# Journalism Standards of Work Today

# Journalism Standards of Work Today:

*Using History to Create a New Code of Journalism Ethics*

By

Stephen A. Banning

**Cambridge Scholars**
Publishing

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This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

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



ISBN (10): 1-5275-5803-7
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-5803-8

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# CHAPTER ONE

# DÉJÀ VU IN MODERN MEDIA

This book is a guide to understanding not only the nature of traditional journalism codes of ethics, but why they were introduced and the problems they were created to address. This will serve as a practical guide for the journalist navigating in today's communication environment in that, more than just a description of ethics, it is a manual for understanding modern journalism challenges. The author uses history as a roadmap exhibiting the way technology has triggered ethical journalism challenges in the past, and how the same template utilized by past journalists can provide a framework for establishing modern communication values. While some of the concepts are sophisticated, the language used to explain them is understandable, and easy to comprehend examples from recent cases are used to break down concepts in clear, simple, terms. The author will outline both past ethical shortcomings and a new code of ethics based on past journalistic standards of work and current responsibilities. Discussion questions will be included at the end of each chapter to encourage engagement through critical scaffolding, beginning with identification items and moving toward topics requiring critical thinking.

This book will reveal the similarity between current content purveyors pioneering todays' communication frontier and journalists during the First Industrial Revolution who struggled with occupational identity and mores as the scope of information dissemination exponentially expanded. Through the lens of past journalism successes and failures, this book provides insights into journalists' roles and standards of work in the context of technologically fueled cultural shifts. The reader will find that current challenges posed by technological transformations have been examined before, and while the answers may apply to different delivery channels, the bedrock principles remain unchanged. The reader will be challenged to balance society's needs with journalistic responsibilities in regard to setting standards in the modern times.

The reader will consider the components of ethical journalism and who modern journalists are. Additionally, this book examines early journalists who tackled questions on journalism's societal value, standards of work, organizations and education. As in modern times, journalists in the First Industrial Revolution faced monumental changes from improved printing technology that increased information dissemination, resultant in a transformation of audiences caused by historically rising literacy rates.[1]

Organizations formed to surmount these challenges, becoming crucial to developing ethical norms in journalism. The reader will be encouraged to consider if these norms still exist, apply and serve society. The prescription is that modern journalism consumers and journalists need to discuss critical questions regarding technology, with the emphasis not just on how technology might be used, but about responsibilities journalists incur and the standards to which they should aspire. However, the underlying values that prevailed when the Canons of Journalism were created a century ago will be found to be the same as those required in modern times, applied to new technological contexts.

It may seem strange that news dissemination was originally based on a rudimentary printing press, as the challenges of modern technology extend far beyond those posed by the limited hand operated presses of the late 1700s. At that time, freedom of the press was limited to those who could afford a relatively expensive printing press. Today, journalists go by many titles, and while some vloggers, bloggers, micro-bloggers, podcast hosts and Facebook posters perform many functions of the traditional journalist, many would never think of calling themselves journalists. Despite this, what has been called the non-traditional media has long ago surpassed the traditional media in terms of news dissemination, and even social media messages intended for a few may quickly reach tens of millions.

While prevailing challenges in modern times stem from the Third Industrial Revolution rather than the First Industrial Revolution, the same questions remain as to responsible journalisms' place and value. This book reveals how early publishers considered these questions, assembled to gather opinions and formed the basis of codes of ethics over many decades prior to

[1] Jim A. Kuypers, *Partisan Journalism: A History of Media Bias in the United States* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 16.

the principles inspiring the Canons of Journalism in the early twentieth century. It is these lessons on which enduring values can be distilled.[2]

## From One Technological Revolution to the Next

This current chapter discusses the premise of this book and its purpose as well as offering a brief overview of the chapters that lie ahead. It began by discussing how this book builds toward a new proposed code of ethics in the Digital Age, setting the stage by looking at how the First Industrial Revolution began and changed both technology and culture.

Chapter Two will describe how the First Industrial Revolution fueled changes in media information gathering, production, content and dissemination that resulted in a loss of credibility, which in turn made a case for a code of ethics. There were also many changes in culture in the first half of the nineteenth century, as the Industrial Revolution radically transformed society, the media being no exception. One of the greatest changes occurred in the 1830s, when the Penny Press Era ushered in innovations still used today. Because of its continuing impact and its effect on journalism ethics the Penny Press will be closely examined.[3]

The Penny Press newspapers were known for sensational stories and lurid headlines which troubled some publishers who became concerned that the new mass-produced news was tainting society and causing all newspapers to lose credibility.[4] Another challenge created by the Penny Press system was newspaper advertising of patent medicines, the sometimes dangerous and usually dubious healing potions that heavily supported many newspapers. Because there was no government regulation of pharmaceuticals, patent medicines often contained substances not mentioned on the label including heroin and cocaine, causing death from overdoses even among children. Both of these problems, sensationalism and conflicts of interest, resulted in a loss of newspaper credibility.[5]

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[2] Stephen A. Banning, "Truth is Our Ultimate Goal," *American Journalism* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 17.
[3] Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 57.
[4] David B. Sachsman and David W. Bulla, eds., *Sensationalism: Murder, Mayhem, Mudslinging, Scandals, and Disasters in 19th Century Reporting* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2013), xxi.
[5] Dan King, *Quackery Unmasked* (New York: D. Clapp, 1858), 295.

Chapter Three will consider how the concept of professionalization influenced journalism culture, an important historical component to consider as we examine it as an early catalyst for journalism ethics, exemplifying journalists' answers to questions elicited by the newly created mass media. During the First Industrial Revolution, three occupations (doctors, lawyers and the clergy) had risen in status and were called professions, being seen as the expert class of individuals needed in an industrialized society.[6] As a result, some journalists wanted to professionalize to keep newspapers from losing more credibility, and thus, professionalization was seen as a way for journalists to ethically respond to the new mass communication challenges.[7]

There were several criteria for an occupation to become a profession which included professional associations, university education, a code of ethics and sometimes licensing.[8] Unfortunately, journalism was a poor candidate for full professionalization in that not all of the tenets of professionalization reflected journalism's unique case. The tenets of professionalism set by doctors, lawyers and the clergy were associations, codes of ethics, university education, licensing and autonomy. While journalists in the nineteenth century formed associations, codes of ethics and advocated for university education, licensing was anathema to the concept of a free press and was never seriously deliberated. Still, many journalists identified as professionals in the nineteenth century and even more so in the twentieth, with the establishment of university journalism schools, professional associations and codes of ethics.[9]

During the second half of the nineteenth century, many associations of editors and publishers had been formed, some specifically as professional organizations where discussions of ethics and university education began.[10] From these humble beginnings, the elements of professionalization were formulated into implementable actions at the start of the twentieth century

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[6] Howard M. Vollmer and Donald L. Mills, *Professionalization* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1966), 2; Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), 6.
[7] Stephen A. Banning "The Professionalization of Journalism: A Nineteenth-Century Beginning," *Journalism History* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1998-1999): 158.
[8] Philip Elliott, *The Sociology of the Professions* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), 40.
[9] Banning, "The Professionalization of Journalism," 158.
[10] Stephen A. Banning, "Press Clubs Champion Journalism Education," in *Journalism 1908: Birth of a Profession,* ed. Betty Winfield (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 65.

when the first school of journalism commenced at the University of Missouri and another shortly thereafter at Columbia University.[11]

Chapter Four delves into the content of the first nationally recognized press codes of ethics, which form the basis of current ethical discussions. The first widely adopted journalism codes of ethics came in the early twentieth century shortly after the foundation of the first university schools of journalism (at the University of Missouri and Columbia University) and the beginning of the two professional press clubs (American Society of Newspaper Editors and Sigma Delta Chi). The codes of ethics were similar to each other and borrowed from ethical discussions that had started more than half a century before, but unlike previous ethical discussions and loose codes of journalism ethics, the American Society of Newspaper Editors and Sigma Delta Chi codes became widely accepted and implemented.[12] These codes addressed issues journalists had discussed in press associations for half a century.

The American Society of Newspaper Editors code of ethics was called the Canons of Journalism and emphasized seven topics: 1) responsibility, 2) freedom of the press, 3) independence, 4) sincerity, truthfulness, accuracy, 5) impartiality, 6) fair play and 7) decency. These seven elements addressed challenges which had emerged over the previous century. The ideas behind these elements are discussed in Chapters Five through Eight as a touchstone for understanding journalism values.[13]

Chapter Five will examine the two items of responsibility and independence from the Canons of Journalism in relation to current communication conditions in the Digital Age, in order to ascertain if these ethical elements are still relevant almost a century after they was codified. These elements directly relate to conflicts of interest challenges, which occur when a journalist is influenced by a latent factor.[14] For example, a reporter who recommends a product would have a conflict of interest if he or she had been paid secretly by the product's manufacture. Even though a reporter might openly inform an audience that he or she had been given an incentive,

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[11] Banning, "Press Clubs Champion Journalism Education," 65.
[12] Banning, "Truth is Our Ultimate Goal," 17.
[13] Charles L. Allen, *Canons of Journalism, Adopted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Convention 1925* [sic] (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Studio Press, 1928), 1.
[14] Michael Davis and Andrew Stark, *Conflict of Interest in the Profession*s (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 78.

it could still be considered a conflict of interest, in the same way a trial judge would be considered to have a conflict of interest if he or she accepted a bribe from a defendant. The reader is asked to consider if this is an ethical element which should still be considered today. Factors damaging to journalism independence historically are discussed including deregulation, concentration of ownership, excessive government regulation, relationships and advertisers.

Chapter Six looks at the Canons of Journalism elements of sincerity, truthfulness and accuracy (which the Canons of Journalism considers one element), and impartiality, which can be related to current challenges of "fake news." While the "fake news" label is new, the accusation is old and one of the reasons codes of ethics were created in the first place. In times past, fabricated stories were called hoaxes.[15] Even though many information sources are truthful, the 2016 United States presidential election revealed the digital landscape allows misinformation to circulate easily, especially through mediums such as Twitter and Facebook where some political reports were complete fabrications.[16]

Chapter Seven studies the Canons of Journalism elements of fair play and decency which encompass the current ethical challenges of privacy, sensationalism and gatekeeping. The chapter looks at whether these concerns are damaging to society today and if they belong in a new code of ethics.

According to the Canons of Journalism, fair play involves respecting privacy and correcting mistakes. Among other areas, this speaks to the current online problem of "doxing," exposing a person's name and address against his or her wishes. The difficulty of sensationalism is embodied in the current practice of digital information producers who use click-bait. This principle is dealt with in the Canons of Journalism.[17]

Chapter Eight examines current journalism challenges in relation to the construction of a new code of ethics. Many journalists after the First Industrial Revolution saw a need for a code of ethics, a belief that resulted in widely used codes in the twentieth century. Today, at a time when traditional media sources have declined, media critics are challenging the

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[15] Matthew Goodman, *The Sun and the Moon* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 147.
[16] Jesus Velasco, *American Presidential Elections in a Comparative Perspective: The World is Watching* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 14.
[17] Paul Alfred Pratte, *Gods Within the Machine: A History of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1923-1993* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 205-6.

credibility of many kinds of information.[18] Consequently, Chapter Eight synthesizes information from previous chapters to propose a new code of ethics. Based on earlier discussion, three enduring foundations of journalism emerge, and a code of ethics is constructed with similarity to the Canons of Journalism where old and new concerns intersect.

## The First Industrial Revolution

This section begins an examination of the First Industrial Revolution that propelled mass media into existence. This time period is examined because it goes to the center of the purpose of this book, that is to compare early journalism problems and solutions with the modern day problems, in order to see if past standards of work, specifically those culminating in the Canons of Journalism, can provide elements for a modern code of ethics.

The First Industrial Revolution in the United States took place at the end of the eighteenth century and can be described as an agrarian economy shifting to one mechanized in character, a sea change that greatly impacted society. Historians often refer to this period as the First Industrial Revolution, paying deference to two additional later periods of industrial growth. The time period was fueled by inventions, which required factories for production and transportation for distribution. These ripples in society inspired a migration to urban areas and new transportation routes between cities. As a result, the time it took materials to be manufactured was exponentially reduced, permitting those who owned the means of production to reap the benefits of an economy of scale, and because of the increased per capita production, society achieved a higher standard of living.[19]

One of the inventions that helped start the First Industrial Revolution in the United States was textile milling technology, based on an English device introduced by Samuel Slater in 1790. Historians generally agree that the First United States Industrial Revolution continued from this time until the 1830s.[20] In order for society to take advantage of industrial innovation, new ways of working had to be introduced. The first work technique, called the

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[18] Aviv Ovadya, "What is Credibility Made of," *Columbia Journalism Review*, March 21, 2019, https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/ovadya-credibility-journalism-ocasio.php
[19] Robert E. Lucas, Jr., *Lectures on Economic Growth* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 109.
[20] Christopher Simonds, *Samuel Slater's Mill and the Industrial Revolution* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Silver Burdett Press, 1990), 19.

outwork system, was a method whereby parts of the manufacturing process were accomplished in separate homes. However, a more efficient method, called the factory system, was later adopted, which allowed all the work to be done in one place, often by large assemblies of workers. Soon textile mill towns were constructed on the East Coast of the United States, the most famous of which was in Lowell, Massachusetts, where young women were recruited to run the machines.[21]

Successfully harnessing steam was important for the First Industrial Revolution because it helped power both factories for manufacturing and transportation for distributing. Steam power has been used in some form for over two thousand years, but it took a series of inventions to create steam machines that would change the world of manufacturing. Without the power of steam, it is difficult to imagine mass communication taking place, and therefore, a brief look at the development of this important technology will help set the stage for a discussion of mass communication.[22]

While a Roman engineer known as the Hero of Alexandria is credited with creating or at least first describing a steam device known as the Aeolipile in the first century, it was not until the late seventeenth century that significant improvements moved it past the novelty stage.[23] British engineer Thomas Savory was the first to make a significant improvement in a steam powered machine when he patented a simple device in 1698 which had no moving parts except for the taps, but could pump water for mining, public use or firefighting.[24] Savory also invented a steam powered system that was supposed to row a boat through the water, but the British Navy rejected it, and it never found favor. In 1712, British inventor Thomas Newcomen invented the atmospheric engine, the first steam engine with a piston, and the first that could be used to power machinery, but was sourced almost

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[21] Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1979), xxv; Harriet H. Robinson, *Loom and Spindle, or Life Among the Early Mill Girls* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, 1898), 60.
[22] David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus* (Cambridge, UK: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1969), 104.
[23] William Rosen, *The Most Powerful Idea in the World: A Story of Steam, Industry and Invention* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 6.
[24] Thomas Savory, *The Miner's Friend, or an Engine to Raise Water by Fire, Described by Captain Thomas Savery* (London: J. McCormick, 62, Paternoster Row, 1829), 22.

exclusively to pump water.[25] Half a century later, in 1776, James Watt made a new type of stationary steam engine available that was about twice as efficient as the Newcomen engine, making it efficient enough to power factories. The invention of other new machines at the time, especially for textile production, could now be powered by steam instead of horses, humans, wind and water. The Watts Steam Engine was the first invention that could adequately replace and surpass factory water wheels in the United States, meaning mills no longer needed to be located by rivers.[26]

Many inventions such as Eli Whitney's cotton gin were first run primitively by hand or horsepower, which was a great improvement over removing cotton bolls from cotton plants by hand. However, steam made machines like the cotton gin more efficient by many factors. Likewise, newly invented textile mill machines, which already were making fabric production faster than possible by hand, generated material at unheard of speeds.[27]

Steam also helped find a way to get the mass-produced products to consumers in the United States by aiding transportation through engines, greatly accelerating the marketing revolution. Robert Fulton was the first inventor to find commercial success in building a boat propelled by steam, making a legendary 32-hour, 150 mile, trip from New York City to Albany on a steamboat called the *Clermont* in 1807, proving its viability to skeptics who had called his idea Fulton's folly.[28] It was the first commercially successful steamboat, making use of a Boulton and Watt steam engine manufactured by a company partly owned by Watt Steam Engine inventor James Watt.[29] This was a pivotal moment in transportation history, as steamboats overcame many shipping challenges, such as depending on the right winds to carry sailboats to their destinations, and the problem of carrying goods by boat upriver, against the current. Steam power meant transportation by water literally no longer depended on the wind, weather

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25 Albert Edward Musson and Eric Robinson, *Science and Technology in the Industrial Revolution* (Milton Park, UK: Taylor & Francis, 1989), 48.

26 Henry Winram Dickinson, *A Short History of the Steam Engine* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1939). 87.

27 Ross Thomson, *Structures of Change in the Mechanical Age: Technological Invention in the United States 1790-1865* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 32, 75.

28 Alice Clary Sutcliffe, *Robert Fulton and the "Clermont"* (New York: The Century Company, 1909), 234.

29 Erich Roll, *An Early Experiment in Industrial Organisation, being a History of the Firm of Boulton & Watt, 1775-1805* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930), 14.

or seasonal sea currents. The steamboat provided a vehicle to carry goods made possible by steam powered factories to any water accessible area at virtually any time.[30]

Because of a need to distribute goods, some areas in the western part of the country which were not accessible by water were made so by the building of channels such as the Erie Canal. Canals were much faster than other forms of transportation, as trains were in their infancy and were usually made of cast iron because methods of manufacturing steel had not yet been refined as they would be later in the nineteenth century. Inventor Richard Trevithick had pioneered the steam powered train in England in 1810, but it was unreliable, not powerful and many people rightfully feared it was unsafe, resulting in the machines being relegated to mining operations during the First Industrial Revolution.[31]

The First Industrial Revolution impacted American culture in many ways including a move by younger people to cities to find work in factories. Toward the end of the First Industrial Revolution these large, closely populated cities proved to be a prime market for the product of other innovations, specifically the printing press. At the beginning of the First Industrial Revolution, the printing press remained essentially the same as it had since its invention by Johannes Gutenberg in 1440, comprised mainly of a screw mechanism that squeezed ink onto paper with moveable type. However, several innovations during the First Industrial Revolution quickly changed printing capacity and speed.[32]

In around 1800 Lord Charles Stanhope in England invented a printing press that was a major improvement. Before Stanhope, printing press frames were made of wood. Stanhope made his of solid cast iron, the metal most used at the time for machinery that required strength, as steel processing was so inefficient at the time that its use was mostly confined to cutlery. Stanhope's invention increased the force of the platen on the paper, the effort needed for each pressing, the speed of operation and the printing area. Compared to later advances, this wasn't a great enhancement, as it only increased the

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[30] Ronald E. Shaw, *Canals for a Nation: The Canal Era in the United States, 1790-1860* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 2014), Preface.
[31] Dickinson, *A Short History of the Steam Engine*, 97-8.
[32] James Moran, *Printing Presses: History and Development from the Fifteenth Century to Modern Times* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 123; William Savage, *A Dictionary of the Art of Printing* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1841), 595.

number of papers produced an hour by twenty-five percent, moving from two hundred an hour to two hundred and fifty an hour. However, it stirred interest in printing innovation.[33]

German inventor Koenig began innovating the printing press in 1802. By 1810 he had added cylinders and used steam to power the mechanics. After patenting his invention, Koenig partnered with Andreas Friedrich Bauer to manufacture the presses which he sold to *The Times of London* in 1814. *The Times* used them to create 1,000 to 1,100 pressings an hour, a pace which was about 20 times faster than the Stanhope press. The speed of the Koenig press paved the way for the mass marketing of newspapers and revolutionized book making, although its full capacity as a mass media device had to wait for the right time and a person with the vision to harness its power.[34]

One effect of improved printing methods was increased literacy, which resulted in a demand for more printed material. This, and the movement of people to urban centers where product distribution was cheaper, faster and more profitable resulted in a situation that transformed information dissemination.[35]

Newspapers were well established by the time the First Industrial Revolution came to the United States, although it existed in a very different form and was conceptually evolving on its own. Before the American Revolution, newspapers often had small circulations and some were subsidized by the government and under government control, a time often called the Colonial Press Era. After the American Revolution, political parties took over the subsidization of newspapers and it was during this Partisan Press Era that the First Industrial Revolution began.[36]

One characterizing factor of the early Partisan Press Era was the cost of a single newspaper, six cents a copy, a prohibitive amount for most people but well in reach of the elite. Sales were almost exclusively by subscription, thereby raising the cost even more, because most day laborers could not afford the one-time payment of a subscription. The content was also aimed

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[33] Ghita Stanhope and George Peabody Gooch, *The Life of Charles, Third Earl of Stanhope* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1914), 261.
[34] Philip B. Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1998), 130.
[35] Kuypers, *Partisan Journalism*, 16.
[36] Carole Sue Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 41.

at an elite audience, replete with economic interest items and often one-sided political discourse.[37]

While the First Industrial Revolution created a perfect storm of favorability for mass marketing newspapers, it took the ingenuity of Benjamin Day in 1833 to realize its potential. Day began a period often called the Penny Press Era described in more detail in Chapter Two, whereby he sold newspapers to the common people rather than the elite, establishing many of the news story norms that we still have today. It was a change that could only have taken place with the foundation set by the First Industrial Revolution, which created the audience, the means of distribution, the method of printing and the availability of raw materials.[38]

While the First Industrial Revolution is considered to have ended in the 1830s, its influence continued with further innovations and cultural shifts. Among the challenges was the nature of the media, having grown so dominant that it was a force in public opinion. Information was no longer controlled just by the elites and allowed to trickle down to the common people but was delivered cheaply directly to the masses. Although some welcomed this innovation, the fact that the owners of influential newspapers had no limits and could act with virtual impunity, concerned others. While a good printing press owner was seen as someone who could educate the masses positively, it was believed a malicious publisher could just as easily lead society down a negative path. Therefore, it was this belief that the exponentially expanding unregulated media needed ethical journalists at its helm that pushed news workers to create standards of work as a way to define good journalism and to offer guidelines for those who held public sway.[39]

## The Digital Age

The Digital Age, also called the Information Age and the Third Industrial Revolution, began in the 1950s and continues to this day. Initiated at the time when technology began to rely on computer systems, perhaps the Digital Age's greatest impact has been felt in the last two decades, when the

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[37] David A. Copeland, Th*e Antebellum Era: Primary Documents on Events from 1820 to 1860* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), 163.
[38] David R. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism: The Press and America's Emergence as a World Power* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 22.
[39] Stephen A. Banning, "Unearthing the Origin of Journalistic Professionalization in the Mid-Nineteenth Century" (Master's thesis, University of Missouri, 1993), 13.

World Wide Web and social media in particular transformed the news delivery universe. As evidence of the adaptation of social media in people's lives, social media company owners have become among the wealthiest individuals.[40] So strong is the social media attraction that it has become the main news source for many. According to a Pew Research Center Poll, social media has become the dominant source of news for two-thirds of U.S. adults, meaning a medium which essentially did not exist twenty years ago, now has greater news distribution than traditional news outlets such as newspapers, magazines, radio, network television and cable.[41]

One of the problems that individuals in the Digital Age are facing is the inability of media observers to track where people are getting information, making it difficult to locate the source of disinformation and causing complications such as the Russian interference with the 2016 presidential election. It was not until after the election that it was discovered how much a Russian group had been spreading misinformation on Twitter and Facebook. Some of the information appears to have been published to make individuals lose faith in the election process, but reports suggest some was aimed at undermining presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, who was not considered a supporter of Russia.[42]

## Discussion Questions

1. Remember: What inventions were part of the First Industrial Revolution? Identify as many as you can.

2. Understand: How did the technical changes in the First Industrial Revolution affect culture? Describe life before and after the First Industrial Revolution started.

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[40] Rob Wile, "Mark Zuckerberg Has Made More Money Than Anyone Else in 2017—Even Jeff Bezos," *Money*, August 8, 2017, http://time.com/money/4891103/mark-zuckerberg-jeff-bezos-billionaires-net-worth-2017/.

[41] "News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2017," *Pew Research Center*, August 23, 2017, http://www.journalism.org/2017/09/07/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2017/pi_17-08-23_socialmediaupdate_0-01/.

[42] Kathleen Hall Jamison, *Cyber Wars: How Russian Hackers and Trolls Helped Elect a President: What We Don't, Can't, and Do Know* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2018), 21.

3. Apply: How would we be living today without the technological changes that have occurred since before the First Industrial Revolution?

4. Evaluate: What was the impact of technology during the First Industrial Revolution on newspaper audiences at the time it was occurring?

5. Create: Similar to the mechanical progress that was made during the First Industrial Revolution, we are in a period of technological momentum in modern times. How do you think the technological improvements in the past twenty years have impacted how, where and when we see or hear information?

# CHAPTER TWO

# FINDING PROBLEMS: MASS COMMUNICATION COMES WITH COMPLICATIONS

In Chapter One we discussed how the Penny Press was the child of the Industrial Revolution, which resulted in a change in technology, creating mass media for the first time. In this chapter we look at the ethical problems this caused, as entrepreneurs learned lies could be more profitable than truth. Therefore, this chapter illustrates how technical progress generated new ethical problems in the nineteenth century in the same way that technical progress in modern times has produced ethical problems in the twenty-first century. Later chapters will look at what can be done about it, but this chapter shows how the first years of mass media included a high volume of what would later be considered unethical conduct.

## Affordable News

The Penny Press became possible in the United States because of changes caused by the Industrial Revolution. The steam press invention allowed for the mass production of newspapers, and in the 1830s, publishers created a mass-produced inexpensive newspaper which was sold on the sidewalks. In short, this newspaper revolution used steam presses to mass produce newspapers with new content, at a new price to a new audience in a new place.[1]

The Penny Press newspapers charged one cent for the newspapers, a change from the previous price of six cents, which only the landed gentry could afford. The content was non-political, in order to appeal to an urban working audience, and was sold on street corners, shifting from the previously used subscription service. The previous subscription newspapers had been politically oriented, while the new Penny Press newspapers were politically

[1] Philip B. Meggs and Alston W. Purvis, *History of Graphic Design* (Hoboken, NJ: John & Sons, 2016), 158.

neutral and used sensational headlines to assure street sales.[2] The new format was an immense commercial success, becoming the standard for most newspapers in the country.[3]

The first two highly successful Penny Press newspapers were Benjamin Day's *Sun* in 1833 and James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald* in 1835. Day started out as a reporter in Springfield, Massachusetts, where he learned the value of telling a good story. The idea for a new kind of press originated through a cholera epidemic which spread to the area where Day worked. Because of the widespread illness, the newspaper for which Day worked almost went bankrupt, as there were too few individuals buying newspaper subscriptions to keep it stable and as a result, Day began to think about producing a newspaper that would harness the untapped market of the working class. Consequently, he initiated his own newspaper in New York City called the *Sun*.[4]

Day started small, with a first run of just three-hundred newspapers. He had contracted with a New York City printer on Ann Street, which today is in the heart of the Manhattan business district, just a few blocks from where the 9/11 Memorial stands today. While there were select wealthy individuals in New York City who could afford a subscription to the six-penny newspapers, there were thousands more who could afford a one-penny paper, so Day aimed the newspaper at the city's maids, clerks and factory workers. Ignoring presidential politics and issues like banking that crowded the columns in six-penny party newspapers, Day focused on news from the crime beat such as murders and assaults, as he wanted to give common people something to talk about with others. Success was almost immediate, and in six months, Day was selling roughly double the number of newspapers than the next highest circulating newspaper. He continued to experiment and two years later he published a story about the moon that was false, a fabrication that had been made up from scratch. The fantastic story talked about aliens who roamed the surface of the moon, a fact purportedly discovered by a scientist with a powerful telescope. However outlandish, many newspaper readers believed it. From that, Benjamin Day saw the

[2] Sidney Kobre, *Development of American Journalism* (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1969), 314-15.
[3] James L. Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald and the Rise of the Popular Press* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1989), 24.
[4] David R. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism: The Press and America's Emergence as a World Power* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 22.

potential of sensational headlines, regardless of their veracity.[5]

Day's press worked so well, other newspapers duplicated his model, although one imitator stood out more than the others. James Gordon Bennett was an immigrant to the United States who commenced his operation in a sparse basement office located on Wall Street.[6] He shared the same printer that published Day's *Sun*, although Day was not happy about that arrangement, and soon found another printer. Bennett had few resources when he started out, and he is said to have begun with five hundred dollars, a desk made from a piece of wood on two grocery store boxes and a chair. He was also the only employee.[7] Like Day, Bennett used sensationalism to attract readers to an affordable newspaper, leading the *New York Herald* to become the largest in the United States.[8]

## Penny Press Influence Today

Many of the ways we present information today, started with the Penny Press. For example, attention grabbing headlines are still used today in platforms from Facebook and YouTube to Instagram and Twitter. Using headlines was important for the Penny Press newspapers because they invited sidewalk sales, which depended on content that attracted the attention of people on the street, a method much different from the previous system of subscription sales, that was not dependent on sensationalism.[9]

Another Penny Press innovation was the beat system, where specific reporters were assigned to a topic, and at its inception, it meant reporters concentrated in an area such as crime or politics.[10] Today, individuals with access to YouTube can create a channel where he or she talks about an area of expertise, from fashion and DIY (Do-It-Yourself projects) to LPTs (Life Pro Tips). The Penny Press also introduced the idea of interviews to make

[5] Willard Grosvenor Bleyer, *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927), 158-61.
[6] George Henry Payne, *History of Journalism in the United States* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Incorporated, 1940), 261.
[7] Isaac Clarke Pray, *Memoirs of James Gordon Bennet and His Times* (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1855), 187-8.
[8] Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald,* 37.
[9] Vincent DiGirolamo, *Crying the News: A History of America's Newsboys* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 181, 234, 350, 535.
[10] Eileen N. Gilligan, *Competing for News: Reporter's Use of Competition and Cooperation in the Production of News* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 49.

a story come alive, a concept still heavily used in traditional and social media.[11]

Soon after the Penny Press came about the public began to perceive problems with the new newspaper model in that the truth was sometimes hard to discern among the sensational and lurid narratives where facts were not allowed to interfere with a good headline that would sell newspapers. Because of this, many individuals felt the Penny Press newspapers appealed to only the lowest human appetites.[12]

## Objectivity

One of the important changes that occurred because of the Penny Press was non-partisan reports. Before the Penny Press Era, all news was generally partisan. In fact, as mentioned briefly in Chapter One, the time period before the Penny Press was called the Party Press Era or Partisan Press Era, when individual publishers were devoted to one political view, depending on partisan subscribers and political patronage for income. The subscribers supported the newspaper's position, and political patronage came from politicians and political parties. Because of this one-sided support, the newspapers were essentially political parties' public relations organizations. At the time, this was better than the situation in the previous Colonial Press Era, where free speech had at times been limited. The Partisan Press Era publishers reveled in the fact that they could criticize the government openly without being punished, something they had not been able to do under British rule without fears of reprisal. The disadvantage was that the Partisan Press was bitterly one-sided and often untruthful. In contrast, the Penny Press publishers avoided one-sidedness, which allowed them to sell newspapers to a wider consumer base, an important factor for newspapers relying on sidewalk sales.[13] Later, the idea of non-partisan reporting became a sign of a professional journalist, as journalists and the public alike forgot that the origin of non-partisan reporting was a system based on making money, not upholding moral standards. After the Civil War, non-partisan reporting became known as independent journalism and was included in the

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[11] James L. Aucoin, *The Evolution of American Investigative Journalism* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 24.
[12] David B. Sachsman and David W. Bulla, eds., *Sensationalism: Murder, Mayhem, Mudslinging, Scandals, and Disasters in 19th Century Reporting* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2013), xxi.
[13] Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 4.

twentieth century Canons of Journalism. In the twentieth century and today, non-partisan reporting is often called objective reporting or impartiality.[14]

As long as the press has existed, it has influenced how leaders communicated to their constituents or subjects. For instance, the Partisan Press became the way officials communicated to their supporters. There were no presidential press conferences during the days of the Partisan Press, and if the president had something to say, he talked to the publishers who supported him, who printed what he said. The opposition newspapers would then react to what the president had said, and the cycle would continue. When the Penny Press became popular and non-partisan, politicians had to find other ways to be heard, a situation that we still have today in that those in politics find ways to get attention, such as by creating controversy.[15]

## The Penny Press' Ethical Advertising Challenges

The Penny Press introduced a new form of marketing that was the beginning of modern advertising, while also initiating credibility problems for nineteenth century communicators. Advertising had been used in the United States long before the Penny Press Era, as during the Colonial Press Era, newspapers in the United States contained some advertising, although the newspapers were expensive and mostly focused on business, containing information about ships and merchant sales.[16]

The Penny Press advertising had a completely different readership, because for the first-time newspaper advertising was aimed at a mass audience. The first major products advertised in Penny Press newspapers were patent medicines, which sold so well that many newspapers became completely dependent on advertising them. Patent medicines were not new to the United States, existing long before, but there had been no way to mass market them. However, with the advent of the Penny Press, there was a cheap way to reach a mass working class audience, one that might not be able to afford

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[14] Edwin Ford and Edwin Emery, *Highlights in the History of the American Press: A Book of Readings* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), 153; Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 7.
[15] Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years 1690 to 1940* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1945), 113-14.
[16] James Melvin Lee, *History of American Journalism* (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1923), 226.

going to a doctor and would be willing to rely on miracle promising medicines.[17]

Patent medicines in the nineteenth century were substances sold by unlicensed individuals in bottles, tins and pill boxes. The elixirs were said to cure various medical ailments and were usually sold by mail order. At the time, there were no laws about medicines, selling them or using the mail for fraud. Therefore, the medical merchants were not required to list the actual ingredients of a substance sold as medicine, or to have proof that it was ameliorative. The sellers could make any claims in a newspaper advertisement and were not even responsible if the medicine resulted in death. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that the government began to regulate medicine, which was the beginning of the end of the patent medicine trade.[18]

## Patent Fraud

Because of a lack of legal requirements, a patent medicine dealer could legally sell flavored water and claim that it cured cancer. Additionally, many patent medicine venders began to use grain alcohol as a base supplemented with addictive drugs such as heroin and cocaine. These were sometimes listed on the label, but usually they were not, as patent medicine sellers did not want anyone to know what was in the concoctions, which they often claimed contained exotic ingredients such as mysterious swamp roots or rare foreign oils. This claim of exclusive ingredients served two purposes. First, it attracted buyers who might otherwise acquire medicine from their neighborhood pharmacist, and, second, it prevented pharmacists from duplicating the product. The patent medicine sellers often claimed exclusive knowledge of the world of medicine and warned users from sampling any other brand prepared by practitioners not privy to their secrets.[19]

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[17] Erika Janik, *Marketplace of the Marvelous: The Strange Origins of Modern Medicine* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 192.
[18] Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine: The Rise of a Solemn Profession and the Making of a Vast Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 132.
[19] Arthur Joseph Cramp, *"Patent Medicines" The Nostrum and the Public Health: Truth in Advertising Drug Products* (American Medical Association Bureau of Investigation, Chicago: 1923), 2; W. F. Bynum, *Science and the Practice of*

The secrecy of the substances' content meant that taking too much of it could result in a fatal overdose. Additionally, there was nothing to indicate how much of the substance individuals could take by body weight, and the concentrations varied from bottle to bottle. Additionally, the addictive quality of some of the medicines' ingredients, including alcohol, heroin and morphine, helped assure repeat sales, a situation that continued until the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was formed in 1906.[20]

One of the difficulties in regulating the patent medicines was the lack of sophistication in medicine at the time. For instance, doctors were still removing patients' blood as a treatment for diseases throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, a process known as bloodletting, and manufacturers produced specific medical instruments for this common process. Therefore, with limited knowledge and laws not in favor of the prosecution, it was difficult for anyone to prove a patent medicine was fake when it was supposedly made from an exotic secret ancient Native American recipe or the oil from an African tree.[21]

## Profit from Pain

One example of patent medicine financial success involved Benjamin Brandreth, who sold pills containing a strong laxative which Brandreth claimed was imperative for good health.[22] He published books and pamphlets, written in lofty literary prose, pretending to cite scientific information supporting the value of his pills. A Congressional report claimed Brandreth was the most successful patent medicine advertiser of his time, acquiring $600,000 in one year alone, and providing him with the means to become a politician and bank president.[23] In 1858, investigative writer Dan King claimed in the book *Quackery Unmasked*: "These are no mere fancy sketches, but true reports of cases which have often occurred;

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*Medicine in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 165.

[20] Linda Lawson, *Truth in Publishing: Federal Regulation of the Press's Business Practices* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 34.

[21] "Propaganda for Reform," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 67, no. 4 (December 9, 1916): 1774.

[22] Charles E. Rosenberg and William H. Helfand, *"Every Man his Own Doctor" Popular Medicine in Early America* (Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1998), 38.

[23] U. S. *House Journal,* "Patent Medicines," House Report No. 52, 30th Cong., 1849, 31.

and every thoughtful mother should know that all printed recommendations of nostrums are falsehoods, and that every such article is more or less dangerous, is always liable to do more harm than good, and should be shunned."[24] King then proceeded to call out Brandreth by name.[25]

Another famous patent medicine brand was Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound. In the last part of the nineteenth century it was said to be the most popular patent medicine and was a household name. Aimed exclusively at women, it did not contain harmful products such as cocaine or heroin, but did include twenty percent alcohol by volume.[26]

The first patent medicine problem for newspapers came when deaths and addictions occurred, and the newspapers refused to stop carrying the advertisements. The newspapers claimed those attacking the patent medicines were free to take out advertising against them, but that it was not the newspaper's responsibility to investigate its advertising. The newspapers which accepted patent medicine advertising claimed individuals had a right to advertise in the newspaper if payment was made, suggesting that those complaining about the products write to the patent medicine makers rather than the newspaper. Journalism historian James Melvin Lee commented in 1917 that medicine manufacturers "maintain that it is just as honorable to advertise a product which will relieve a stomach of an ache as it is to advertise a mincemeat that puts an ache in the stomach."[27]

The worst offender in advertising patent medicines in New York City was the Penny Press newspaper the *New York Herald*, owned by Penny Press pioneer James Gordon Bennett, who was adamant that he would not refuse any patent medicine advertising for any reason. It was rumored that Bennett had a great financial motive in that he charged patent medicine advertisers twice the normal advertising rate. Eventually, however, Bennett bent to public opinion and limited patent medicine advertising, admitting that patent medicines were the worst kind of advertising. Bennett's turn around in attitude may have been the result of concern that changing attitudes

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[24] Dan King, *Quackery Unmasked* (New York: D. Clapp, 1858), 294-5.
[25] King, *Quackery Unmasked,* 295.
[26] Sarah Stage, *Female Complaints: Lydia Pinkham and the Business of Women's Medicine* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1979), 53; James Harvey Young, *American Health Quackery: Collected Essays of James Harvey Young* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 5; Stewart Holbrook, *The Golden Age of Quackery* (New York: Collier Books, 1959), 63.
[27] James Melvin Lee, *History of American Journalism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), 391.

regarding advertising patent medicines would hurt his circulation.[28] This kind of response undermined the credibility of the newspaper and cast the publishers in the role of robber barons who were unconcerned about society, the opposite of what ethical publishers in the nineteenth century wanted, in trying to be recognized as professionals looking out for society.

It may seem strange that the unlicensed medicines were advertised for so long. However, both the patent medicine sellers and the newspapers reaped great financial rewards, making it a relationship that built many mansions. Additionally, it was unlikely that newspaper or magazine owners who used patent medicine advertising would criticize the product which made them wealthy. Given this, it is ironic that it was a journalism article which finally exposed the dangers of patent medicines in 1905. The FDA was founded a year later partly as a result of this article. The FDA introduced sweeping changes, including a requirement that contents be accurately included on the product label, although it was not until 1938 that certain dangerous substances were banned.[29]

## Fake Healers and Real Journalism

A few articles had been written about the dangers of patent medicines in the nineteenth century, but they were rare. The journalist who made the difference was Samuel Hopkins Adams, writing a series of articles in *Colliers* magazine that were later reprinted by the American Medical Association. Adams studied the companies, wrote articles and named names, listing specific false claims and misrepresentations by the patent medicine companies and explaining how people were being swindled with addictive and sometimes fatal drugs.[30]

He also called out newspapers for being complicit in the fraud. Adams showed how the patent medicine sellers' lies could not be spread without the newspapers' deliberate help, and disclosed that newspapers refused to

[28] Bleyer, *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism*, 201-2.
[29] James Harvey Young, *Pure Food: Securing the Federal Food and Drugs Act of 1906* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1914), 216, 276, 289; Arthur Philip Greeley, *The Food and Drugs Act, June 30, 1906* (Washington, DC: John Byrne and Company, 1907), iii-iv. See also: James Harvey Young, *Toadstool Millionaires: A Social History of Patent Medicines in America before Federal Regulation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).
[30] Samuel V. Kennedy, III, *Samuel Hopkins Adams and the Business of Writing* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 44-5.

print anything negative about patent medicines because of the income they produced. Adams explained: "The retail price of all the patent medicines sold in the United States in one year may be very conservatively placed at one hundred million dollars. And of this one hundred millions [sic] which the people of the United States pay for patent medicines yearly, fully forty millions [sic] goes to the newspapers."[31] Adjusted for inflation, the amount going to newspapers today from patent medicine advertising would be about a billion dollars a year. Adams went on to say that the Lydia Pinkham company alone spent $1.2 million a year on newspaper advertising. This was at a time when most people made about $500 a year. As a result, Adams' muckraking articles had a profound effect on newspapers and the days of unregulated patent medicines were numbered.[32]

Adams' investigative writing on patent medicines not only shined a light on the need for medical regulation, it also spotlighted the newspaper industry's lack of moral guidelines. For instance, Adams admonished: "With a few honorable exceptions the press of the United States is at the beck and call of the patent medicines. Not only do newspapers modify news possibly affecting these interests, but they sometimes become their active agents."[33] This created a climate favorable to professional ethics among the public and journalism ethics supporters in associations, and even many bottom line minded newspaper owners favored the veneer of professional ethics as a way to regain credibility.

## Hidden Influence: Conflict of Interest

The problem of hidden influence affecting newspapers in the nineteenth century similarly influences many journalists today through a factor called a conflict of interest. Advertising is important for communication in modern times, as in most models, it pays for the communicator to operate. However, improper advertising can damage credibility in the Digital Age as much as it did a century ago. For instance, some popular vloggers with tens of millions of subscribers recommend products on their channels. Many times, these products have been given to the bloggers free of charge and sometimes additional payment has been made for the recommendation. Therefore, the bloggers are less likely to give a bad review on a product, knowing that doing so would result in a loss of sponsorships. This creates a situation

[31] Samuel Hopkins Adams, *The Great American Fraud* (Chicago: American Medical Association, 1905), 73.
[32] Adams, *The Great American Fraud, 73.*
[33] Adams, *The Great American Fraud, 5.*