general conclusions on the state of the newspaper industry as a whole - and New Zealand newspapers in particular - on whether advertisers are exerting more pressure, with more success, on newspaper editorial policies than in the past. However, with the migration of advertising onto direct-to-consumer sites and fragmentation of media, the concerns expressed by journalists in this study may indicate

that the traditional separation of editorial from advertising is coming under renewed pressure. Further research would be needed to understand if this is the case but issues that could be explored include whether newspapers are being forced to lower the bar in terms of formerly strict editorial guidelines and in what ways increased commercial pressures are impacting on newspaper journalism. A key question raised by this finding is whether or not changes to editorial policy are being made apparent to consumers. If the tentative findings in this study were found to apply more widely, this would have significant implications for the public's understanding of the independence and impartiality journalism has traditionally claimed for itself. It might also have implications for journalism education which has traditionally reflected assumed standards in the industry - standards which may be changing. Further research would seek to answer these questions.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This chapter offers insights from the data analysis – what the data says and what it means. It concludes with some final reflections on the future of long-form newspaper journalism drawn from the findings.

Through interviews, the picture that emerges in this research is of a sub-group of journalists struggling to understand and make meaning of their role at a time of constant – and rapid – change. Ethnographic interviews were carried out with seven participants in order to achieve what Singer (2009) calls in her definition of ethnography, “a holistic description of cultural membership” (pp. 191-194). In this approach, participants’ frames of reference are emphasised and the researcher remains open to their understandings of the world.

Very little ethnographic research has been done on the impacts of new digital technologies on long-form journalism internationally and it appears this case study is the first of its kind in New Zealand. The study has adhered to O’Leary (2004, p. 116) who observes the selection of cases in a case study is usually non-random and theoretical selection often means selecting a case in order to explore a particular event – in this case, the advent of online journalism and its impact on a traditional genre of print journalism, the feature story. The interviewees in this study can be seen as a purposeful sample which may be relevant to the wider field (Mason, as cited in Silverman, 2010, p. 145). While broad generalisations to a wider group may not be possible, generalisations may be possible from the evidence produced. But as Rubin & Rubin (2012) note, ample and explicit evidence is needed for any conclusions drawn from the data analysis (p. 211). The evidence from this study, and conclusions drawn, are discussed below.

8.1 Challenges to occupational identity

While traditional values and norms of professional journalism – such as the public service role – were articulated and upheld by journalists in this study, overall they saw their place in the new media landscape as uncertain – and the future unpredictable. Their strong identification as print journalists can be seen as a significant factor in this uncertainty. None saw a future for print journalism; all believed the future would eventually be exclusively online. Some hoped print would survive in some form; one veteran believed the company he worked for was abandoning the print newspaper sooner than it needed to. But most saw their current careers within a five to ten year

timeframe with a majority indicating they would be forced to leave the industry sooner than they would like.

The interviewees' identity as print journalists was often interwoven with a discourse of extinction, reflecting the assumption that the print newspaper in its current form would eventually disappear. By using words such as "dinosaurs" and "dodo" they perceived themselves as a dying species – as the newspaper was a dying product - thereby conveying the concept of non-adaptation: as an extinct species, they have already been left behind.

However, another implication from the dinosaur discourse is that it can be seen as absolving them from engaging in new forms of work they see as being outside core professional norms. The core professional role of the newspaper journalist was summed up by one veteran in this study as "just trying to get good stories and tell them". This role was seen as being in conflict with new roles such as engagement with social media which he described as, "just not me". The identification as a predominantly print journalist intent on simply getting the story is clearly conveyed through both the articulation of core occupational norms and the perception that social media is outside this core role. Therefore, as print journalists, they cannot be expected to carry out activities that are perceived as distracting from the core task – getting good stories and telling them. This may help to explain the rejection of a majority of interviewees to engaging with social media – they retain the right to choose whether or not to adopt new forms of work. This was clearly evident in the response of a veteran journalist who said, "I really prefer to spend my time in other ways".

The discursive dinosaur characterisation was not only a self-perception: journalists believed this was how others – namely management –perceived them. This was evident in the comment by one journalist, "it's not just them, it's us as well, we are dinosaurs". This was said in answer to a question about whether the feature writers ever saw online audience metrics. Answering in the negative, she saw this as understandable: feature journalists were older, did not engage with social media and so they were "luddites" and "dinosaurs" who – quite reasonably as she saw it – were not only excluded by others but accepted this exclusion as natural. Again, Robinson's (2011a) exploration of the impact of new technologies on groups of workers can be seen as highly relevant here. She observed that a process whereby new technologies displace traditional work routines and the place of workers within the industrial workplace hierarchy with "potentially

devastating effects”. Two of these effects, she notes, are a “waning legitimacy” and workplace isolation (pp. 147-148). These effects can be seen in the comment of the journalist as noted above. Feature journalists are seen as being outside the new technological world – dinosaurs - and therefore information from that world such as online audience metrics is not shared with them. What can be argued here is that technology is not the determining causal factor in the position of the journalists but rather a result of social and culturally-specific assumptions and workplace norms. As feature journalists, their work is print-based; their values are those of traditional print journalists and therefore they not only exclude themselves from the new digital world but are also excluded from it, and this exclusion is seen as natural.

Along with a high degree of uncertainty about the future, journalists from one company cited concerns about a blurring of a long-standing ethical divide between advertising and editorial. This can be seen as a distinct theme to emerge from the research. The blurring of the boundary between advertising and editorial was seen as a serious breach of a core foundational ethic of professional journalism: the separation of commercial from editorial content. All the journalists from one media outlet mentioned the issue independent of questions asked during interviews. This may indicate a relatively high level of concern. For these journalists, any perceived blurring of the line between church and state – editorial and advertising – was a threat to core occupational norms and values, summed up by one interviewee as saying a particular publication in the paper was “not real journalism”. Another expressed the view she might be forced to leave the profession if this perceived erosion of standards got any worse. Concerns over the boundary between journalism and what McNair (2006) calls “not-journalism” are not new, indeed they pre-date the web (p. 11). Writing in the *New Zealand Listener*, former TVNZ news head Bill Ralston notes the blurring of the line between editorial and advertising began with commercial sponsorship of radio and television programming “decades ago” (2012, October 6). However, McNair argues that technology exacerbates this trend. But exactly how tensions between commercialisation and editorial independence are playing out in the New Zealand media market is unknown. However if the findings in this study were found to apply more widely, then that could be seen as having significant implications for traditional notions of independence and impartiality of journalists. Further research in this area might yield insight into how the migration of advertising to the web, and the increased ability of

advertisers to bypass mainstream media and reach consumers directly, is impacting on newspapers' ability to uphold traditional notions of editorial independence.

8.2 Perception of long-form as devalued and under threat

Throughout the interviews it was evident that, for journalists from one company in particular, their sense of worth and value as a distinct group of media workers was perceived as having declined over time. A series of events and key developments was linked to this decline and included section changes, a demand for shorter stories, physical re-location to the general print newsroom and the citing of focus group research by editors to argue readers didn't want longer stories. These developments and events can be seen as forming an overall theme of devaluation, not just of the journalists' work but of themselves. The changes implemented through these developments and events meant journalists felt their work was "a bit more meaningless", was diminished in importance, and their legitimacy as feature writers was undermined. As noted in previous chapters, Robinson (2011a) discusses the effects of introducing new technologies into the workplace and notes it can result in a "waning legitimacy" for some groups of workers (pp. 147-148). A sense of waning legitimacy was evident in comments by interviewees: they felt their work had been devalued over time and therefore they related this devaluation to themselves as print feature journalists. Their position in the workplace was described as "isolated" and they felt "shunned".

Told by management that readers no longer wanted longer stories, and that this was a result of focus group research, the journalists felt *journalism* was no longer the determining factor in deciding editorial content. The journalists wanted the occupational values and norms of *journalism* to be the overriding decider of content – not reader research, which they strongly contested as unreliable and not scientifically robust. Focus group research can be seen as a social process - groups of ordinary readers are asked their *opinion* on editorial content and this in turn is used as a basis on which editorial decisions are made. This can be seen as aligning with Williams' (Williams, 2003/1974, pp. 131-133) approach whereby technology is made meaningful through a social process – here, it is the opinion of readers rather than the innate properties of a technology that is influencing editorial decision-making.

Even with online metrics, which are more quantitative than focus group research – digital data-generation through user clicks – it could be argued that an element of choice remains. The data must be interpreted, assumptions made about what it means and decisions based on those assumptions implemented. Again, Williams provides useful analysis, arguing that the “moment of any new technology is a moment of choice” (Williams, 1985, as cited in Freedman, 2002, p. 430). Even page-view or story count data does not provide an inevitable outcome but one based on a sociological process or the “selections and preferences of human actors” (Freedman, 2002, p. 430). The selections and preferences – the choice – made in regard to page-view counts can be seen as a choice, one open to contestation, and it was contested – by the journalists.

This also raises the question of what *other* choices might have been available. One interviewee thought the basis for choices must rest on “old-fashioned news value judgement”. In other words, core occupational and professional journalistic norms such as serving the public interest. But whatever choice is made, Williams’ approach offers insight into how social processes and human actors shape technology: a choice is being made, rather than an outcome pre-determined by innate mechanical or digital properties of the technology itself (Williams, 1985, as cited in Freedman, 2002, p. 430).

8.3 Ambivalence to new forms of computer-mediated communication

Asked about their engagement with new forms of computer-mediated communication and their attitude to new forms of participatory journalism such as civic journalism, overall the journalists’ responses can be characterised as ambivalent. However, responses were mixed and views sometimes strongly expressed in this part of the research.

8.3.1 Social media

Social media was a somewhat contentious issue in this study. Respondents had highly divergent views, from the youngest journalist who said, “I love it”, to the veteran journalist who characterised it as “about as much use as a fart in an empty room”. Discourses also conveyed a sense journalists were conflicted over whether or not to engage with the social media: a younger journalist said she used it “sporadically” although she wasn’t sure how much use it was. This was the most equivocal response in the study but a veteran reporter also expressed the view that he thought he “should” be

on twitter but would “rather give my time over to getting the story, researching the story, things like that.” Asked about social media in general, another veteran said, “I don’t do any of that, but that’s only because I’m old, everyone else does it.” Evident in the last phrase is an element of occupational pressure – twitter has evolved as an important source of news, particularly breaking news, so that it could be hypothesised that, while journalists still feel able to reject new forms of communication, they feel increasingly pressured to engage with them. The journalist who saw twitter as a distraction from core tasks such as research, appears to express this pressure through that word “should”. He ended his comments by saying, “I know I should [engage with twitter], but I haven’t.” However, this perceived pressure was not enough to force journalists to change behaviour – they reserved the right *not* to engage with new forms of digitally-mediated communication. It can be argued that here, once again, technology itself was not a determining cause of social and cultural outcomes: instead, professional norms and routines held sway.

All journalists at one company noted during interviews that senior editors were using twitter. However, two commented that editors’ engagement with twitter meant that it undermined more traditional forms of staff communication, such as newsroom email. One interviewee said he found out important organisational information on twitter before the information was available through internal channels. Another was highly critical of what he saw as editors’ willingness to engage in a wider conversation on social media rather than engaging in conversation with staff. As Williams observes, technology may evolve into new social forms in unpredictable ways or with unintended consequences (Williams, 1975, as cited in Boczkowski & Lievrouw, 2008, pp. 18-19). Arguably, senior editors’ engagement with twitter, noted by all interviewees at one company, can be seen as an example of this. Journalists felt editors’ communication on social media meant they were not talking to staff. One interviewee said, “It’s like well suddenly [a senior editor] is talking to everyone and yet he never talks to us”.

Even when journalists thought social media had a valuable role in the contemporary media landscape, professional values and norms remained an overriding determiner of behaviour (p. 448). As Powers (2011) found, journalists may see new forms of journalistic work as a threat because they do not align with core occupational norms. They therefore subordinate or alienate new forms of work by characterising them as foreign, unnecessary or potentially dangerous to core tasks. This can be seen in the

comment by a veteran journalist that he doesn't have time for social media but is "just getting good stories and telling them".

A younger journalist felt twitter had a role in professional journalism but stipulated she was not "friends" online with anyone she had contact with in a professional capacity. This can be seen as the upholding of the traditional notion of professional autonomy whereby journalists claim independence from outside influence or, as Deuze (2005) observes, journalists see themselves as autonomously free of "extra-journalistic" forces or pressures. Journalists reserve the right to enact concepts of impartiality or independence that align with professional values so that being "friends" online with contacts or sources is seen as a breach of professional values and norms.

8.3.2 Audience interactivity

Interviewees' responses to increased opportunity for readers and users to participate and actively engage with news media contained similarities to their response to social media. There was a diversity of views, ranging from strongly positive, to ambivalent, to strongly negative. The most positive response came from a veteran journalist who said he was "absolutely a fan" of feedback but noted the puzzled response of colleagues when he initially chose to include his email address online in the early days of his newspaper's website. While the anecdote illustrated how online communication has evolved into a normative routine since the early days of online journalism, the negative responses to audience engagement in this study suggests journalists may still be struggling to overcome pre-web attitudes where the audience are conceived as wholly passive consumers of content. Domingo noted a similar response from journalists in his 2008 study which found they continued to reproduce mass media models of the audience as passive (as cited in Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009, p. 573). The majority of responses in this study on audience interactivity can be characterised as ambivalent, mirroring Singer's 2009 study of journalists' attitudes to user-generated content at the UK's *Guardian* newspaper (2009, p. 17). Most interviewees observed that reader forums often attracted senseless comments – characterised as "nutter feedback" by one journalist – and overall likened reader forums to "online talkback".

Generally then, attitudes to new forms of engagement with the audience reflected a similar range of attitudes to those on social media: they ranged from negative, to ambivalent to positive but overall can be seen as ambivalent to the concept of engaging more closely and far more regularly with readers.

8.4 Increasing dominance of online

An overarching theme to emerge in this study is the significant shift in the attitude of these print journalists to their newspaper's website. Its importance and influence can be seen as having evolved into a taken-for-granted industry norm, a significant development since Singer et al's 1999 study where online journalists felt they were not taken seriously by print colleagues and from the early days of newspaper websites when online was seen as "subordinate" to the print newsroom, (Powers, 2011). In the present study, not only was publication online seen as vital but prominence online was of equal concern. This was clearly articulated by the interviewee who said if a story was not online, it was like it didn't exist and by the group of journalists at one company who had argued for a dedicated tab on the homepage for long-form content.

The growing influence and dominance of online was physically evident for these journalists in the current size of the online newsroom. As a group, respondents in this study either came into journalism prior to the setting up of newspaper websites or at a time of their very early development. Over the course of their careers, more senior journalists had watched the online newsroom develop and this corresponded with a decrease in staffing in the print newsroom. This physical manifestation of the growing importance of a new technology, and the trend it signified, was hardly likely to go unnoticed: "When I first started [the website newsroom] was, I dunno, six people in one little corner of the newsroom. Now they take up a quarter of the newsroom, there would be thirty or forty of them", one interviewee said. While there had not been a precipitous decline in print staff, "the work they are doing has increased significantly because they're also filing during the day," she added. Another journalist, talking about various re-configurations of the online and print newsrooms in recent years, said: "You've got this whole lot of people who work for online, there's loads of them, that room is quite crowded now and there's this huge empty space where they used to sit in the old [print] newsroom."

This manifestation of the increasing dominance of the online operation of major New Zealand newspapers in this study reflects the study's findings overall: that online is increasingly dominant and influential in the major decisions newspaper companies are making about the future. As Rubin & Rubin (2012) observe, even if the findings of a study do not hold for all cases, some generalisation should be possible, therefore it is likely that the findings in this study on the increasing dominance of online could be

applied more generally. It is likely that newspapers in other Western democracies with similar media markets are following a similar trend. Further, it appears unlikely this trend will subside or significantly alter course: the reverse is far more probable. This has profound implications for print journalists currently working in mainstream newspapers as they face an increasingly uncertain future. All respondents in this study referred to the tenuousness of their employment as print journalists. This uncertainty is not only likely to continue, it is likely to increase.

8.4.1 Convergence and multimedia

But it appears the increasing dominance of online has not resulted in a realisation of the – sometimes idealised (Singer, 2004a, p. 4) – notion of the converged newsroom where content such as multimedia is routinely produced by multi-skilled staff working in a converged newsroom. While the experiences of print news reporters in general may differ from the experiences and attitudes revealed in this study, for these feature journalists at least, online remains a foreign world, a “mysterious” journalistic endeavour with routines and practices that may, or may not, fall within traditional print journalism norms and routines. An example of this was the vague responses of interviewees when talking about the online newsroom: they did not know if it had a separate sub-editing capacity, whether online journalists generated original stories or what technological constraints and deadlines online staff worked with. One veteran journalist said: “One thing I don’t understand is what so many people in that online department actually do job-wise.”

Coupled with a relatively rudimentary knowledge of online routines and practices, long-form journalists had no regular, meaningful interaction with online staff, one describing “very much a separateness” between the two newsrooms. Another veteran saw online as having been set up as a “separate entity” so that managers had never “looked to blend the skills we have with the digital format”. A younger journalist described online as “a very different culture” where staff did not leave their desks in case the rival news outlet beat them to a story. This raises the question of how much ongoing effort is being put into convergence within mainstream news organisations - in New Zealand at least. The findings from this study suggest at least the possibility that convergence is no longer being driven within media companies – particularly newspaper companies - but either being left to evolve over time or no longer seen as a realisable goal. However, as noted earlier, in the final stages of the present study, the New Zealand Herald announced a

round of redundancies which it said would help align its print and online operations (NBR Staff, 2012). Whether this results in a new push towards convergence of staff remains to be seen but ongoing configurations of both the print and online operations of the Herald is likely to be worthy of further study.

Further, it raises the possibility that some groups of workers may be perceived as being on one side of a technological divide, where they are being left to either adapt - or not. Three interviewees raised online training as an issue in this study. Two, from either end of the career spectrum – ten years compared to twenty years – had requested online training and to spend time in the online newsroom. This had not eventuated – both journalists believed this was as a result of organisational constraints: online was too busy; the requests were not seen as a priority. A fourth interviewee described his production of a video for the website but noted no training and very little support was provided for this.

This raises the question of whether all journalists are being encouraged or provided with the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge required to successfully make the transition from print to online. Some evidence this is not the case was provided in this study, as noted above. While it is possible to see internal production routines and workplace organisation as the determining force here – rather than technology itself – far from being realised, convergence continues to be a challenging and complex process. The “dinosaur” discourse can be seen as a response to this issue and the perception by one feature journalist that it was not management’s fault print feature journalists were seen as dinosaurs, “it’s us as well”. If some groups of workers are perceived as unable to cross a technological divide between the world of the print newspaper and new world of digital and online journalism, then the extinction discourse would be an understandable response by those who felt left behind. As Boczkowski (2004a) found, those with access to new technologies took advantage of them differently and some of those differences could be attributed to organisational structures, work practices and representations by individual users. He concluded that technological effects “cannot solely be attributed to the properties of new technology but also the production processes that mediate actors’ adoption of these artifacts” (p. 208).

8.5 Limitations of the Research

This research explored the impact of technological change on newspaper feature journalism in New Zealand - firstly by looking at organisational changes and attitudinal shifts towards the long-form genre. The second research question explored feature journalists' level of engagement with, and adoption of, new forms of computer-mediated communication in order to examine how technology was being adopted by a particular sub-group of journalists working in a genre that can be seen as encapsulating traditional occupational norms, values and beliefs.

New Zealand is dominated by two newspaper companies, APN News & Media and Fairfax Media, both foreign-owned (Myllylahti & Hope, 2011, p. 188). Between them, Fairfax and APN own more than 90% of daily print newspaper circulation, Fairfax with 48.6% and APN 42.4% (Rosenberg, 2008). Given this concentration of ownership, combined with New Zealand's small population, New Zealand newspaper journalists can be seen as a relatively small occupational group while feature journalists – a specialised sub-group within journalism – as an even smaller group. The number of journalists able to be selected for the research was therefore necessarily small and this is reflected in the sample size.

As well as a relatively small interview sample, a second limitation of the research is that it is likely to become outdated quickly. Events in news media, and in newspapers in particular, are happening at a rapid pace and therefore developments even a year from now could conceivably render this study out-of-date. However, a rapidly changing environment should not deter researchers from investigating the mediascape for what it can tell us not only about the present but as an indicator of what might be in the future.

Despite these limitations, the experiences and attitudes of the journalists interviewed are unlikely to be unique but rather reflect the challenges long-form journalism faces in newspapers in other parts of the world.

8.6 Further Research

As noted throughout Chapter Six and above, a number of issues were raised by this research that could be worthy of further study. These are noted and discussed briefly below.

8.6.1 Convergence

As this research was in its final stages, the *New Zealand Herald* announced a number of lay-offs as a result of new initiatives to further integrate the Herald's online and print operations (NBR Staff, 2012). Two interviewees who participated in this study left the paper a short time later. It was unclear whether this was the result of compulsory or voluntary redundancy. Further research into how the new initiatives in terms of integration are implemented by the *Herald* could be valuable in assessing ongoing attempts by newspapers to integrate new technologies into existing forms of journalism and to explore the challenges newspapers continue to face in regard to convergence of both content and staff.

8.6.2 Separation of editorial and advertising

Journalists from one company who took part in this research expressed strong concerns about a blurring of the line between editorial and advertising. This was not raised as an issue by journalists from the other company or cited as a concern in a follow-up question. However, the issue of editorial independence can be seen as an important one. Professional journalism makes claims to autonomy from what Deuze (2005) calls "extra-journalistic" influences, including commercial influences (p. 448). An understanding of increased commercial pressures on editorial independence could make a worthwhile contribution to understanding how newspapers are evolving in the digital environment. Further research could attempt to answer questions such as whether newspaper editorial policies are changing in light of expanded options for advertisers in a fragmenting online media environment and whether or how these changes being made apparent to media consumers.

8.6.3 Online metrics tied to pay

How news media are tying the popularity of individual journalist's work to pay and conditions may be an emerging development in news media but without further evidence, it can only be noted here as a potential issue. Further research would be needed to explore whether online metrics are becoming increasingly influential on individual journalists careers and whether hits online is having a determining effect on the employment conditions of journalists working in mainstream media.

8.7 Concluding reflections on the future of long-form journalism

As Deuze (2007) observed, the work of professional journalists has become “more uncertain, stressful and market-driven than in the past” (p. 153). In the face of this uncertainty, as long ago as 1997, Singer urged journalists to avoid either “excessive confidence or excessive fear” about the future (1997, p. 88). Fifteen years on, excessive confidence was notably absent from the present study. Indeed, a strong element of fear marked many of the discourses of interviewees. This fear was expressed both explicitly, in phrases such as “it’s scary”, and more obliquely through the distinctive “dinosaur” discourse as well as through criticisms of internal decision-making and the responses of newspaper companies to the changing media environment.

This study found changes within media organisations and the attitudinal shifts that have driven them are seen to be challenging occupational norms, values and professional identity of long-form feature journalists. These changes include a growing influence and dominance of online, pressure to engage in new online forums such as social media and reader forums, and, more tentatively perhaps, pressures on the traditional boundary between advertising and editorial. Traditional notions of professional journalism – particularly the notion of professional autonomy – continue to be upheld but journalists in this study expressed grave doubt that professional autonomy would continue to be strongly upheld in an increasingly digital future.

All interviewees in this study saw their current position as strongly aligned to print journalism and therefore as tenuous. Feature journalists perceived their work as being less valued in a digital realm where immediacy and brevity are key drivers of online content. This devaluation was interpreted by feature journalists as meaning long-form journalism was under threat and therefore they themselves were in danger of extinction. A final word from journalism scholar Jane Singer seems particularly apt here. As she wryly observes, new technology may be having a profound effect on professional journalism but she warns journalists they will have to adapt: “because you know what happens if you do not” (2008, p. 125).

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Appendix 1

Indicative Interview Questions for Participants

1. How long have you been a journalist; what is your current job title and how long have you been in this position?
2. What is your career background as a journalist?
3. Where is your work printed: online, print or both?
4. Is your work published in print, online or both?
5. Does your work appear in print or online first or simultaneously in both?
6. Does it matter to you where your work is published?
7. In general, how do you identify as a journalist: print, online or both?
8. What would you say are your professional values as a journalist?
9. Have the number of employees in your department decreased or increased in the past five years?
10. What would you say is the dominant attitude to the web within your organisation? Does this differ among sub-sets of journalists at the paper?
11. What is your attitude towards the online version of your newspaper and to digital/online in general?
12. Do you think long-form has been impacted by the advent of online and if in what ways?
13. Do you perceive any changes towards the value of your work within the organisation?
14. What is your engagement with social media, either professionally or personally or both?
15. Have you or are you using multimedia elements in the stories you write?
16. How well do you understand online production of news?
17. Have you had any training in online journalism?
18. If not, would you take it up if it were offered?
19. What do you think about the concept of “civic journalism”?
20. Has the imperative of page views/popularity online affected your work?
21. How has the imperative of page/views and immediacy and brevity impacted on your news organisation?
22. Do you see web metrics or online readership figures in any form?
23. What do you think of your own outlet’s website?

24. In what ways has the web changed or is changing journalism do you think?
25. To what degree do you engage with readers through reader comments or forums?
26. What are your views or experiences with reader comments/discussion online?
27. Do you follow any debates or discussions about the future of print media and journalism in general in regard to the web/online?
28. Do you have a clear idea of the future direction of your organisation's digital/online future?