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## THE CONTINUING IMPORTANCE OF NEWSPAPER JOURNALISM

A newspaper's role is to find out fresh information on matters of public interest and to relay it as quickly and as accurately as possible to readers in an honest and balanced way. That's it (Randall, 2007: 25)

So writes David Randall in his book *The Universal Journalist*, the much reprinted, all over the world, and excellent 'insider' book on journalism and what it takes to be a journalist. Randall loves journalism and newspapers, and unlike many manages to remain upbeat about both. He recognises the criticisms of both, and is intolerant of journalism that fails to meet his high standards, but he maintains that there is more good journalism than bad, and that there are more honest journalists than twisters of the truth. And he believes that journalism and newspapers can, and should, be an influential force for good, and often are. The authors of this book share that view, but also recognise that it isn't the whole story. A newspaper's role is fundamentally that put succinctly by Randall; and he enlarges on it:

It [a newspaper] may do lots of other things, like telling them [readers] what it thinks about the latest movies, how to plant potatoes, what kind of day Taureans might have or why the government should resign. But without fresh information it will be merely a commentary on things already known. Interesting, perhaps, stimulating even; but comment is not news. Information is. (2007: 25)

But beneath that lies a complex web of debates and issues surrounding and influencing that simple purpose. They involve the content of newspapers, how that content is selected and how it has changed over time; the economics of newspapers, who owns them and determines their policies, editorial and commercial; the threats to newspapers from competing media, even their survival; the extent to which society wishes to regulate or control newspapers, the freedom of a free press; the responsibility of newspapers with regard to matters

such as privacy, taste and decency, the age-old contest between public interest and what interests the public. There are other issues currently being debated about the effects of the press we have (and deserve?) on public attitudes to politics and politicians, on the susceptibility of newspapers to the influence of an increasingly sophisticated public-relations industry, on whether newspapers are coping with declining sales by 'dumbing down', trivialising, or whether changes in the news agenda are simply a response to changes in society and its interests. An understanding of current preoccupations is informed by an awareness of how the press has developed over the centuries, a historical context. All this and more will be discussed in this book.

### Newspapers not dead – shock

A newspaper has been described as a portable reading device with serendipity. You can take it anywhere and read it anywhere. You do not have to plug it in or recharge it. Newspapers remain fairly cheap; even the *Sunday Times*, Britain's first £2 newspaper, costs no more than a pint of beer in most places, rather less than in some, and less indeed than the DVD that will inevitably be provided free in the polybag that holds all the sections together. For that £2, if you were as interested in property as cars, sport as fashion and style, culture as business, you would get as much reading as you could accommodate in a week of Sundays. At the beginning of 2009 the most expensive dailies (excluding the specialist *Financial Times* at £1.80) were the *Independent* at £1 and the *Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian* and *Times* at 90p (Monday to Friday), with the mass-circulation redtops half the price or less. The serendipity comes in the surprise. You can turn the pages and come across something you find interesting. You weren't looking for it, because you didn't know it was there and you didn't know you would find it interesting.

The British have always been great consumers of news, comment and entertainment printed on paper, and we still are. We buy on average 11.2 million national newspapers each day and 11.8 million on Sunday (Audit Bureau of Circulations, October 2008). Readership of daily nationals is about 26.5 million and Sunday nationals 28.3 million (National Readership Survey, average issue readership April 2008 to September 2008). Set against an over-15 population of about 49 million, that is a lot of newspaper reading.

There is no correlation between the popularity of newspapers and the extent to which they are criticised and abused. It is the ultimate love-hate relationship. Expressions like 'Never believe what you read in the newspapers' have entered the language and become clichés, usually uttered by people who, rightly, believe most of the facts they read in newspapers. They tend to absorb more of what they read than what they watch or listen to, and what they read in the newspaper makes a significant contribution to conversation in the home and workplace, a welcome antidote to last night's *EastEnders*.

Despite (accurate) talk of the decline of newspaper sales in Britain, fascination with them has never been greater. While debate goes on about the influence of newspapers over our national life, from politics to celebrity, the newspapers themselves are in the spotlight as never before. Politicians are to blame, for pandering to newspapers behind the scenes while in public attacking their malign influence on our national life. The public are to blame for buying the material they attack the newspapers for publishing, and for 'shopping' – and, in these days of mobile telephones doubling as cameras, photographing or filming – the misdemeanours of well-known figures they spot misbehaving. Newspapers themselves are to blame for their reluctance to admit their mistakes and excesses. Most dislike and disparage analysis and criticism of their practices, particularly when it comes from media academics. Rival media are to blame for deferring to newspapers and sustaining their reputation for remaining the most influential medium. So radio and television constantly review newspapers, rolling 24-hour news channels at length and repeatedly, with newspaper journalists doing it; current-affairs programmes discuss the content and views of newspapers, late-night phone-ins discuss issues they have read about in the press; print journalists appear on *Newsnight*, *Question Time*, *Any Questions*, anywhere a view is needed. It is of course partly because the electronic media are obliged to be impartial whereas print journalists take positions.

None of this is good for the egos of the print journalists who are so magnified across the electronic media. They run the risk of taking themselves very seriously and believing in their own wisdom. Worse, they are susceptible to that dangerous disease, celebrity journalism. There was a time when print journalists were neither seen nor named. Now the newspapers give some of them lavish billing and television gives them a programme. The car is not the star on *Top Gear*; Jeremy Clarkson is. When Piers Morgan turns his charms on tabloid celebrities in his television interview show, there is no question who the real celebrity is. Not the WAG or supermodel. Both Clarkson and Morgan were once simply newspapermen.

So it would seem that despite accusations from some quarters that newspapers today trivialise and are dumbed down – and there is arguably some substance in both claims – newspapers have at least as much presence as they ever did. The basic role of the newspaper, to find things out and tell people about them, in as accessible a way as possible, is still fulfilled. There is debate about what those things that are found out are, and whether they are worth finding out in the first place (the news agenda), but it remains the case that without newspapers much that those exercising power over the rest of us would prefer not to enter the public domain does so through the medium of the newspaper.

Newspapers occupy a crucial place in the 'public sphere', defined by Habermas (1984: 49) as 'a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens'. Harrison

(2006: 110) traces this public sphere for news from the conversations in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century town halls and coffee shops to the present era of newspapers, broadcasters and the internet. This engages the public in politics and debate. But today's multi-media world is 'increasingly provided by a smaller number of large and powerful organisations, as well as by organised and well-resourced groups in civil society' (ibid.: 112). A decline in newspaper sales and an increasing concentration of ownership might undermine the access to a range of views.

### Newspapers in the digital age

Journalism itself is more important than where its products are published, and one of the problems of the current media debate is the failure to distinguish between the two. So preoccupied have media owners and managements become with the process of publishing and the variety of opportunities modern technologies allow that debate over how and where to publish has drowned out the more important question of what to publish. The fashionable use of the generic word 'content' instead of news and information has a significance that goes beyond the semantic. Content is simply what occupies the space and to use it to describe the products of journalism is to devalue the spirit and practice of intellectual inquiry and analysis that is the hallmark of good journalism.

The debate over the future of newspapers and their place in a multi-media, multi-platform, converged media world is of course of great importance and fascination. It is crucial in a business sense because unless publishers make money they will not publish. But after a period of complacency – crisis, what crisis? – newspaper publishers realised that something had to be done. One or two titles – the *Guardian* for example, and for a short time the *Telegraph* – embraced, or at least acknowledged, the digital age before the turn of the twenty-first century. But many more decided to enjoy the profitability they were still experiencing, blink at the circulation figures and carry on doing what they knew how to do, produce newspapers. Managers and publishers had relatively recently come to terms with the post-Wapping benefits of the computer for newspaper production, and profits. They were slow to see that the computer would pose a much greater threat as a rival publishing technology. Most journalists felt equally unthreatened by those about them predicting doom, dismissing them as nerds and techies who never read anything anyway and preferred Apples to news. They could safely be left in 'cyberland' while real journalists got on with their newspaper reporting. As we shall see later, the newspaper mainstream, editorial and managerial, kept their heads in the sand and ignored the signs of change all around.

**Table 1.1**

	1983	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006
All newspapers	77	73	68	61	57	54	50
Popular	57	50	47	46	42	37	33
Quality	10	11	11	11	11	12	12

### Down and down: the decline of newspaper sales

Peter Preston edited the *Guardian* for 20 years from 1975 to 1995, and saw its circulation grow considerably over that period. Others did not have the same experience; decline had begun, and would accelerate. Reflecting on the general sales loss so preoccupying editors and owners today, Preston (2008: 642) describes the circulation falls over his professional life: thirty years ago the *Daily Mirror* selling 3,879,000, in June 2007, only 1,565,000. The *Daily Express* has fallen from 2,312,000 to 770,000, the *Daily Telegraph* from over 1.3 million to 892,000. 'Where have 1.5 million *News of the World* customers gone? And over three million *People* readers. Why are national daily sales down to 11.6 million when those with not-so-long memories can recall 14 million? Why is our universe contracting year after year, as though inexorably?'

Franklin (2008a: 3) is less gloomy. 'While the decline in newspapers' circulations is undoubtedly significant, the suggestion here is that newspapers are not about to vanish or disappear.' Rather they are 'changing and adapting their contents, style and design in response to the challenges they confront in the increasingly competitive market'. This is a world of other media platforms, the internet and mobile telephones. Franklin says this is not a 'complacent' argument, but a recognition that 'adapting to increased competition, often driven by new technology, is historically what has triggered change in the newspaper industry .... what newspapers have always done'.

The latest (24th) British Social Attitudes Survey (2008) provides data on newspaper readership, and reviews how that has changed over the years of the Survey's publication. Regular readership (at least three days a week) is measured and divides newspapers into two categories, 'quality' (*Times, Telegraph, Guardian, Independent, Financial Times*) and 'popular' (*Mail, Express, Sun, Mirror, Star*). The figures in Table 1.1 shows the per centage of the adult population reading any paper, a popular paper and a quality paper.

In their chapter of the Social Attitudes report *Where Have All the Readers Gone?*, John Curtice and Ann Mair (2008: 161–172) describe the decline as 'continuous and relentless', pointing out that regular adult readership of national newspapers in Britain has fallen from just over three quarters to just half. 'Collectively Britain's newspapers have lost a third of their readers and, instead of reaching the overwhelming majority of the population, are now

regularly ignored by around half.' However, the authors note that readership of quality papers has remained steady at around one tenth of the population. 'The overall decline in newspaper readership has in effect been a decline in the readership of (once) popular daily papers.'

It may seem strange to be producing a book on newspaper journalism at a time when the industry is dealing with declines in circulation and readership by trying to get away from the limiting 'newspaper' descriptor of its activities, and placing more emphasis on its non-newspaper activities. Words like 'press' and 'newspapers' are being removed from company titles, usually replaced with the word 'media' (Guardian Media Group, Telegraph Media Group). So obsessed are they with newspaper sales and readership decline, amplified by the advertising decline of the economic recession of 2008–09, so prepared to take seriously the apocalyptic soothsayers predicting the end of newspapers, that they seem almost embarrassed to talk about the newspaper bedrocks of their businesses.

But there remain good reasons for concentrating on newspapers in a book such as this, and they are not simply historical. The newspaper industry, perhaps because it is perceived by some to be the most threatened media sector, is a key driver in the change that is coming about. Newspapers, more than any other sector, are driving convergence by adopting other forms of publishing – web, audio, video. The broadcast sector, with its own problems of falling audiences through the fragmentation brought about by digital multi-channel opportunities, is not moving into newspapers. And online publishers of news are not moving into journalism, except those already in journalism: newspapers and news broadcasters.

So far the elephant in the room has been newspaper decline, or even death in the foreseeable future. Temple (2008: 206) suggests the newspaper is at 'a critical crossroads, facing the most serious challenge to its future existence since the *Daily Courant* rolled off the presses in 1702'. Newspaper people have many strengths, but these often contribute to their weaknesses. They include looking on the dark side – bad news is usually bigger news; treating problems as crises; pessimism; and endless introspection. When journalists or media managers get together they seldom talk about anything but media matters. They also think in short time scales – after all newspapers come out every day or every week – so a set of poor circulation figures (despite the massaging to which the publishers have contributed) is a crisis not a problem. And a period of readjustment, albeit massive, is not the same as imminent death. Such panic attacks are not helped by an awareness that they were slow to wake up to the implications of online publishing, and when they did wake up it was in a state of hyperactivity.

It wasn't as though circulation decline was a new problem. Newspaper sales have been in decline in the UK for 30 years, but to extrapolate that to the rest of the world, as Franklin (2008b: 307) points out, 'articulates a curiously North

American and Euro-centric view of the press which seems blinkered to the explosion of new titles and readerships in other parts of the world'. Most people working in UK newspapers today have never known anything but decline. There have been individual successes that have bucked the trend for a period, but the high water mark of the 1940s and 1950s when the *Daily Express* sold 4.3 million and the *News of the World* peaked at nearly 7.5 million (Greenslade, 2003a: 5 and 120) will never come again. It is not sufficient to blame the rise of the internet. As Preston (2008: 643) puts it, 'The net may be delivering the *coup de grace*, but it's not truly to blame for what's gone wrong over decades. Human living patterns, changing, moving on, have done that.' During the golden age of newspaper sales television was just stuttering into life. And television as it was, analogue and fewer channels than fingers on one hand, will never again have the audiences it had when everybody was watching the same few programmes – digital satellite and cable saw to that. So it is simply wrong to think that newspaper circulation decline is a result solely of the internet, broadband and online news. It started long, long before that.

Technology does not exist in isolation, of course. It emerges out of specific economic, social and political contexts. But technological change can make certain things possible, or more or less likely. Technology was no threat to newspapers in the 1980s when computer typesetting and direct input revolutionised the industry, transforming the economics in the direction of huge potential increases in profitability. That 'new technology' era allowed for enormous growth in the size of newspapers (pagination) with the resultant potential for growing advertising revenues. The current digital revolution allowing for delivery of words, pictures and sound through screens and a vast (limitless) increase in the amount of information available through this medium is of course a challenge to newspapers, but not necessarily a terminal threat. It is that challenge newspapers are addressing now, in various ways, with varying investment and varying creativity and imagination. There is undoubtedly a lot of gloom to be found in newspaper offices these days, but that is not the whole story. It is also an exciting time for newspapers. Newspapers are not on death row.

### Global newspaper trends

So loud is the noise made by the doom laden 'death of newspapers' faction (journalist and academic alike) in the UK that we tend not to look at the wider picture, to ask whether this decline is a global phenomenon. It is not as though the internet is a localised presence – the world wide web is just that, world wide, although broadband penetration, and thus mass availability, is still predominantly a feature of the advanced economies. But worldwide print publication of news remains buoyant, as data collected annually by the Paris-based World Association of Newspapers (WAN) demonstrates.

WAN's World Press Trends figures, published annually since 1986, are collated from 232 countries where newspapers are published. The data for 2007 show that worldwide newspaper sales rose by 2.6 per cent on the previous year and 9.4 per cent over five years. When free daily newspapers are included, global circulation rose by 3.7 per cent for the year and 14.3 per cent over five years. These figures are helped by huge growth in newspaper sales in India (up 35.5 per cent over five years) and China, the world's largest market with 107 million copies sold daily (up 20.7 per cent over five years). But sales were up in 80 per cent of countries surveyed. All over the world 532 million people buy a newspaper each day (486 million in 2003) and average daily readership is estimated to be 1.7 billion. But what about Europe, where internet use is large and growing and newspaper decline is considered widespread? In fact here too sales have risen in 11 EU countries, and if free newspapers are included circulations rose by 2 per cent across the EU in 2007. While most Eastern European paid-for titles increased sale, decline was more evident in Western Europe, with Sweden and the UK performing worst. Elsewhere significant falls were recorded in the United States, Australia and Oceania.

So there is some statistical support for the pessimists in Britain, but it cannot be simply explained as part of a global, or even European trend. It is not just a case of saying that newspaper readers are switching to the internet for their news wherever there is huge internet availability.

While there is evidence of decline in sales in Britain, we should not forget just how many papers are still bought in this country. And even in our allegedly time-starved age we spend plenty of time reading our newspapers. The National Readership survey carried out its first 'Time Spent Reading' survey of this during the first half of 2007. As the NRS managing director Roger Pratt said, it showed 'just how robust the print medium is'. It demonstrated that 'consumers are committing substantial time to print media despite increasingly busy lifestyles and the proliferation of media channels'. The survey showed that a Monday–Friday national newspaper was read for an average of 40 minutes, a Saturday national newspaper for an average of 60 minutes (with 42 per cent reading for more than an hour), and national Sunday newspapers for an average of 70 minutes (half of readers spending more than an hour on their paper) (NRS Time Spent Reading report, October 2007).

The *British Journalism Review* commissioned its own survey from the pollster YouGov of the nature of newspaper decline and findings were published in 2006 with a commentary from Steven Barnett, Professor of Communications at the University of Westminster (*BJR* Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 8):

There are those inside and outside the newspaper industry who genuinely fear that the daily printed newspaper will soon become as anachronistic as the black Bakelite telephone, and that it simply cannot survive in the modern world. Can the newspaper continue to offer something different and unique in people's lives? Is it being overwhelmed by the immediacy of 24-hour channels and the internet? Is it too expensive, too opinionated,



too distrusted journalistically, or just too much to handle on a daily basis when there are so many other calls on people's time? Will it be on its deathbed five years from now?

The data revealed that 29 per cent read a newspaper less often than two years earlier, the figure rising to 32 per cent for national newspapers. But 13 per cent read a paper more often (10 per cent for nationals). Significantly, and perhaps unexpectedly, the 'more often' figure rose to 28 per cent in the 18–29 age group. The main reason given for reading less often was the availability of news elsewhere, particularly from the internet. However, 53 per cent of respondents said they still found things they liked in newspapers that they could not get elsewhere. While 18 per cent thought they would 'probably' give up reading newspapers over the next four or five years, 56 per cent took the opposite view. Barnett said that such figures could not be described as catastrophic, noting that the more negative figures about newspaper reading came from those who described themselves as 'occasional' readers (less than once a week):

Our research suggests that newspapers may have a longer shelf life than many believed possible, and that the model of the cinema – adapting to the television age but not being overwhelmed by it – might be the more appropriate analogy. These data are indicative of a prevalent mood that seems better disposed towards the printed press than we might reasonably have expected. ... There will certainly be continued circulation decline. But the evidence suggests that just as cinema going declined until the 1980s and then bottomed out and rose again, newspapers will find their plateau. In cultural and consumer terms, as long as the newspaper industry can continue to offer something of real journalistic substance, our data suggests that it will continue to find a willing and substantial readership. (Ibid.: 14)

It is widely believed that take-up of online media, and the consequent reduction in the use of traditional media, is most prevalent among the young. Ofcom, the regulator of broadcast media in the UK, provided some data in this area in its 2006 market report. It found that all consumers, but particularly the younger ones, were using the internet more, spending less time reading magazines and newspapers, watching TV and listening to radio. Among 15–24-year-olds, 27 per cent said they read national newspapers less since they started using the internet, while 14 per cent of all consumers reported a similar shift in their habits. The five analogue terrestrial television networks made up 58 per cent of young people's viewing time compared with 74 per cent in 2001. However, Ofcom's chief operating officer, Ed Richards, remarked that old media would not be going out of business:

It's not the death of any particular media. We are seeing an adjustment as a new medium, the internet, becomes more and more significant in people's lives. Other media will have to adjust and have to respond as they have been doing to that threat, and to respond in the way they use and position their current media. But we do not think any media will die as a result of this. All media will carry on and no doubt be successful.

Gavin O'Reilly, group chief operating officer of Independent News and Media, publishers of the *Independent* and *Independent on Sunday* in the UK, and many other titles from Ireland to South Africa, who is president of the World Association of Newspapers, takes a bullish view of the state of the newspaper industry worldwide, while recognising the circulation decline in Britain. He criticises media commentators and leading journalists for talking down the continuing success of newspapers and failing to celebrate how well they are adapting to the digital media world. Consumers will always want, he says, 'unique comment and analysis, well-crafted and well-edited content that has faced the rigours of a well-honed editorial process' (speech to Society of Editors conference, 4 November 2007).

Peter Preston (2008: 645) describes the pessimism in the British newspaper industry as 'the curse of introversion'. The industry is 'the very model of a great business bringing itself to dust in a welter of navel gazing. Day to day it remains wrapped in its own preoccupations.' Preston is sufficient of a realist to recognise what is going on in terms of circulation decline and the fall in advertising revenues as classified advertising – that's jobs, cars and houses – revenues fall, but says this represents inevitable and inexorable change which the industry has failed to adapt to. 'Introversion means we adjust slowly to change, if we adjust at all. Introversion means we don't notice the world changing around us. Introversion means a fatal lack of communication in the communications business, a blinkered refusal to make connections or form fresh alliances. Introversion brings a kind of imbecility along with it.'

But that adjustment to change is now coming about, and after several years of gloomy 'introversion' there are signs that the newspaper industry is beginning to adapt to the digital age. It is recognising that whatever the publishing platform information has to be gathered; and newspapers have traditionally been very good at that. It is recognising that journalism itself is more important than how it is published, and that newspapers know as much about journalism, probably more, than other media. How that process of change is developing will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

### Why newspapers remain so powerful

Jeremy Tunstall (1996: 1), writing before the internet became the force it is today, argued that newspapers remained powerful in the video age. The arrival of television had greatly increased the significance of the mass media around the world, but in terms of broad political and societal power television had added to – not subtracted from – the press in general and the newspapers in particular.

Newspapers, he wrote, exercised a continuing prerogative both to bias the news and to slant the comment. 'It is the newspapers, not television, which go

for the politician's jugular. Typically it is the newspaper which first spills the politician's blood; only then does television swoop in for the action replay.' Fewer people now read a daily newspaper each day but perhaps three or four times a week, but each newspaper was much fatter than that of a few decades ago. We were, said Tunstall, now in an age of semi-regular newspaper reading. 'The somewhat reduced TV networks and the somewhat arthritic daily newspapers still tower and stoop over the fragmented new media.'

'Semi-regular' reading has increased, a fact disguised by publication of newspaper circulation figures that average daily sales over the six publication days. Sales of Saturday newspapers, particularly at the 'upper' end of the market, are massively greater than Monday to Friday sales. Without the supplement packed Saturdays, more akin to Sunday newspapers than those published by the same title on other days of the week, sales of national dailies would look much worse than circulation figures suggest. The *Guardian*, for example, which averages an audited sale of around 350,000 across all six publishing days, sells about 200,000 more copies on a Saturday than on all other days of the week.

The fatness is undeniable, with all national newspapers spawning more and more sections, again particularly at the upper end of the market. The number of words in one edition of the *Sunday Times* or *Observer*, or *Saturday Guardian* or *Telegraph*, would equate to that in many novels. This has resulted in the perception that news has been relegated in importance, whereas the reality is that there is at least as much news, or material presented as news in news sections, in all newspapers as there has ever been, in most cases more. A look at the pre-Wapping era of 'old' technology and 16–24-page broadsheets that were then the norm reminds us that in many ways the scale and ambition, not to mention value, of national newspapers has grown rather than diminished.

The propensity of newspapers to go for the politician's jugular remains, and some would argue has gone too far. But it is the newspapers that continue to expose the news management of governments, the hypocrisy and manipulation of statistics. It is the newspapers that embarrass politicians and on occasion bring them down, whether over policies, financial impropriety or philandering. It is the newspapers that get bees in their bonnets, worry away, obsess. We may challenge the subjects of those obsessions, which range from the serious and important to the trivial, the inconsequential and sometimes the downright dangerous. But with as pluralistic a press as we have in this country a lot of different tastes are catered for. As long as newspapers provoke the strength of feeling most do they are unlikely to become marginalised. When the *Guardian* and *Daily Mail* can both evoke such rage from different sections of the public (and each other), when both can be regarded by those who dislike them as so biased, so wrong, then there is clearly choice and representation of different political outlooks. ITV or Sky News do not produce such reactions, and nor does Google News. The BBC does on occasion, partly because of its public funding via the licence fee, but mainly

because the newspapers decide to whip up a campaign about some 'outrage' or other; another demonstration of the power of the press to set agendas.

Quite apart from the physical factors, the newspaper continues to offer a different approach to journalism from other media. It offers a range of content in one package, as opposed to requiring the consumer to go to different places for different things, as on the internet. It acquires character and attitude from the way it selects and what it selects. It is seldom bland. Newspapers, unlike other media, tend to reflect and reinforce the prejudices of their readers, painting a picture of the world the reader will recognise. Newspapers will understand the lives of their target audiences and publish material that is relevant to them, that fits in with their preoccupations, interests, working lives, family lives and leisure. While magazines are deliberately more specific, newspapers will seek to deal with all aspects of the readers' lives: their health, holidays, finance, homes, children, clothes, food, the things that excite them, enrage them, worry them and amuse them. All this in one portable package.

Newspaper journalism, even in the age of dramatic and technology-led change, still represents more than any other medium the essential of journalism: to find things out and tell others about them; to tell stories in a simple and accessible way; to explain; to root out hypocrisy and corruption among those who wield power, in so many ways, over the rest of us; to right wrongs and campaign; to provide the stuff of everyday conversation; to enrage and entertain; to shock and move; to celebrate and condemn. In the words of the American journalist H.L. Mencken, 'to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable' or in the words of the former *Sun* editor Kelvin MacKenzie, to 'shock and amaze on every page'.

But young people entering journalism do not necessarily see it that way. They may see journalism as one way to make a difference. They may be interested in events and want to be close to them, explaining why they are important, interesting, dramatic or simply remarkable. Newspaper journalists work for commercial organisations but, although newspapers are businesses, they are not businesses like any other, because they are about life and not things; they are about us, and the ways we live and are organised and governed.

The good journalists ask the questions and question the answers. These days there are many places to publish information and the business of how and where to publish it is in transition. Newspaper publishers will (and are doing so) publish on a variety of platforms, but it will be a long time before the scope, the relative simplicity, of the newspaper becomes redundant.

Would Rupert Murdoch be spending £650 million on three new printing plants in Britain if he did not see a secure future for newspapers? Would the *Telegraph* titles be bought for nearly £600 million if the new owners, the Barclay brothers, simply wanted a website?

Murdoch, whose titles make up about about 35 per cent of UK national newspaper circulation, and who was a late convert to embracing news on the internet – he is now a zealous convert – believes newspapers have a future,

as part of a mix of publishing platforms where the most important feature is the brand (its credibility and trust in it). During his series of 2008 Boyer Lectures on Australian radio he poured scorn on the pessimism of some journalists and the 'perverse pleasure' they took in 'ruminating on the pending demise' of newspapers. 'The newspaper,' he said, 'or a very close electronic cousin will always be around' (Murdoch, 2008).

The financial analysts would say in their formulaic way that newspapers will continue to form an important part of the media mix. We would suggest that newspapers will continue to represent the journalistic bedrock. Or as Gavin O'Reilly (2007) put it to the Society of Editors conference: 'We see newspapers as the ultimate browser, where in essence someone else has done the hard work for you, and delivered the serendipity of life to you in a concise, colourful and portable way, and all for the price of a cup of coffee.' He underestimated the price of a cup of coffee.

### Structure of this book

In this introductory chapter we have set out why we believe newspapers continue to be so important and so fascinating, notwithstanding the rapid changes that are going on around them and indeed to them. Subsequent chapters will take particular aspects and explore the role of newspapers in more detail, pointing to particular examples and drawing out key themes. Chapter 2 will look in detail at the present state of the national newspaper market in the UK, the different market sectors and the audiences and relative performance of different national titles. It will provide current sales, readership and demographic data, and consider changes in the editorial agendas of different titles. The most significant change to newspapers in the past decade has been format change within the sector previously referred to as 'the broadsheets'. Three of those daily 'quality' titles (and two Sundays) have 'downsized' to what is now described as 'compact' format, to the (at least initial) benefit of their circulations. The regional press has undergone a period of great decline in sales, and the reasons for this and the response of publishers is considered in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 provides a brief history of the press over the past 300 years, considering the influence of key figures at particular moments in history and the emergence of titles still published today. The importance of developing technologies, in distribution as well as printing, of the radical press as well as what became the mainstream press, of government controls through the 'taxes on knowledge' and of the unabashed pursuit of political power through newspaper ownership are all considered. Power and profit shifts between different owners and titles dominating particular periods are described. Press history shows that there is nothing new in many areas of concern today: the power of individual proprietors, scurrilous journalism, tabloid agendas, special offers to induce purchase, price-cutting and ferocious competition.

Chapter 5 deals with the political economy of the press in the age of corporate newspapering. Colin Sparks (1999: 46) was unequivocal:

Newspapers in Britain are first and foremost businesses. They do not exist to report the news, to act as watchdogs for the public, to be a check on the doings of government, to defend the ordinary citizen against abuses of power or to do any of the other fine and noble things that are sometimes claimed for the press. They exist to make money just as any other business does. To the extent that they discharge any of their public functions, they do so in order to succeed as businesses.

While most editors and journalists would take a loftier view, most proprietors and shareholders would agree with Sparks. This chapter looks at the ownership of the press, and its concentration. It looks at the reasons for large profits in a time of circulation decline and the effects of technological change. It considers changes in ownership and the attractiveness of media companies to potential purchasers. Has cost-cutting in recent years had a negative effect on journalism? What is the significance of the development of free newspapers? It was already clear by the end of 2008 that the global recession would have a profound effect on the UK newspaper industry.

Chapter 6 examines contemporary practices in newspaper journalism and how editorial emphases have changed. Has the broader agenda of the serious press to include popular culture and celebrity represented 'dumbing down' or the democratisation of news? Is Brian McNair right when he suggests (2003: 223) that the thesis of dumbing down is at least a 'contestable' or even 'elitist' response to welcome developments in journalism.

This chapter will consider McNair's argument in terms of consumer, lifestyle, popular culture and celebrity journalism. It will also deal with the debate initiated by John Lloyd in his book *What the Media Are Doing to Our Politics* (2004). Lloyd believes the media, and particularly newspapers, contribute to the lack of respect for and trust in politicians. Their emphasis on negativity, he argues, can undermine the political process. He had an ally in the outgoing prime minister Tony Blair, who devoted one of his farewell lectures (2007) to the media, which he described as 'like a feral beast, just tearing people and reputations to bits'. Blair went on:

I do believe this relationship between public life and media is now damaged in a manner that requires repair. The damage saps the country's confidence and self-belief; it undermines its assessment of itself, its institutions; and above all, it reduces our capacity to take the right decisions, in the right spirit for our future.

Another current debate on newspaper practices emanates from a *Guardian* journalist, Nick Davies, who savaged his peers in a controversial book, *Flat Earth News* (2008). Much of the research for this was carried out by Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. Davies says

that he feels 'forced to admit that I work in a corrupted profession' (2008: 3). Examining various stories he claims to have found 'falsehood, distortion and propaganda running through the outlets of an industry which is supposed to be dedicated to the very opposite, i.e. to telling the truth'. He and his Cardiff researchers put much of the blame on public relations and news agencies. Contemporary practices will also include the demands made of journalists in a multi-media age, questioning whether increasing their productivity dilutes the quality of their journalism.

Chapter 7 deals with ethics and regulation, which remains self-regulation in the case of newspapers. Mike Jempson (2007), director of the Mediawise Trust, observes that 'journalism is under scrutiny as never before'. There is more discussion of newspaper ethics today than at any time, with an emerging body of academic literature dealing with the subject. Newspapers subscribe to the Code of Practice of the Press Complaints Commission, a code developed by newspaper editors themselves. Many of the debates involving the academy, politicians, the public and newspaper editors themselves are around ethics and standards, and have to deal with a public that buys more newspapers when they feature scandal in public life while decrying press intrusion and telling pollsters of their lack of trust in the media.

Chapter 8 looks at investigative journalism, seen by many as having declined through lack of investment. Painstaking investigations take time and may not yield a result, and cost-cutting managements are said to be unwilling to make the investment. Others will say that all reporting is investigative because it is about finding out, and the journalism of disclosure is still alive. Political donations and MPs' expenses are but two recent examples of the products of journalistic investigation. Since the supposed golden era of investigative reporting, *Sunday Times* Insight in the 1960s, the Freedom of Information Act has entered the statute book. This chapter will examine whether that is fulfilling the expectations of those who campaigned for it, or whether Britain's traditional culture of secrecy is alive and well.

The growth of the academic discipline of journalism studies and its many related subjects is examined in Chapter 9. It is fair to say that relations between journalists and academics who seek to research and analyse their practices and products have not always been warm. Journalists who spend their lives asking questions in an attempt to reveal the truth are often curiously averse to answering questions themselves and sometimes question the right or ability of those who do not 'do' journalism to research or analyse it. Equally, academics in the field have often approached journalism with preconceptions and distaste for the popular end of the market. They have on occasion been disappointed that academic research methods are not employed by journalists working to a different time frame and for a different and much larger audience. But there are signs that some mutual understanding, not least of the differences between the two activities, is developing. Perhaps the

growth of journalism education in universities and the movement of journalists into academic employment, the emergence of the so-called 'hackademics', has fostered that. The fact that this book draws frequently on the work of media academics but is written by two former hacks now working in the academy could be seen as bridge building. Equally the use in the book of sources from inside journalism, speeches and lectures by eminent journalists, and data emanating from the newspaper industry can be taken to indicate that a welcome two-way process is going on.

Chapter 10 returns to the themes introduced in Chapter 1 and looks back to the future, to the engagement of newspapers in the new, converged journalism. It describes the vast changes that have taken place very recently in the direction of multi-platform publishing. It looks at the demands on publishers and journalists alike as the new media age is addressed. And it recognises that there are more uncertainties than certainties about what lies ahead; we are probably nearer the beginning of the 'digital revolution' than we are to the end, assuming there is one. Discussion of the future is perhaps inevitably based more on opinion than fact, which is one of the allegations against newspapers today. Two opinions from very well-known journalists underline the point. First John Humphrys, scourge of politicians, anchor of BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme, quoted in the *Independent* (2006):

The idea of society functioning without newspapers in one shape or form is simply preposterous. If they don't survive, heaven help all of us. The question is what form they take and I would be absolutely astonished if within the foreseeable future they didn't remain in their current form. We love newspapers. Obviously we are not buying them in the same numbers we did. They have been through this kind of crisis before and I have lost track of the times we have discussed the imminent demise of newspapers. But whenever a newspaper comes up for sale, you get killed in the rush; everyone wants to buy it. How come?

And Piers Morgan, former editor of the *Daily Mirror*, in the same *Independent* article (2006):

Every newspaper has a great future online. End of story. Within five years every newspaper will be free and they'll all be online. And if not, they should be. There will still be a presence in print but that will be for older readers and you will find that anybody under the age of 35 will only read newspapers online.

Finally, this book has drawn on many books, journals, papers and articles that the authors would recommend. Newspaper journalism is a vast subject and the scope of this book has inevitably limited the extent to which each of its constituent parts, outlined above, could be explored. For that reason Chapter 11 is a critical bibliography, essentially recommended reading for those who wish to dig deeper into a fascinating subject.

We begin, in the next chapter, with a closer look at the present national newspaper landscape.