MOBILE-FIRST JOURNALISM

Producing News for Social and Interactive Media

Steve Hill
and Paul Bradshaw

Mobile-First Journalism

Media publishers produce news for a full range of smart devices – including smartphones, tablets and watches. Combining theory and practice, *Mobile-First Journalism* examines how audiences view, share and engage with journalism on internet-connected devices and through social media platforms.

The book examines the interlinked relationship between mobile technology, social media and apps, covering the entire news production process – from generating ideas for visual multimedia news content, to skills in verification and newsgathering, and outputting interactive content on websites, apps and social media platforms. These skills are underpinned with a consideration of ethical and legal concerns involving fake news, online trolling and the economics of mobile journalism.

Topics include:

- understanding how mobile devices, social media platforms and apps are interlinked;
- making journalistic content more engaging and interactive;
- advice on how successful news publishers have developed mobile and social media strategies;
- adopting an approach that is entrepreneurial and user-centred;
- expert interviews with journalists, academics and software developers;
- learning key skills to launch and develop news websites, apps and social media outputs.

Mobile-First Journalism is essential reading for journalism students and media professionals and of interest to those studying on courses in social and new media.

Steve Hill is Course Leader of the MA in Multimedia Journalism at Westminster University, London. Previously, he lectured at Southampton Solent University, UK, and has a background in technology journalism. His books include *Online Journalism: The Essential Guide* (with Dr Paul Lashmar, 2013).

Paul Bradshaw is Course Leader for both the MA Multiplatform and Mobile Journalism and the MA in Data Journalism at Birmingham City University, UK. He also works as a consulting data journalist with the BBC England Data Unit. His books include the *Magazine Editing* (with John Morrish, 2011), *Snapchat for Journalists* (2016) and *Online Journalism Handbook* (2018).

Mobile-First Journalism

Producing News for Social and Interactive Media

Steve Hill and Paul Bradshaw

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2019
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Hill, Steve (Lecturer in journalism), author. |
Bradshaw, Paul (Data journalist) author.
Title: Mobile-first journalism : producing news for social and interactive media / Steve Hill and Paul Bradshaw.
Description: London ; New York : Routledge, 2019. | Includes index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018019287 | ISBN 9781138289307 (hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781138289314 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781315267210 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Online journalism. | Journalism–Technological innovations. | Digital media.
Classification: LCC PN4784.O62 H545 2019 | DDC 070.4–dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018019287

ISBN: 978-1-138-28930-7 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-28931-4 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-26721-0 (ebk)

Typeset in Goudy
by Out of House Publishing

Contents

Figures

Tables

Preface

When we began researching this textbook, resources on mobile journalism were focused almost entirely on one aspect – how reporters record video content using smartphones. There was lots of material about framing techniques and which company manufactures the best microphone or tripod, but not a lot else.

This book aims to correct things. The impact of mobile and social media on journalism is massive. Tech analyst Ben Evans wasn't exaggerating when he proclaimed in 2016 that mobile is 'eating the world'. The audience (our users) view and engage with journalism content on a range of smart devices manufactured by tech giants such as Apple, Samsung and Amazon. Today a few social media companies, led by Facebook, dominate the distribution of news. Many media companies worry about power being put in the hands of so few large tech companies.

Mobile has leapfrogged print newspapers, desktop computers and traditional radio as the main way we stay informed about the world. Only TV news is more popular in the UK. As we will see later in this book, Google's Android software is the most popular operating system (OS) in the world, overtaking computers running Windows. Mobile and social media continue to have a radical and transformative impact on journalism. So we had no choice but to write this textbook!

This book isn't just about shooting video on mobile, although this is a core skill. We start by outlining a definition of mobile and social media journalism which is much broader than that contained in other textbooks. Our users view and engage with journalism content on a full range of devices and platforms. Some devices are mature technologies – such as iPhone and iPad. We encourage an experimental approach to newer smart devices and social platforms. We focus on newsgathering, production, output and design and take an approach to journalism that is user-centred – i.e. we focus on the audience throughout. In doing so, we look at the interlinked relationship between mobile devices, social media, news websites and apps.

The book has four core principles:

1) Mobile and social media are two sides of the same coin

Mobile and social media grew up together. Smartphones, tablets, smartwatches and even Amazon Alexa devices are social tools. We may use them to communicate

with friends and often personalise them through the selection of apps and their appearance. Social media predate smartphone technology (and even the birth of the World Wide Web), but the success of the likes of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and WhatsApp has been shaped by the availability of smart devices.

2) Adopting an approach that is mobile first and user-centred

Media companies have had to adapt to technology change. In the late 1990s they adapted the print user experience to desktop. Back then, we spoke about a publishing strategy that was web first where 'newspapers' broke their stories on the internet before print. The iPhone launched in 2007. It took time, but creating interactive content for mobile is now commonplace. Mobile and social is at the heart of the newsgathering process, although there are often subtle differences in strategies between media companies across Europe.

Media companies may claim to be user first, i.e. they accept that audiences consume and interact with journalism in the format and on a device and platform that is the most convenient at any given moment – whether that is a phone, TV or an internet of things (IoT) device. As journalists, being user-centred means we too must be highly adaptable to changes in technology.

3) Coding for journalists

Learning a little about coding makes journalists more employable. We discuss the concept of the code-friendly journalist. The aim is to understand how app developers, data visualisers and designs work within large media organisations.

4) Understanding the economic challenge

Generating revenue from online content remains challenging, to put it mildly. In fact this may be the biggest understatement you'll read in this book! We look at how content is monetised, i.e. how it generates revenue. There are risks in allowing distribution of content to be put in the hands of a few, relatively unregulated (compared to news organisations), social media giants. We consider whether social media companies need to do more to invest in journalism and reduce the amount of fake news and trolling of users on their platforms.

So now you know the aims of the book, let's get cracking.

Acknowledgements

From Paul: Thanks to my students on both the MA in Multiplatform and Mobile Journalism and the MA in Data Journalism at Birmingham City University, who are always bringing me new examples of social storytelling and exploring new journalism techniques. Maria Crosas Batista, Carmen Aguilar Garcia, Jane Haynes, Zoe Head, Jonny Jacobsen, Barbara Maseda, Lea Nakache, Anna Noble, Victoria Oliveres, Carla Pedret, Michael Smith and Wan Ulfa Nur Zuhra are just some that did so while I was writing this book. Thanks also to my colleagues at the university whose knowledge and experience across a range of platforms I continually drew on, and those in the industry whose conversations helped whether they knew it or not: Caelainn Barr, Martin Belam, Emily Bell, Inger-Lise Bore, Bob Calver, Alberto Cairo, Sam Coley, Faye Davies, Ross Hawkes, Jon Hickman, Sarah Jones, Diane Kemp, Nick Moreton, Siobhan Mullen, Nic Newman, Rasmus Nielsen and Caroline Officer all deserve particular mention. To Steve for allowing me to co-author the book, and Kitty Imbert at Routledge for shepherding it through. Most of all, as always, to my family, who make it all fun.

From Steve: Many thanks to: my co-author Paul for joining me on this project. His website, OnlineJournalismBlog.com, remains the most influential resource for online journalism education in the UK and beyond. Everyone at Routledge who worked on this book, particularly Kitty Imbert and our former commissioning editor, Niall Kennedy. The photographers and illustrators who granted permission to use their work. Thanks to Matt Cooke, Matthias Guenther, Dina Rickman and Aidan White for agreeing to be interviewed. All the staff and students in the journalism department at Westminster University. Thanks to Dr Mercedes Bunz, Jim McClellan, Dave Gilbert and Deborah Vogel for their support, interesting chats and for being wonderful colleagues. My friend Mary Hogarth (Bournemouth University) for support and advice on book writing over many, many, years and my tech journalist friend Ken Young. Most of all, a big thank you to my mum and dad – Brenda and Malcolm. This textbook is dedicated to Tina and to her father Mr Rennie Tan (1942 to 2017).

Introduction

Mobile and social media journalism – past, present and future

The mood around mobile and social has changed dramatically in 2018. To those working in the field, it can sometimes feel like being caught in the crossfire of a battle. Fake news, Russian trolls, concerns over filter bubbles and hoaxes, censorship, algorithms and profit warnings have all shown that the path to mobile-first publishing is going to be anything but an easy one.

Like any new territory, the mobile landscape is being fought over fiercely. Step back from the crossfire and you will see that different actors are fighting over different things, in different ways: and there isn't just one battle, but three.

The commercial battle first erupted in 2013 when audience figures on news websites began to show some unusual changes: mobile visitors were starting to outnumber those on desktop. At first this was just happening at weekends, but things accelerated quickly: within the space of a year mobile-driven activity dominated every day of the week.

News organisations concerned with delivering those audiences to their advertisers had to adapt more quickly than they anticipated to a mobile-first strategy. The pioneering online publisher BuzzFeed went further than most: in 2014 it began hiring for a new BuzzFeed Distributed division, producing what would come to be known as 'native content' – journalism which existed primarily on social platforms rather than on the publisher's website. Others followed suit, with some businesses built entirely on Facebook.

Other publishers began producing video in square ratio so that it would work on a vertical screen, invested in teams dedicated to chat and social platforms, and hired partnership managers to collaborate with their new 'frenemies' – the web giants that news organisations' advertisers were fleeing to, but whom they were still increasingly reliant on to distribute their news. They looked to move into this new territory with journalists who could speak the language of social media, telling stories in different ways.

Meanwhile, another battle had opened on a second front – and this one was political. For as long as social media existed, there had been a cat-and-mouse game between protestors communicating via social media and authorities clamping down on the platforms being used: such was the case during the 2007 Myanmar protests, the Iranian elections during 2009 (when the US State Department

famously asked Twitter to postpone updating its network so that its service would continue uninterrupted) and the events of the Arab Spring.

But in 2016 that information war entered Western consciousness too, and in new forms, as evidence surfaced of Russian attempts to interfere in the US election. Donald Trump was to regularly use the phrase 'fake news' to discredit critical news coverage in his own country, but it was fake news as a political tactic by foreign agents, alongside the use of 'troll factories' and fake accounts, that would come to public prominence.

Social platforms have been on the defensive ever since. Facebook performed a significant U-turn when it announced it would be taking steps to protect election integrity. Twitter identified and closed down 2,752 profiles believed to have been run by Russia's Internet Research Agency – many of which had been quoted in the UK media as if they were real people (Hern, Duncan and Bengtsson 2017). Then it closed down another 200,000 the following year. And Tumblr refused to comment when BuzzFeed reported that it was also being used by Russian trolls.

This information war could prove to be the most significant for modern journalists: by turning our territory into a battlefield it risks turning us all into war reporters by default: verification skills are no longer the preserve of the hard-bitten hack; information security is everyone's concern when news media are a target for state hackers.

But it is the third battle which is most easily missed: a battle of culture. If there was an opening shot that was fired here, it may well be 2016's open letter to Mark Zuckerberg from the editor-in-chief of the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten*, Espen Egil Hansen. In it, he responded to a demand from Facebook that the newspaper take down an iconic Vietnam war photograph by Nick Ut from its Facebook page. 'Dear Mark,' he wrote. 'You are the world's most powerful editor … I think you are abusing your power, and I find it hard to believe that you have thought it through thoroughly.'

These shots have continued to ring out from all corners. In early 2018 conservatives reacted angrily when Twitter froze or deleted thousands of accounts that it suspected of being bots, just weeks after the company had been accused of 'shadow banning' conservative accounts by downgrading certain tweets. And social media companies have been accused of not censoring *enough*, as trolls use their platforms to target prominent female figures – including journalists – or incite hatred based on ethnicity and sexuality.

The cultural war affects journalism in particular because is a fight to be heard, and a battle for relevance. It is a battle that takes place within news organisations too: while some editors and producers struggle to maintain a system where news organisations still control both the news agenda and its distribution, many news consumers already live in a world where agendas are set – via algorithms – by a combination of friends, family, strangers and editors; and where news does not begin and end at fixed times and spaces.

The cultural war is also a format war: the traditional inverted pyramid of newspaper storytelling has been overtaken by a proliferation of other shapes: engaging with a modern audience means engaging with new formats too, from the rise of

visual journalism, live coverage and livestreaming, to GIFs, emojis and memes. Those who only speak in the language of the past risk losing the battle for the future.

Of course amidst all this fighting it can be easy to forget about the original promise of social and mobile – the opportunity to bring a wider range of voices into journalism, and tell stories that would otherwise be left untold; to report from places and times that a traditional news crew could never reach; and engage audiences who would otherwise be disconnected from our reporting.

These promises remain as important as ever in 2018. And as the battles over money, power and culture come to a head, it is important to remember this: retreating to the old ways is not an option. We need to move forward. This book should prove a useful map to this exciting new territory.

Reference

Hern, A., Duncan, P. and Bengtsson, H. (2017) Russian 'troll army' tweets cited more than 80 times in UK media, *Guardian*. Available at www.theguardian.com/media/2017/nov/20/russian-troll-army-tweets-cited-more-than-80-times-in-uk-media

1 Understanding the user

This chapter will cover:

- The relationship business
- What is social media?
- Status in the community
- Isn't all news social?
- Smartphone addiction
- Mobile and social media – two sides of the same coin
- Personalised, portable, social and always on
- Mapping the mobile and social media landscape
- Mobile wars
- Technology and identity

Introduction

Journalists have a responsibility to serve their audience. Talk to any newspaper or magazine editor and they will be able to list the average age, gender, social class and typical occupation of their readers. Traditionally, this information is gathered using reader surveys or audience focus groups.

If magazines have 'readers', then mobile websites and apps have 'users'. Analytics software is used to collect data on a website's most popular stories, page views, location of the user and the social media sites that generate the most traffic, etc. Google Analytics (analytics.google.com), which is free, is one of the most popular tools for monitoring news websites.

Throughout this book we encourage you to have a user-centred approach to your journalism, which takes into account the interactive nature of mobile and social media output. Having people view your content (a measurement known as 'reach' on social media) is one thing, but a user interaction with content is better. 'Engagement' is used to measure the number of shares, comments or other interactions with our journalism content on social media. We can also measure 'dwell time' – the time spent viewing an article online.

This data allow us to build up a picture of the user and the content they find useful.

This chapter seeks to understand how modern users not just view, but engage and interact with digital content. People do all kinds of things on their mobile devices and much of it *isn't* related to journalism at all. Mobile games, rather than media brands, dominate the Apple Store and Google Play top ten charts. Two classic examples of addictive and popular mobile games are Candy Crush and the augmented reality game Pokémon Go.

We use the term 'user' rather than 'audience' in this chapter. The term audience is problematic as it suggests passivity, i.e. a group of people passively watching TV in their living rooms. It is a model of media that presents the audience as the 'child' and we, the journalist, as a 'parent' who is 'teaching' the children what they need to know about the world. In fact the classic advice for feature writers is often 'show, don't tell' – we should allow the reader to experience the story through action, words, thoughts, senses rather than summarising the facts of the story.

Many theorists have outlined this changing producer–user relationship. Academic Jay Rosen (2006) coined the phrase 'the people formerly known as the audience' over ten years ago. Henry Jenkins (2008) described user participation as being an integral part of what he referred to as 'the new economy'. The ideal media consumer was 'active, emotionally engaged, and social networked', according to Jenkins.

Clay Shirky (2008) said mass media is shaped like a megaphone – content is 'broadcast' from a centralised location to a large audience made up of passive receivers of content. A radio show or article in a print newspaper cannot be changed, altered or interacted with by the audience. Social media and mobile technology encourages far more interactive modes of communication. Users switch between creating their own content (photos, videos, etc) and publishing it. They share gossip with their friends and consume content created by mainstream media brands, such as the BBC and CNN, all in a single day.

- **Mass media content – viewed by 'audiences'**
- **Digital content – engagement and interaction by 'users'**

A shift has taken place from a 'focus on individual intelligence, where expertise and authority are located in individuals and institutions, to a focus on collective intelligence where expertise and authority are distributed and networked' (Hermida, 2012).

We have moved from information scarcity in the pre-web days to information oversupply. The fact that social media are global, forever changing and allow anyone to publish, makes understanding them problematic. Journalists today

are 'sense-makers' – explaining the importance of events to users who are being bombarded by information, much of it of dubious quality.

The relationship business

Facebook has always known it is in the user-relationship business, not the content creation business. It aims to connect people, e.g. groups of friends together or users with advertisers. Facebook doesn't create much content itself. It likes to leave that bit to its users or content providers. Social media companies often claim to be merely platforms for others people's content, rather than media publishers.

The journalism business

If you want to annoy a journalist, refer to the news, features and packages she or he produces as 'content'. Most journalists pride themselves on the fact they will try to 'break' stories and influence the public debate. The word 'content' suggests they are creating stories solely to fill a space online or to generate advertising revenue, hence the quality of the content really doesn't matter.

In 1994 the *Daily Telegraph* was the first UK national newspaper to launch a website – the Electronic Telegraph. Like many newspaper sites back then, it was little more than text and images from one platform – the printed paper – shoved onto to another platform – the web.

The *Telegraph* is in the journalism business – it invests in news production, employs professional journalists and seeks to 'break' exclusive stories. It embodies public sphere journalism much like the BBC, *Guardian* and *The Times*. But traditional media – print and broadcast – must also realise that they are now in the online relationship business and must engage at a much deeper level with their users.

Jeff Jarvis, the journalist and academic, has criticised traditional media companies for focusing on counting audiences rather than developing deeper relationships with the communities of interests they serve.

Print publishers cherish their lists of subscribers – the names, addresses and bank details of people who have the publication delivered to their homes. Subscribers are, by definition, the most loyal readers of a publication. Instead of picking up the magazine in a newsagent one month, but perhaps not the next – subscribers get the magazine delivered every week or month.

In fact looking at magazines in pure business terms, the subscriber list, along with a strong brand, are the two most valuable things a print publisher possesses. Sadly over the last 20 years, once loyal readers have become increasingly disloyal. They have cut their magazine subscriptions and have moved to accessing content for free online. But for decades the levels of engagement

with print readers has rarely gone beyond collecting names, addresses and bank details.

The relationship business

Clay Shirky (2008) said mass media is shaped conceptually like a megaphone – where content is 'broadcast' from a central point. Social media look very different. Social media are 'horizontal media' where information is shared person-to-person in a model that appears 'flat' and 'networked'. Journalists and media brands are no longer the centre of attention. With this networked model, journalism content mixes freely with gossip and personal updates. Once the main producer of content to a loyal audience, journalists have been side-lined on social media.

The internet was never *just* a technology. It always had a social dimension. People sent email (electronic mail) before the invention of the World Wide Web. Ray Tomlinson is commonly thought to have sent the first email in 1971. The World Wide Web, invented by Sir Tim Berners-Lee, arrived much later in the 1990s.

The post-millennium saw the rapid rise and fall of a series of social media sites. Those with long memories may recall social platforms such as Friendster (launched in 2002), MySpace (2003) and Bebo (2005). One platform that rose to fame and has yet to fall is 'TheFacebook', as it was known at launch. Created by Mark Zuckerberg from a dorm room at Harvard in 2004, it incorporated social technology such as email, message boards, direct messaging and group chat into one single platform. What separates Facebook from the social media failures is its focus on the user experience and keeping things simple. This is something we will return to throughout this book.

While traditional media companies like the Telegraph have relationships with their audiences of sorts, it is nothing compared to the vast amounts of user data the social media players collect. This means they can target adverts at specific demographics, based on things like age, gender, location in the world, etc.

As we mentioned at the start of this section, Facebook insists it is *not* a content publisher. It is a platform that hosts other people's content and it produces none, or very little, itself.

Journalism is expensive to produce and various external bodies regulate media publishers. In contrast, technology companies work within a lighter regulatory environment. Producing quality journalism can be a lot of hassle and so the tech giants often don't wish to be involved.

However, traditional media publishers can learn much from tech companies, such as how they can embrace the interactive and the horizontal nature of social media. Some publishers still talk of having 'readers' and 'audiences' rather than appealing to communities of online users.

Jeff Jarvis (2014) states:

> Relationships – knowing people as individuals and communities so we can better serve them with more relevance, building greater value as a result – will be necessary for media business models.

He says media publishers will always sell journalism content, but content is not the end product. It is a means of learning more about the user.

The key questions Jarvis suggests you need to ask the user:

- What is she interested in?
- What does she know?
- Where does she live?
- What does she do?

Answers to these questions can be used to develop genuinely useful interactive and personalised services on the web, social media and apps. Building closer relationships is a matter of life or death for the big media players, warns Jarvis. They must change or face going out of business.

What is social media?

So what is social media? The words most associated with social media include:

1) **Participation** – users often produce their own content, as well as viewing and engaging with content produced by others. Eyewitness user generated content (UGC) can be useful to journalists and is often shared on Twitter and YouTube.
2) **Community** – people gather in communities based on shared interests. This can often lead to participants to collaborate on projects together. You may have taken part in a Facebook Group – where online users meet to work on a specific project.
3) **Friendship** – social media traverse our private selves and public selves.

Christian Fuchs (2017) takes a broad definition of social media:

> All computing systems, and therefore all web applications, as well as all forms of media can be considered social because they store and transmit human knowledge that originates in social relations in society. They are objectifications of society and human social relations