

Journalism 2013: all you need to know

by VINCENZO MARINO
translated by ROBERTA AIELLO

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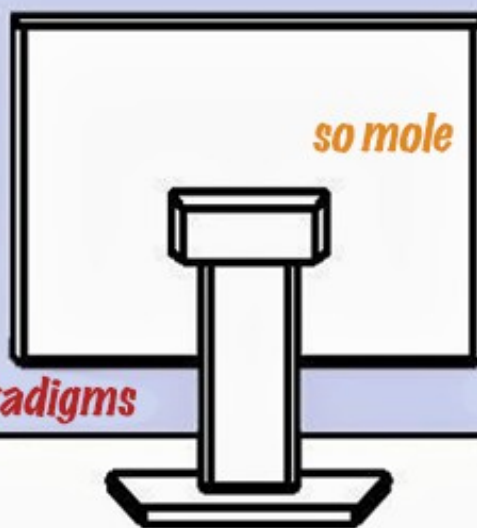
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translated by Roberta Aiello

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INTRODUCTION

For the media, 2014 has begun the same way 2013 began and ended. In January 2013, the journalist and blogger [Andrew Sullivan decided](#) to abandon the *Daily Beast* to launch [his own blog](#) financed by a fundraising project that should have collected nearly 900 thousand dollars. The operation generated a wide debate on the economic sustainability of small businesses like Sullivan's and the economic value of the independent 'signature', raising the issue of [personal branding](#) in online journalism.

In a post dated 31 December, [Sullivan announced](#) that his fundraising had reached 850 thousand dollars. Although the target has almost been achieved, the unquestionable success of the operations has been undermined by ups and downs, overly influenced by events (there was a spike in subscriptions during the shutdown of the U.S. government) and by the fact that next February, most of the subscribers will be asked to renew their subscription.

In a review of articles of last year, offered in an adapted and reasoned ebook, 2013 opened the doors to the issue of the personalization of journalistic work, starting from the challenge of the individual who intends to capitalize on his/her own talents and his/her own sources, and ending, in the last few weeks of the year, with [the most glaring](#) and [discussed example](#). This is the project that will involve Glenn Greenwald, the blogger and journalist who has created Datagate, and *First Look Media* of Pierre Omidyar.

Confirming a strengthened trend – from the datajournalist Nate Silver who left the *New York Times* to the [AllThingsD](#) co-executive editors who abandoned the *Wall Street Journal* to found [Re/Code](#) - one of the most relevant news of the beginning of 2014 is [the case of the young journalist Ezra Klein](#) and the new *Washington Post* of Jeff Bezos. The episode recalls another main theme of 2013 which will surely find reverberations in the current year: the acquisition of the *Post* by the Amazon CEO and, more generally, [the interest of billionaires](#) in [the old digital journalism](#).

Klein, policy writer and editor of [Wonkblog](#) for the WP, proposed a new project: a website financed with an "eight figure" investment that does not seem to have met with the enthusiasm of the management and the new ownership. The 29-year-old blogger abandoned the platform [to find donors](#). It is difficult to know the reasons for the denial nor the feasibility of the project. Regarding this race for editorial independence, there is talk about [choices made at the limits of hubris](#).

The relationship between the reader and the community was the center of one of the most meaningful speeches of last year [made by Katherine Viner](#), and the basis for another project started in 2014. This is [Contributoria](#), funded by the *Guardian Media Group*, which intends to join the community of users, the collaboration between journalists (who offer their own stories) and

crowdfunding (another issue of last year), challenging a certain reluctance of readers towards journalistic projects due to [the general distrust of the profession](#).

Between January 2013, which saw the launch of the operation of Sullivan, and December 2013, [with the refining](#) of the *newco* of Omidyar and Jay Rosen, the world of media was rocked by the NSA case, which obviously has influenced [the public debate about news, its relationship with the sources and governments](#), and new business in the publishing market. Journalism has never been [under such an attack by power](#) as it has in 2013. With the more 'generic' global surveillance in cases, such as the wiretapping of journalists of the *Associated Press*, [the hearing of Alan Rusbridger before the home affairs select committee of the House of Commons](#) and the Leveson Inquiry, journalism has had to deal with a panorama where working with anonymity and with confidence with sources appeared [much more complicated](#). For this reason, the *New Yorker* has set up its own "[strongbox](#)" for sensitive information, and the *Guardian* - the newspaper in the forefront regarding Datagate - was forced to seek [the cooperation of the New York Times and ProPublica](#).

In a scenario where [it becomes difficult to define "journalism" and "journalist"](#) and where anyone can produce relevant news even unknowingly (as in [the case of Brown Moses](#)), it seems difficult to imagine what the future scenarios will be for the media in 2014 (although many efforts have been made, from [the special of NiemanLab](#) to [Filloux of MondayNote](#)) unless we start from some fixed points, mainly related to the technological evolution. That same evolution which makes it difficult to precisely define the role of the information professional. According to many, such as [digital strategist Nic Newman](#), it is easy to think that a broader adoption of tools like drones and *wearable gadgets* will influence the way in which news is produced and shared, as well as the wider dissemination of *mobile* tools can [definitely change](#) the way in which news is read and packaged (atomization of information, greater visual impact). On one hand, the market of smartphones and tablets [do not seem to be in crisis](#), which leads to the assumption of the primacy of *digital only* with respect to *digital first*. On the other hand, the introduction of tools such as Google Glass are destined to redefine more than one norm for journalism, technical, commercial, and even ethical.

That is not all. If the attention of readers [is shifting more on mobile](#) - and it is possible to assume that the trend in 2014 will be consolidated in a decisive way - the challenge for *news organizations* is to intercept their willingness to purchase content and that of advertisers to buy space, taking strength from the incessant decline in advertising revenue on paper and [the strong rise of the video industry](#).

The paywall model should prove its value away from the newsroom of the *Times*, while the model of native advertising - that [the NYT has just launched redesigning its website](#) - will have to do the same with [newcomers](#) (*BuzzFeed, VoxMedia, Vice News*) which have built their current fortunes on it.

"Journalism 2013: all you need to know" is an ebook which gathers all the articles of the weekly *RoundUp* of the International Journalism Festival. It condenses the last twelve months of the media, which are possibly the most decisive of the recent past.

CHAPTER I

January – April 2013

Publishing trends for 2013

Although 2013 has just begun, the media, particularly online, already has some new features that generate debate on the future of the profession and its sustainability for both online and traditional media. Taking a cue from the trends set in this field during 2012, Hamish McKenzie, in the *PandoDaily*, [summarized in seven points](#) what could be the publishing trends of the new year. Some of which have already had some significant confirmations in recent weeks. One of them is micropublishing, the publication of stories and articles offered to readers on single and multiple formats revived, in recent months, by experiments such as [Weekend Companion](#) by [The Awl](#) group, [Matter](#), [The Magazine](#) and numerous digital publishing shops that have been created and developed. It is an idea which aims to accommodate the habits of mobile readers, based on purely textual products, easy to read on smartphones and tablets, light to download and also relatively inexpensive to produce, considering that due to the 'aesthetic linearity' they do not require excessive economic investments.

Another prevalent theme in 2013, according to the author (in accordance with a 30 page [Gdoc produced](#) by digital strategist Nic Newman), could be [curation](#), the activity of filtering and 'cure' of information where there are news overloads and tight deadlines. The role of the curator, who emerged with the growth of the use of social networks as a super-source for news and sharing platforms, would be destined, in the coming months, to become a central one on the basis of the motto "more signal, less noise", especially referring to the actual online offer, which allows anyone, through the aforementioned social, tools such as Storify, Storiful and Bundle and read it later applications such as Instapaper and Pocket, to create a sort of self-powered curation, independent of editorial activity.

The access of the reader into an 'almost' journalistic area, allows him, through micropayments - another trend cited by McKenzie - to play an active role in a project, allowing the realization of funding single pieces or journalistic inquiries, new platforms, applications or blogs. In recent months, and in those to come, there have been launched and will be presented a number of new *micropayments startups* - as the Swedish *Flattr* and *CentUp*- that allows the giving of credit, in the true meaning of the word, to favorite authors: "Now that we are used to buying things with our *mobile* wallets, it will be easy to start giving something to the digital contents we value most".

The declaration of independence by Andrew Sullivan

One of the best known and discussed cases in early 2013 is that of Andrew Sullivan. He is one of the most famous bloggers in the world. In recent years he has been hosted by Tina Brown on [The Daily Beast](#), where he wrote and managed his *The Daily Dish* until his decision - or rather, declaration - in the early days of January in a post eloquently entitled "[New year, new Dish, New Media \(a declaration of Independence\)](#)". Sullivan has decided '[to set up on his own](#)', with his team of collaborators and provide contents to readers with the payment of a fee of about 20 dollars per year. It will be the same blog, without ads, but independent and freely available if you arrive on the site from links posted on social networks or via RSS feeds. His target is 900,000 dollars, but in the first few days Sullivan already reached 400,000 with over twelve thousand subscribers, including a benefactor who decided to contribute 10,000 dollars.

The case quickly became a starting point for the most various analyses: they were more than a few to appreciate Sullivan's initiative, including [Felix Salmon](#) of *Reuters*, considering it a possible escape from the economic crisis of journalism, a "symbol of hope" (Ingram of [GigaOM](#)) and a way to make journalistic work profitable again.

However, a [precedent](#) that, according to many, such as Peter Osnos of [The Atlantic Online](#), is likely to generate significant effects in the world of online news in a model not easily reproducible [according to](#) the professor Jay Rosen of *New York University*. In fact, the success or failure of such a project is essentially based on the loyalty of its readers, who recognize in the author a distinguished brand who they trust and pay with a yearly handout. Jack Shafer [points out](#) that: "It depends on how strong the relationship is between you and your regular readers. And Sullivan and his team have good reasons to bet on this relationship", sometimes even to the limits of obsession. A fiduciary relationship in which the author, of course, has advantages over the usual figure of the blogger.

It is not news that Sullivan - a journalist, certainly not a beginner - has enjoyed years of hospitality at a brand of magazines such as *Time* and *The Atlantic*. For Poniewozik of *Time Magazine* this [represented](#) an advantage that Sullivan is now trying to monetize almost like the comedian Louis CK or Radiohead who "were able to capitalize on their independent efforts after they managed to become famous in more conventional ways". Also noteworthy is the point of view of Kevin Drum of [Mother Jones](#), who states that if everyone followed the example of the British author, many would no longer be able to afford to read blogs and soon would be unable to subscribe to them.

However, the harshest criticism comes from the pages of *NSFWcorp* in a post titled "[If Andrew Sullivan is the future of journalism then journalism is fucked](#)". [Mark Ames](#) remembers the unresolved and controversial journalistic past of *The Daily Dish* author that would approach him

with extreme right wing views and questionable statements in recent years. Ames stated "thank's to our collective amnesia", most people have mistaken Sullivan's punditry for intellectual courage. Ames' proposal, in a final peroration, is to let Sullivan's project fail violently, now that his professional future no longer depends on economic-publishing elite but directly on his readers. The blog, accessible from the old address andrewsullivan.com, will officially start from February 1st. It is possible to contribute financing it [here](#).

The "Snow Fall" case: serialization and multimediality

Two other editorial tendencies that McKenzie predicted in the *PandoDaily* are serialization and the role of multimedia contents. These two tendencies are synthesized in the case of the *New York Times* [Snow Fall](#), prominent in the online debate during the Christmas season where, once again, the definition of "the future of journalism" appeared. Snow Fall regards a six-part report by John Branch on the history of the survivors of an avalanche in the mountains in Washington State in February 2012. The distinction of the piece, as differentiated from a typical *non-fiction* story, was the accompaniment of the voices of the witnesses and the multi-medial structure of the article. It was conceived not only on the level of text but integrated with audio visual contributions made striking with an aesthetically innovative and highly usable layout, adaptable for any type of reading device.

It is a different idea for an article and online journalism. It re-proposes the classic form of an only textual or visual pattern of repetition of the news, arriving at a sort of hybridization made possible, in recent times, by graphics and computer innovations finding its precedents in the [aforementioned cases of ESPN and Pitchfork](#), the new video portal [HuffPost Live](#) and websites such as [The Atavist](#). In this case, however, we speak of a mainstream media that invests months (six) and labor (16 collaborators), and managed to reach, with this experiment, a page view share of more than 3.5 million. Those are elements that make Derek Thompson believe. In [The Atlantic](#), it can be difficult to talk about the future of journalistic language in general. It would be a "miraculous mega-multi-media feature," "a triumph" of journalism, design and creativity that certainly deserves respect, but a method far from the present and journalistic speed of the network as it is today, where young and mobile readers - [according to figures published by the Pew Research Center](#) - prefer to read with a solution more aesthetically similar to the old print paper. More than anything else, it is a "sensational gift for readers," concludes Thompson. "That is already enough".

It should not be underestimated that the fact that the piece was initially launched as an e-book published by *New York Times* in agreement with *Byliner* - [a move already anticipated](#) in recent weeks on these pages - at a cost of 3 dollars and fifty three cents, is an example of how the trend toward the publishing serialization cited on *PandoDaily* can actually establish itself as a

possible player in the market and into the debate in the new year – and there is [talk](#) of e-book as a home for *longform journalism*.

Longform journalism and profit

The propensity for textual production with medium-long consultation is, on the other hand, the seventh of the trends cited by *McKenzie*. *Buzzfeed* is a paradigmatic case, which [employed](#) a new *longform editor* and had already embraced this new way of working with the notorious "[Can you die from a nightmare?](#)" by Doree Shafir. There are [steps in this direction](#) by *Tumblr*, which is looking for a freelance writer who contributes to the "official storytelling arm" [Storyboard](#), or to the [success](#) - even in economic terms, data and well-known crisis contexts – of websites such as *The Verge* and *Polygon* of *Vox Media*: "2013 promises to be a great year for magazine-format pieces, even if they are no longer in the out and out magazines". These are all experiments that seek to emulate the publishing format of printed publications such as *The New Yorker* and *Atlantic Monthly* exploiting the tendency of readers on tablets and smartphones in a more serious and in-depth reading.

The executive offices of *Buzzfeed* are not only [inspired by the past](#) with its classical structure of *longform*. In an interview in one of the blogs of the *Wall Street Journal*, the CEO Jonah Peretti [admitted](#) he thinks in terms of advertising with the same innovative and revolutionary logic that animated the *mad men* of Madison Avenue of the '50s and '60s. In that period, the advertising industry was not satisfied to flatten out but was aimed at reaching its own target audience through engaging stories and entertainment. The case of the advertisement of [General Electric](#) on the home page and the *BuzzFeed TimeMachine* is emblematic although not singular. The *media company* has announced in recent days the investment of another 19.3 million dollars, added to the 15 million of last January which has yielded 46 million. It is an important investment that will continue to grow, relying on the *mobile*, on the video section and proposing its well known journalistic style made up of galleries with hundreds of thousands of *like*, political journalism, and approach to *longform*.

One area that risks becoming even more competitive and crowded - as long as it finds the right model - is the news of the [recapitalization](#) of *Subtle*. This blogging platform, launched less than a year ago by the designer Dustin Curtis, which, unlike the classical Wordpress, Livejournal or Posterous, hosts posts of a few dozen of 'tech thought leaders' – which now have become more than two hundred. The platform aims to make a profitable business with quality contents and a *longform* mode. A road that goes in the opposite direction to the more than ten years of 'blogging democratization' which limits the network to only a few selected authors and wants to profit on this 'entry wall'. Although the same Curtis, interviewed by *TechCrunch* and prompted by Ingram on [PaidContent](#), admits he has no idea on how he can do it.

The Atlantic and the advertorial of Scientology

This week was mainly dedicated to the [The Atlantic-Scientology](#) 'case', and the debate that it has generated. This marks somewhat of a reversal compared to a few weeks ago regarding the subject of native advertising. At the end of last year, this definition had become a [buzzword](#) and a significant [opportunity](#) to overcome the crisis of advertising, giving hope to the economic sustainability of online news. Nevertheless, there have been some [articles](#) recently in which there have been warnings about sponsored content risks (Keller and Beaujon in [Bloomberg Businessweek](#) and [Poynter](#)), a lesson that can be learned (Ingram in the [PaidContent](#)) and a list of the pros and cons of these type of ads (promotional pieces with the layout of a normal post but characterized as special advertiser feature, or sponsor content).

The case: last Monday, the website of the historic magazine *The Atlantic* [published](#) an advertorial (derived from advertising and editorial) entitled 'David Miscavige Leads Scientology to Milestone Year'. The piece, an advertisement commissioned by the Church of Scientology, revealed, in a promotional way, some data about the 'cult' inspired by Ron Hubbard and gave news about its expansion and the construction of new centers. This caused many criticisms. In the newsroom - some members swore on Twitter that [they didn't know anything about the article or distanced themselves from this decision](#) - deciding to [remove](#) the piece twelve hours later and [apologize](#) to the readers. However, this behaviour did not prevent inevitable ironies. The most theatrical was that of *The Onion*, the website specializing in hoax, which launched a fake advertorial entitled "[SPONSORED: The Taliban Is A Vibrant And Thriving Political Movement](#)".

Dean Starkman, of *Columbia Journalism Review*, [notes](#) that one of the most serious errors is to have enhanced the moderation of the comments for that specific post. For this reason, for a certain period of time, the article reported a majority of positive or, at worst, harmless feedback towards Scientology.

Many have tried to broaden the question, trying to analyze why there was so much clamor. Some people believe that it had such resonance because the [unfortunate protagonist](#) was a historic and respected newspaper. Others think the fault is of the theme of the advertisement, the controversial organization of a religious nature - "[Isn't an appropriate subject](#)" - regardless of the host platform (which still [offers](#) this service to other [advertisers](#)). Charlie Warzel of *Adweek*, [speaks](#) of the "real problem of native advertising," fearing it is an episode that will teach customers and media corporations to treat this tool with a certain discretion, inserting sponsored feature, appropriate to the tone of the website, "the only way to have any chance of success" by this means. It is a point of view that is in line with that of Shafqat Islam, co-founder of *NewsCred*, which focuses on the definition of native advertising. For Islam the 'accused' definition of native advertising would not be perceived in that way because it was foreign (and therefore not native) by readers who are already strained more and more in distinguishing between published material and advertising content - as explained by Andrews of *GigaOM* [in one of our posts](#), at the end of December.

The intellectual property of the images on Twitter

Recently, a [sentence](#) issued by a New York court has tried to shed light on the eternal dispute about intellectual property rights of the images published on Twitter. Photographer Daniel Morel, who worked in Haiti after the earthquake in 2010, has [sued](#) the *Agence France-Presse* and *The Washington Post* for using his photos, shot on the island and published on social networks, without any permission from the author.

The images were taken from AFP, uploaded on the website of Getty Images stock photos and, from there, traced by the newspaper of the capital. They were re-used by the two media corporations with the certainty – according to the defense argument - that once uploaded on Twitter they become freely usable by anyone. Manhattan district judge Alison Nathan, who was not of the same opinion, upheld the appeal of the photographer and determined that the news agency cannot use unconditionally the images found on social networks, violating copyright law.

This matter involves issues on a larger scale. For the first time there has been a decision of a legal nature on a case which was created and developed on the contents uploaded and taken from social networks. However, the case remains unclear. If on the one hand it is true that the policy of Twitter, known through the [terms of service](#), clearly shows that the content published on its platform cannot be used by third parties, on the other hand we have to consider the decision of the court in distinguishing between the sharing of multimedia products through practices such as retweet, and the behavior of agencies such as the AFP, who wrongly interpreted the process of republishing as 'license' for their free commercial exploitation. “Users own their photo”, [confirms](#) Twitter to *Reuters*.

It is an extremely relevant issue. In England, there has been a debate on the use of the images taken from Twitter by some newspapers for the coverage of the [crash](#) of the helicopter in the centre of London. “The speed with which the media used eyewitness photos posted on Twitter is not surprising given the nature of the story, but it raises an issue about copyright”, writes Lisa O'Carroll [on The Guardian](#). In the past, - O'Carroll continues - such material was called user-generated content or citizen journalism, but now, with Twitter, everybody can and everything is potentially 'news', so it becomes necessary to have full knowledge of its terms of use.

Regarding the question of the images of [Reddit used by BuzzFeed](#) or the [updating of the standards](#) of service of [Instagram](#), Jeff Roberts on *PaidContent* [explains](#) that: “This tension over photographs is only going to grow as smartphones spread and people post more pictures online. Meanwhile, social media images are becoming ever more essential to news reporting”. Roberts concludes that: “There is no easy solution to this copyright mess” despite the suggestion of John Herrman on *Buzzfeed* who [writes](#): “Want to publish a Twitter image legally? Just embed it” (the process by which, through the copy and paste of the HTML code of the entire tweet in the post, you can incorporate the images of the author in the text, letting the legal question remain, in practice, in the hands of the Twitter platform).

The fake dead girlfriend of Manti Te'o

Manti Te'o is a linebacker of the Notre Dame football team, a Hawaiian-born boy who triumphed on and off the field for his dedication and talent. During 2012, according to the news, he played despite two painful losses shortly before the games: the death of his grandmother, and a few days later, that of his girlfriend of many months. Lennay Kekua, who suffered from leukemia and supposedly died following a car accident in California, last September. This week, the sports blog *Deadspin* has examined the case and found that the girl never existed.

This could have been a hoax, followed, published and never verified by numerous national and global publications ([here](#) the story of its 'spread') such as ESPN and *Sports Illustrated*. According to many - [including](#) Michael Calderone, the Senior Media Reporter of the *Huffington Post* - more than a case of negligence, this was a kind of implicit acquiescence towards a story that seemed, as it was built, highly 'saleable'. A moving portrait which the media dashed headlong for, an athlete who loses his sick girlfriend, and decides to play anyway. A perfect "archetype" that has stood for weeks, "because media wanted it to exist", [explains](#) the *Deadspin's* founder. A case that "reveals how the media helped spread falsehoods that, if checked out, would have disrupted a feel good story", Calderone specifies. "It's amazing that news outlets were so quick to cover a woman's death without any verification - an obituary, local report from the funeral, or comment from the family".

The case was embarrassing for dozens of the people. It involved and led astray various kinds of newspapers and media. On [SB Nation](#) for example, it is possible to find a list of those who never checked. It begins - deservedly - with "[us](#)" and continues with "you" (Jack Dickey and Timothy Burke - the authors of the post on *Deadspin* - excepted). It took around four months to bring the hoax to the surface. It was discovered by 'insiders' and not through citizen journalists. However, this brings into question journalistic ethics, the duty of checking and of the public sharing of more possible sources, in order to be able to contextualize the article and make it 'stronger'. Steve Buttry, for example, [refers](#) to the [accuracy checklist](#) of Craig Silverman, a vademecum that should accompany the reporter in the preparation and verification of the news he is reporting, and stresses the importance of the publication of the links and their consultation to avoid other similar situations (the only link present in the article of ESPN referred uselessly to the sport [statistics](#) of Te'o). Karen Fratti, [on Mediabistro](#), takes this opportunity to recall how the fact checking process is important in the era of digital journalism paying attention to the sources, on social media or not, and to the use of the basic tools of the profession - with a dose of common sense and skepticism.

The Washington Post, the online corrections and plagiarisms

Last Wednesday, with an internal email, *The Washington Post* decided to [update](#) its corrections policies in the online edition of the paper, a set of codified rules with "the intention to ensure that on line mistakes are corrected as quickly as possible". They range from the formulas

used for corrections - to attach to the end or at the beginning of the post, depending on the severity of the mistake – to the prohibition to remove from the net items previously published. “In that case”, "the memorandum states, "the piece will be replaced by a note explaining the reasons for the removal." Craig Silverman of *Poynter* is [slightly skeptical](#) about this decision because adopting the explanation “published inadvertently” would not clarify the reasons for the deletion.

Meanwhile, last Tuesday, the newspaper [suspended](#) William Booth, the bureau chief for Mexico, after the journalist admitted to have illegally copied four paragraphs from the academic journal *Environmental Health Perspective*, used in an article about the extension of the Panama Canal [published](#), on January 12th 2013, with an editor's note of apology. “It is the *Post*'s policy that the use of material from other newspapers or sources must be properly attributed”, explains the note of the newspaper, which will consider the case seriously and demanded the public apology of the journalist – who said he was deeply sorry but defended himself by explaining that he did not act intentionally.

From only 140 characters to only 6 seconds

This week Dick Costolo, the CEO of Twitter, published a culinary [video](#) of a few seconds on his social network. It was the official launch of [Vine](#), a stand-alone application (not integrated, to be downloaded separately). It was created by a start-up bought by the San Francisco corporation last fall, and according to many is about to become the response to the purchase of Instagram by Facebook. The application, available now only for iPhone, iPod and iPad, allows the recording of videos of six seconds («[apparently the video equivalent of 140 characters](#)») by simply touching the screen and sharing them on various social networks.

[According](#) to John Battelle, it would be an evolutionary transition of Twitter from a simple social to a real media company, as shown by the implementation of new services such as the renovated [system of embedding](#) tweets. A new 'era' that will need more and more care of information. However, according to Mathew Ingram [on PaidContent](#), it risks alienating the company from the effort and the reasons of their early success: the rough essentiality, adapted day by day to the taste and the suggestions of the users.

Videos – for which the progress of the recording corresponds to the pressure on the screen, allowing the user to create a sort of assembly - are played in loop, to emulate the graphic and the journalistic impact of the well-known animated GIF. Jeff Sonderman in *Poynter* [indicated](#) the pros and cons of this new video tool, starting from the potential effects on reporting and the live publication of testimonies. He explains that it is one thing to compare the different photographic points of view of an event, another to look at the different perspectives of the same event with a more realistic tool such as video - with its 'view' on all the ethical dilemmas of the case, the crudeness of some content, as already [shown in the past](#) with other available instruments. In short, potential drawbacks and benefits are growing, and we must learn to deal with them.

How to use Twitter as journalists

“Journalists should treat information we gather on social media the same way we treat information gathered any other way” Steve Buttry [said](#) last Monday, in a post about how the experts should check and verify sources and news on social networks. His advice mixes simple common sense and the journalistic practice of checking. Buttry recommends 'get(ting) hands dirty' using Twitter as much as possible to identify, recognize and build relationships with sources that can be considered reliable over time. He suggests reviewing, carefully, the profiles of those who provide information - and to 'sound the alarm' if they have signed up on Twitter recently or have written few tweets. He also suggests checking the network of conversations of the 'suspect' and never forgetting the context, always paying attention to the time, the date and the geolocation - if available - of the tweet.

Finally, it is important to remember to look through the advanced search at other profiles that have reported or are witnesses of the same event in order to confirm the truth, or at least the consistency, of the multimedia contents offered by these types of sources. These operations are certainly not unknown to Andy Carvin, one of the protagonists of the universal journalistic network, who was [interviewed](#) this week by Jesse Hicks. Carvin told *The Verge* how he developed his techniques of verification and instant sharing of information on Twitter. His work made inroads during the mass demonstrations of the so-called Arab Spring. It has been described in his latest book "[Distant Witness: Social Media, the Arab Spring and a Journalism Revolution](#)" and in a keynote speech during the 2012 edition of the International Journalism Festival ([video](#)).

Considered as «the man who tweets revolutions» (*The Guardian*), and «one-man Twitter news bureau» (*Washington Post*), Carvin prefers to be identified as a sort of DJ, or even better a news anchor, who works on «real-time news trying to share the most interesting with his followers». An interview that does not forget to mention critics, such as [Michael Wolff](#) for comments on Carvin's attitude about the shooting at the Sandy Hook School. In the end, Carvin explains what the meaning of 'knowing how to tweet' can mean for simple users without journalistic ambitions.

Are journalists joking too much on Twitter?

This is a question [asked](#) by Craig Kanalley, senior editor of *The Huffington Post*, last Wednesday. «I don't want to come across as humorless. I love to laugh. I think laughter is important in life» Kanalley specifies. «I also follow journalists who I think do a fine job combining humor with their reporting», and really, who doesn't enjoy laughing?, he adds, before moving on to an accusation that - he admits - he kept for a long time but never made public. If it is true that being a journalist is something serious - and it is one of the reasons for which the author claims to have gone down this road - why is Twitter so full of journalists' jokes - sometimes related to events which are not happy at all? Of course, Twitter can be a great tool for engagement, good

for a community and the recent [Sullivan case and contributions of the readers for *The Dish*](#) is glaring proof. It is a means on which you sign up as ordinary user, as a «[human being](#)», although wearing the burden - someone would object – of the valued 'public' role you perform, and the fact that each journalist, in some ways, is a spokesman for his/her newspaper.

Last October Ann Friedman, [on #Realtalk](#) of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, referred to the need to 'humanize' one's own journalistic profile on Twitter. «The perfect place for disrespectful comments», «Make more jokes!» was her invitation that seems to have been accepted. According to [research](#) by Avery Holton and Seth Lewis of the Universities of Texas and Minnesota, among the tweets of the most popular journalists almost a quarter (22.5%) have a humorous value. Maybe too many, according to the senior editor of *The Huffington Post*, who remembers how words made public have a weight that can lead to [consequences](#).

Conversational journalism and the community

The additional risk would be to flatten the journalistic personality to the environment where it has decided to 'talk' to other users and its own readers, until the difference between media professionals and ordinary citizens was made indistinguishable. The challenge of conversational journalism cited last Thursday by [Jason Kottke](#) on his [blog](#) is the code of the newest online publishing. «The most visible journalism these days – he begins, citing TMZ, *BuzzFeed*, *Huffington* - mostly takes the form of opinionated conversation: professional media people discussing current events much like you and your friends might at a crowded lunch table». With the result that it becomes more and more difficult to understand, in the noise, who is the professional and who the amateur without experience. An idle chatter from which network professionalism may not be able to benefit and which intends to satisfy the tastes of readers, with their colloquial languages used for debates on more easily accessible issues (cases cited are those of [Manti Te'o](#) and [Beyonce lip-sync scandal](#)). «Speculation is fun and people want their news to be fun».

The discussion has a key role for online media and in recent years there have been many newspapers that have decided to choose different policies and methods of insertion of comments, looking for a reliable and open system. In 2011, *TechCrunch* decided to replace the classic form of comment adopting [the one used by Facebook](#), which requires the authentication of the author to discourage the invasion of the trolls. However, the system has worked 'very well' and it seems that the surrender to anonymity has led most commentators not to participate in the discussion at the bottom of the posts. Last Tuesday, *TechCrunch* decided [to give back](#) the opportunity to make anonymous comments thanks to the tool [Livefyre](#) – a company that has as its motto «We make your site social». «Commenters, We Want you back» is the title of the post that reports the news. In the image, on a sheet, a handwritten note: «I miss you. asshole».

«Why I hate Twitter»

One of the articles on the media which has been discussed this week on the net is «Why I hate Twitter» by Matt K. Lewis [in *The Week*](#). Exasperated by the «noise» of Twitter, which has become a sort of «dark place», Lewis explains the reasons that led him to consider the social network a kind of «prison». Impossible to leave for professional reasons, appreciated in the beginning, Twitter has turned, over the years, into a network dominated by factionalism and jokes ([here the discussion of last week](#)). For Lewis, Twitter is not an aggregator of ideas, but of unbearable personal problems and superficial judgments. A flow in which it becomes difficult to continue to use the means for journalistic purposes. Although Lewis admits that he has recommended aspiring journalists practice with Twitter, he affirms that it distracts from the profession and leads to reading - or joining - «small petty battles». It looks metaphorically more and more like the degenerative idea of the 'free love' concept typical of the 1960s that produced, according to the author, people like Charles Manson.

The post has encountered some [inevitable irony](#) on Twitter. Certifying the crux of the criticism of *The Week*, [Julie Moos of Poynter](#) found its strongest criticism in [an article by Choire Sicha](#) for *The Awl*. The author's thesis intends to dismantle the entire system of Lewis's argument starting from a 'technical' premise. It cannot be Twitter itself that led to the degeneration, because it is a social media on which one chooses freely the feed to follow. Unless you want it, it is not possible to be subjected to your own timeline, because you can change it, anytime. [Rebecca Greenfield, on *The Atlantic Wire*](#), notes that the Twitter following of Lewis amounts to more than 5,000, an unusually large number for a communications professional, many of whom apparently are unnecessary and 'eradicable'.

«So if you can't simply unfollow people you don't care about, or block people that gross you out, you need to go back to therapy», Sicha retorts. The 'defense' of Twitter, by Sicha, albeit not particularly enthusiastic of the means, doesn't avoid stigmatizing Lewis's combination of the free love generation and Manson with Twitter. As in the style of *The Awl*, Sicha makes fun of the author criticized: «Most everything that you consume on Twitter is because you chose it. And if you can't live with what you've made for yourself, you should definitely make like Matt K. Lewis and leave. Then you'll be safe. Until you publish a piece about it. And everyone makes fun of you on Twitter». The debate ends with the reply of Paul Brandus, also on *The Week*, who [explains](#) the reasons of his love for the San Francisco social network (source, media, inspiration, great means for those who want to do journalism without opinions).

Academic research on digital media

This week *NiemanLab* published an [article](#) edited by *Journalist's Resource* - a project of the Shorenstein Center on Media and Social Sciences – that attempts to create a picture of the latest academic research in the field of digital media. Twitter is obviously the protagonist of more than one study. The research of the University of Sheffield [focuses](#) on social media as a tool for

disseminating breaking news, from the experience of Paul Lewis (*The Guardian*) and that of Ravi Somaiya (*The New York Times*) during the London riots of 2011. Lewis and Somaiya have different 'publishing' strategies for the use of the medium and different feedback, in a context that imposes new ethical rules and journalistic conventions for professionals.

Dynamics that require changes in the field are the theme of a [study](#) conducted by the University of Gothenberg on how the internet and mobile news have redefined the whole context including the redesigning of the customer profile. A [study](#) by the New School for Social Research speaks of «produsage», a buzzword recently used to show the cancellation of the distinction between producers (media) and customers (audience). It is the emergence of a new actor, the producer-consumer who is able to 'inhabit' both spheres and participate in a renewed news market, where it is possible to draw a silhouette based on some empirical data ('simple' reader users make under a thousand tweets, the *produsage* area is between 8,000 and 25,000 messages).

Another [study](#) was conducted by the Hebrew University of Tel Aviv with the analysis of data of twenty countries. It focuses on the influence of political contexts on social network activities during the so-called Arab Spring. There are more than a few references to consequences, ethical dilemmas and paradoxes of the encounter between life and digital life. There is an analysis of what happens to our Facebook profiles after death ([Pepperdine Law review](#)), of the non-profit universe at the time of social media, with obvious reference to the "Kony 2012" case ([Non-profit and voluntary sector Quarterly](#)), and implications of the future of mobile visual devices, as the well-known [Google Glass](#) project (Boston University).

The length of articles and slow journalism

In the past few days, a debate has taken shape that has been developed around a number of figures released by the *Columbia Journalism Review* («[Major papers' longform meltdown](#)») about the collapse of the longform articles in American publishing. The causes are due to staff reductions and adaptation to new tools for reading (and supply of news in general). Between 2003 to 2012, for example, there were 86% fewer pieces of more than 2,000 words at the *Los Angeles Times*; 50% fewer at the *Washington Post*, 35% fewer at the *Wall Street Journal* and 25% fewer at the *New York Times* ([here](#) some graphics). A collapse that [according](#) to Alan D. Mutter has perhaps overly upset the experts and the main consumers of newspapers - he explains - who tend to 'still' associate length to importance of the article, the subject or author. Whereas it is now possible to recount a story, a fact, or an interview better through new media, none of which are based exclusively on the 'word', but given by video, infographics or multimedia experiments.

[Out of Eden Walk](#) project, described by Evan Osnos, last Thursday, [on the New Yorker website](#) is a notable example. It is a portal built on the trip around the world by Paul Salopek that contains photos, audio, maps, graphs, which will be told [through Twitter](#) in its immediacy and that will include longform articles that the author wants to define as slow

journalism. [Steve Buttry](#) suggests focusing on the value of the article itself, its contents and the needs of the public rather than its length.

On the Internet experiments like *Longreads* and *Grantland* have been able to find their own established audience, and there are examples - such as *The Atlantic* - where the word 'long' is not disdained ([here](#) an example from the last few days). Most importantly – Buttry points out - data arrives from the network on readings and sharings of articles we should look at. «We should try to write the types of stories that people are going to want to share and read. That's way more important than worrying about how long or short a story is», Buttry concludes.

Chinese hackers invade the New York Times

For four months the *New York Times* has been attacked by Chinese hackers. The news came from the [American newspaper itself](#). According to the NYT the first infiltrations date back to the period in which the reporter David Barboza investigated and then published an article on the hidden fortune of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. The attacks, which occurred again last October, would have resulted in the loss of passwords and sensitive data of journalists and employees of the newspaper with the aim of identifying the names of those who have worked with Barboza for the realization of the scoop.

The allegations of the *New York Times*, that were quite precise but denied categorically by Beijing, were motivated by a study conducted by computer security experts hired by the newspaper that revealed the modus operandi of 'infiltrators' to be like that of cyber attacks conducted by the Chinese army.

The *New York Times* was not the [only](#) victim ([here](#) a brief history of cyber attacks against newspapers; [here](#) the satirical version of *The Onion*). This week the *Wall Street Journal*, as well as *Bloomberg Business*, [revealed](#) themselves to be victims of Chinese attacks seeking information on their coverage of Beijing affairs. It is a form of a control program of the American press that records more and more episodes, from 2008 until today. According to the FBI it is considered a threat «to national security against the interest of the United States». [Ryan Chittum of CJR noted](#), in the era of hyper-connectivity, where nothing is really safe, the real question is "who has *not* suffered a hacker attack by China?".

Market price paradox for online media

One of the most [talked about](#) articles in the past few days has been "[Another blog post that won't make any money](#)" by Ryan McCarthy on *MediaFile*. In the article, the author highlights the paradoxes of online media production. A market where the surplus of supply does not justify efforts and revenue, where journalism produces more every day, always in different ways, without any particular economic benefits. Analysis, graphics, photos, tweets and conversations with readers, slideshows, videos, GIFs, are available for a wider audience, distributed on various

platforms, with previously unthinkable content. It is something that generally – McCarthy continues - gives an opportunity to advertisers to occupy more space and obtain a greater visibility. In spite of this, it has not prevented advertising revenue falling for years.

McCarthy cites [Frederic Filloux](#), general manager for digital operations at *Les Echos*, to explain his idea: it is "economically absurd: in a 'normal' world, when audiences increase, advertising reaches more people and, as a result, rates rise". The post notes that solutions to the dilemma have been reached in different ways, beginning with the well-known - and [often controversial](#) - [native advertising](#) experiments or focusing on content and readers, as the *New York Times* did and for which recent [data](#) confirm the gap between the subscription revenue and the *ad revenue*. It is a question that the intersection between demand and supply is not able to explain: "The time we spend on the web has grown by 40% in the last three years. While advertising – McCarthy continues - becomes less and less expensive".

Touchdown for Oreo

An example of a possible new way and almost completely free online advertising was suggested last week in the weekly news. During the third quarter of the Super Bowl, the final of the football game between the Baltimore Ravens and the *San Francisco* 49ers, a power outage forced the stadium to remain in the dark for 34 minutes. The incident became an inspiration for the social media team of Oreo which tweeted from the brand account: "[Power out? No problem.You can still dunk in the dark](#)" with the image of the cookie that stands out in the darkness. The picture was essentially an advertising banner adapted to the immediate situation. It was retweeted by more than 16,000 users and 'liked' by 20,000 on Facebook. They were not the numbers of Beyoncé's show, Angela Watercutter notes [on Wired](#), but still a pretty good result "for a cookie". The company responsible for the management of the Oreo's social networks at the Super Bowl speaks of a mix between speed and adaptation to sensations: "You need a brave brand to approve content that quickly. When all of the stakeholders come together so quickly, you've got magic". It was an almost unique situation - reported [by BuzzFeed](#) - to capitalize as best you can on an unexpected event.

The issue of the initial paradox remains alive. "In an environment - Watercutter continues - where advertisers are spending nearly \$4 million to run a spot during the final (however Oreo presented [one](#) of the most appreciated spots), having a brand respond in real-time on social media is a clever way to reach people on smartphones and computers". Especially if you consider the precise figure of 36% of viewers who watched the Super Bowl "[consulting a second screen](#)", particularly [Twitter](#) (something which was [also noticed by advertisers](#)). A simple box against expensive productions for an old but still influential media such as television. [According to some](#), this is an episode that should be relegated to the specialized debate on digital marketing, giving adequate 'sectorial' importance to the topic. Certainly for all the media, the Oreo tweet represents

a case history to take into account, especially if you look at it from the perspective of the speed of production and sharing on multiple platforms.

Pros and cons of online publishing

Producing more, faster and with more means ends up with the degradation of professional work. This is the hamster wheel, the "[hamsterization](#)" cited this week by Jay Rosen in another of the articles discussed in the last few days. In a post with the eloquent title "[Look, you're right, okay? But you're also wrong](#)", Rosen first analyzes the reasons for the progressive destruction of the traditional newsroom, caused by the unavoidable implementation of the logic of the Internet applied to the profession. The race to the easy click "stupid and not ethical" and the danger of amateur reproduction of the profession ("Bloggers and citizen journalists cannot fill the gap"), practiced by citizens who lack sources and tools that they are unable to operate - unlike the experienced reporter. Moreover, unlike the reporter they cannot act as the "community's institutional memory" and on the spot 'guardian'. Rosen doesn't forget to mention the economic issue, the well-known impossibility of the return of the media industry of the past, since "the *online advertising* will never be able to replace what has been lost".

On the other hand – or 'at the same time' - in this accusation-post on the various beliefs about the online media industry, it is necessary to consider seriously the positive aspects of this revolution, knowing how to work on a different ground compared to that on which we have operated for decades. In order to be able to see Google as a resource rather than a threat, it is necessary to definitively rewrite the methods of production, to rethink the content of new platforms – a particularly dangerous failure, in spite of the mythological 'original sin' of free distribution of the first journalistic content on the web. Still, it is important to interact with the rest of the supply ("Do what you do best and link to the rest' is not a slogan, it is your only hope for a full coverage") and one's own readers, having full knowledge of the "business side" of the newsroom. According to Rosen, the overlooking of the "church-state" distinction between industry and profession was a lack of history that would have led to real disasters. "A journalist is just a heightened case of an informed citizen, not a special class. The First Amendment doesn't mention your occupation; it refers to everyone's right to publish".

Why young people don't read newspapers

Newspapers continue to arouse less interest among young people. This week, Alan D. Mutter, [on Editor & Publisher](#), tried to explain the reason, taking a cue from some of the data [of the Pew Research Center](#). In the United States, youth readership ranges from 16% in the forties and 6% in the twenties. A fact certainly associated with the general decrease of readers, that fell from 56% to 29% of the population from 1991 to 2012. Even with a more specific analysis there are no mitigating circumstances. According to the study, three out of four readers are more than 45,

although the same age group represents only 40% of the population, leading one to assume a progressive extinction of the newspaper reader. Why?

Routine. According to the post, the *X* and *Millennial* generations have 'grown up' in front of a screen, TV or tablet, and aren't much accustomed to other methods of consumption. This explanation, however, would not be able to justify some recent data on the digital versions proposed by 65% of American magazines, [which represent less than three percent of the total circulation](#). They are the so-called 'digital natives', who would prefer flexibility and convenience - therefore a pure web *environment* - to costs, effective purchase and 'physical ownership', according to an old analysis of the *Washington Post* cited by the author. A generation, [according to Mary Meeker](#), destined to change everything, every process, from simple consumption to the exercise of rights such as education and health. Meanwhile, the *New York Times* [imagines](#) a sort of *entry level* journal to start young readers on a product like the newspaper. Laura Hazard Owen, [on Paid Content](#), tries to imagine how it would be: *lifestyle* and columnists of the caliber of a Krugman ([the 'journalist-brand' style we have already spoken](#)), highly customizable, with a cost of 10-15 dollars.

Newspapers which can make it

This week, [a study](#) by the Pew Center has highlighted the stories of four newspapers that, despite the well-known scenario of crisis, are able to reverse the trend and make a profit. The cases are exemplary for both the results and the models of response to the crisis and are different from sector to sector and from newspaper to newspaper. In a context where for every \$1 newspapers gained in digital ad revenue, they were already losing \$7 in print advertising, the actual ratio 16:1 is even more critical. These newspapers are *the Naples Daily News* (Florida), *the Santa Rosa Press Democrat* (California), *the Columbia Daily Herald* and *the Deseret News* (Utah). One of the most interesting case concerns *Deseret*, whose CEO Clark Gilbert took on the responsibility of the digital section, working on the strength of his academic skills, having taught these subjects for years as a professor at Harvard Business School. Through his work, he created a kind of experiment in the field applying his knowledge to the publishing group.

His idea was to separate the digital 'arm' of the company from the traditional one. Following the metaphor of his colleague Clay Christensen in [NiemanLab](#), for Gilbert the old paper business is like a crocodile, a creature in slow extinction but still able to survive, and the digital business is a new form of life (mammals), ready to dominate the future. They deserve to be dealt with separately, also from the point of view of advertising by helping advertisers to come together, step by step, towards new models of non-paper advertising. As for the results of his job: the newspaper is in good shape (an average circulation of 90,000 copies) and digital revenue growth of 44% since 2010.

According to the research data ([here](#) in the infographic), a detailed knowledge of the market would be essential today for the success of a publishing company. This was the backbone of the

rebirth of *the Naples Daily* that took advantage of (small) sizes and average age (60 [is more and more](#) the target audience for newspapers) of the urban area where it is distributed, with revenue growth of 10% since 2009. The ability to explore new avenues, like *the Columbia Daily* did, is important, diversifying numerous digital products (estimates for this year: +15% compared to 2011). As Mathew Ingram suggests in [PaidContent](#), there is a need to aim high and jump enthusiastically with very clear ideas, bravely defying failure.

The barging in of mobile journalism

The scenario appears to be radically changed by the sudden arrival of reading on mobile devices. If for the majority of people - often also for publishers - this is simply a different way of consuming the same product, as pointed out by Cory Bergman in [Poynter](#) this week, it is a disruptive innovation, a variable that can change the entire landscape fatally. It is a process comparable only to the transition from paper to the internet of the 90s. Unlike that process, which was mostly 'suffered', at most ridden, but not really tamed or fully understood, this one could be still understood and domesticated. Like a second chance - or worse, the last call - for the entire media industry.

Bergman has decided to establish a picture of the five reasons which should lead to confirm the similarity between the paper-internet and internet-mobile transitions. First, he warns that the adoption of rewritten and redesigned websites, according to the standards of *responsive design* (about which [we have already spoken](#)) would not be enough to embrace this 'revolution', based more on geolocation and digital payments (something more like Google: content, advertising and personalized services) and not on mere aesthetic adaptability and versatility of content distribution. The second point of the post advises us to keep in mind that the mobile will not surpass the desktop universe for years. It will continue to erode market segments and steal users and services from the old browser consultation - which happens more and more often, for example, to [the Guardian](#) or to [websites such as Facebook and, of course, Google](#).

The third point reminds us not to forget that the decline of the 'desktop' will have a direct impact on advertising revenue, although the gap between desktop and mobile impression-cost is still quite large. The author suggests that there is a whole sector to work on, bearing in mind the examples of the above-mentioned Google and Facebook, which alone - offering a kind of ad different from the one always imagined by the publishing industry - account for almost 70 % of revenues from *mobile advertising*. The *mobile first* would also continue to appear as a field where one spends and invests more now. It is a trend to follow, reformulating the concept of reproduction and proposition of news, and the assumption of the fifth point. Much of the time spent on mobile devices would be dedicated to social networks ([23% only for Facebook](#)), which should lead one to imagine new information ecosystems, new products, new business models. New challenges, more like Flipboard than [the disastrous The Daily](#).

Tablet journalism and social news readers

The market is without doubt more open and competitive than ever, says Eliza Kern in [GigaOm](#). "The internet offers more than we can reasonably ingest" (the excess of supply that [we talked about last week](#)) and by combining ongoing consolidation and the use of social-style applications on mobile devices for finding and reading the news, it seems clear that a natural outlet could be yet more space for the so-called social *news reader*, tools to organize the reading in the chaos of information, adapting the needs and tastes of users and their contacts. The market already offers tools such as the aforementioned Flipboard, Zite, Prismatic, the new and upcoming Thirst, but public and industry are still waiting for the real 'killer' application, able to take advantage of portability, social relations and adaptability between reading "first" and "second screen".

Today's reality is 'multi-screen' and the desktop/laptop reading - using the words of Blodgett in [Business Insider](#) - still largely dominates. Tablets and smartphones appear more and more often as means of consultation to combine with other media, as evidenced by the growth of the underlying "[second screen application](#)" battle between Facebook and Twitter - brought to light [last week](#) during the Super Bowl and confirmed by the acquisition of Bluefin Labs by the social network of San Francisco.

It is the beginning of the definition of *tablet journalism*, presented this week by Roy Greenslade in [MediaGuardian](#), as the real future for the industry. Quoting John Meehan, the former editor of *the Hull Daily Mail*, Greenslade [says](#) that iPad and similar devices will continue to change the scenario by offering new reading experiences, new features, leading to different content and recalibrated prices. "I believe the printed newspaper will survive, but I suspect for not more than 10 -15 years from now", Greenslade explains, stating that the industry certainly cannot rely only on this type of product. "More people will read tablet equivalents", he adds. In Italy, in 2012, more than two million tablets were sold - about 700,000 from October to December alone.

The "personal paywall"

An entire system needs redefining in order to generate profit and to shape products and services on the basis of the wishes of the users. This week, Mathew Ingram in [PaidContent](#) focuses on what could be the new winning variables of the so-called *paywall* ([here](#) the famous debate which we have already spoken about), starting from an original yardstick. After years of painful search, the music industry has perhaps found a satisfactory method of linking users and corporations; by understanding the real reasons which entice the listener to pay. It's not the song, or the content itself, but the access to the artist that really counts. It's a sort of 'personal paywall' which if applied to journalism could lead to some proposals - in this case five, listed by the author.

- The chance to read any author desired, on a subscription basis, in an all-in-one package, whatever the form is

- Guarantee to the subscribers advantages over other users, following the model of membership as already mentioned, and with an offer similar to that made to fan club music members, to ensure privileged access to special or unreleased content
- Be part of live events with authors, as happens in concerts
- Favour the creation of virtual communities with the presence of the author to add value and justify the expense of subscription
- Let the authors become 'experts online' under payment, answering questions on the issues which the readers consider them to be experts in

Summing up, a "personal paywall" with the key features being the personalization of the services offered and the right price.

Little faith in journalism

This week Harvey Morris, on the blog *RendezVous of the International Herald Tribune*, [analyzed](#) trust in journalism, taking a cue from an [Ipsos MORI survey](#) which questioned 1,018 British citizens on their level of respect for the press. The results show a very bleak picture: only one in five interviewed (exactly 21%) declared trust in the journalistic class, on a par with bankers, just a little above politicians (18%) and even under real estate agents (24%). A rather meager result, says Morris, considering the 'bizarre' percentage of TV hosts who are accredited with 70%, nearly four times more than journalists. Journalists are probably judged too close to the political establishment to be considered worthy of trust.

Journalism and political parties are evaluated at a similar level. According to the author, such a low level corresponds to a substantial discrediting of the political class in Britain, combined with events which have certainly helped to undermine the credibility of the journalistic profession, such as the phone hacking scandal at *The News of the World* and the subsequent difficulties arising from the Leveson Inquiry. Without forgetting – [recalls](#) David Carr, quoted by Morris – the constant ‘race to the bottom’ of content, driven by a growing tendency to overproduction and the rapidity of publication with lower disposable income and gradually reduced ranks. “The trend in a lot of the media is toward more scandal, more controversy and more opining”, [says John Lloyd](#), contributing editor of *The Financial Times*, complaining about the lack of journalism based on endangered features such as “objective reporting, investigation and rational analysis”.

Advertising on blogs: Maria Popova and affiliate links

In the last few days, an interesting case of an author’s credibility and the ‘betrayed’ trust of the reader has surfaced in the US. The debate was focused on the blogger Maria Popova, [writer for websites](#) such as *The Atlantic* and the [popular](#) editor of *Brain Pickings*. The blog, followed by 500 thousand unique monthly visitors, is a source of pride for Popova both for the quality of content

and their totally free and *ad-free* consultation. On *Brain Pickings* there are no banners or posts for promotional purposes, only donations of faithful readers, who have allowed it to survive exclusively on those donations, as Popova has [always proudly claimed](#), similar to the [situation of *The Dish of Andrew Sullivan*](#).

This week, an anonymous blogger whose name (Tom Bleymaier) was revealed later, [did the math](#) of Popova's earnings and the *Brain Pickings* financing, analyzing the so-called *affiliate links*. These are links inserted into articles, books and other products on e-commerce sites – primarily Amazon – that would have provided her with a payment from each of her readers' clicks. According to Bleymaier it is a turnover which could generate up to \$400,000 per year.

The case has raised more than one issue. Above all, the refocusing of the classic debate on [native advertising](#) and *sponsored content* (including the most striking episode of the [article about Scientology in *The Atlantic*](#)), which was a kind of editorial content of an advertising nature – unlike the case in question. Secondly, this could represent the collapse of the hopes of economic sustainability for blogging, especially high-quality blogging, of which *Brain Pickings* seemed to be an example. And last but not least the ethics issue, which would refer to the use of so-called disclosures, explaining in simple terms to the readers that revenue is generated through the inclusion of certain content. Even more so if the economic independence and 'authenticity' are a flag, a source of survival and a trust 'pact' between reader and author – [says](#) Felix Salmon of *Reuters*. Prompted by Mathew Ingram [on Twitter](#), Maria Popova admitted that she didn't think her readers cared about the necessary disclosures and promised to add a note [in her donation page](#) to make clear the affiliation to funding programs.

Fact-checking: the dispute between *The New York Times* and Tesla

The Tesla vs *The New York Times* case also aroused interest this week. It started with [a review](#) by John Broder for the NYT of the 'S Model' Tesla electric car, made available by the company for a test ride from Washington to New York. The article, published on 10 February painted the car in an unfavourable light, stating that there was energy unreliability even in favorable conditions (low heating, speed limits), long charging times and bad performance. The production company didn't just dismiss the criticism. In [a post on the company blog](#), Tesla CEO Elon Musk published and analyzed the logs of the on-board computer which provides usage data of the car. This data contradicted the NYT article, which was defined in no uncertain terms as "false". The reporter must have used the car improperly, traveling far beyond the limits, with the heating on and without following the directions on how to refuel.

This is another episode which [has led to](#) new ideas in the journalistic debate. Journalistic reporting can be contradicted, or at least questioned, through the easy checking of sources. Consequently, the role of the journalist risks losing its former function of the unique depository of and spokesperson for previously inaccessible events and products, now analyzed and refuted by

other players (citizens, companies) putting at risk once again the trust between author and reader. Dan Frommer [writes](#) that it is interesting to note how the company itself challenged the data. In previous times it would have simply replied with a paid advertisement or by contacting a rival newspaper. Nowadays, Frommer continues, every company is a media company, and in this case Tesla could argue independently, through a blog, becoming the source of news – as [emphasized](#) by Dave Winer – showing how the power of the press is continually on the wane. This doesn't mean that anyone with a hundred followers on Twitter automatically possesses 'firepower' like *The New York Times*, [adds](#) Ingram in *PaidContent*, but certainly [for better or for worse](#) it allows us to revise the meaning and method of journalistic work.

The “new digital journalism”

This week Frédéric Filloux, [in MondayNote](#), discussed the future of the profession and the creation of a new digital journalism. The French general manager has invited journalists to find a new approach to the profession, which doesn't follow the same processes of postwar methods and forms, using the same text structure aimed at suppressing the author's thought and 'color' elements behind objective scenes and quotes of others. Those are twentieth century patterns, reproduced on websites that still adapt their articles to the standard 'paper', which should be revised to meet the changing tastes of readers respecting their 'time' commitment dedicated to reading (defined as "readers' time budget"). "Readers no longer demand validating quotes that weigh the narrative down. They want to be taken from A to B, with the best possible arguments, and no distraction or wasted time".

Other key elements for the new profession, according to Filloux, would be the trust in the author and brand, which should lead the reader to trust in the veracity of the product. It would be a synthesis of a work ten times longer and which should lead – in this exchange – to a streamlining of the story and to taking on new stylistic tracks that are immediately recognizable (see "[Some shift in power visible in journalism today](#)" by Jay Rosen, about the value of the visibility and the relationship between author and publisher). Probably something more like blogs – another point analyzed by the author – which paradoxically end up being the most interesting articles of the newspaper. However, unlike the articles, they are free and kept out of the paywalls, with the result that original content worthy of breaking free from the label of “secondary genre” is not monetized and the producers of the content are not adequately compensated.

The moral of the tale is that digital media needs to invent new genres, a call to new journalism through which the future of the profession will pass. If Paul Smalera of *Reuters*, [in Medium](#), says it is a process that should see the journalist at the center, for Filloux it should invest the entire publishing industry. “While the blogosphere has yet to find its Tom Wolfe – Filloux concludes – the newspaper industry still has a critical role to play. It could be at the forefront of this essential evolution in journalism. Failure to do so will only accelerate its decline”.

How much is Twitter worth?

This is the question many people are asking, finding an initial answer in an evaluation made at the end of January, when the [offer to purchase](#) securities by BlackRock, the investment management corporation, implicitly put its value at about \$9-10 billion, a gain of 10% compared to the fundraising in the fall of 2011. This week, Dennis K. Berman of the *Wall Street Journal* [investigated](#) the real assessment of the company, considering that \$10 billion is a low estimate and believing that Twitter has a good chance of 'landing' on Wall Street as one of the best IPOs of 2013. Berman reports that according to *eMarketer*, the market research company, 2014 revenues for Twitter are forecast between \$800 million and \$1 billion. A remarkable achievement for a company that offers a rather simple service, on a platform that doesn't need particular maintenance and which 'works alone'. So what is the secret of Twitter?

Taking a cue from current events Berman cites the Oscars, an event that, like many others, [was](#) 'experienced' on Twitter both by [users](#) - as a second-screen activity - and by actors, [newspapers](#) and [other participants in the show](#). It was relaunched and promoted continuously, reducing TV to - as the author puts it - a lowly portal to social media, and not the other way around. Another element is that Twitter is a platform which offers new and updated content by users, who work for free, creating and cleaning messages. However, Berman warns that the road is not without obstacles. Twitter should begin taking measures against the crisis of advertisers that might depend on users who, once logged in, are reluctant to purchase goods - *via promoted tweets* - which is unlike what happens on Google - often consulted before a purchase. The article ends by stating that the finding of a solution to this issue, the continuation of current expansion (which remains fast, despite the ban in China) and the attention to maintenance costs are all aspects to be monitored in a year which could be a golden one for the company.

Research on how to get more followers

This week, Jeff Sonderman [in Poynter](#) reported the results of the research study "[A Longitudinal Study of Follow Predictors on Twitter](#)" done by the Georgia Institute of Technology. The study reported analysed some 500,000 tweets sent by about 500 active Twitter users (in English, with Twitter accounts that are at least 30 days old, who follow at least 15 other "friends" and have a minimum of 5 followers) over a period of 15 months. It was found that 'negative feelings' tend to alienate other users, making the author less attractive as a possible user to follow. Researchers explain that Twitter could be dominated "by very weak social ties" and for this reason negative or aggressive attitudes "could be considered annoying and unpleasant to potential new followers".

Another tip which emerged from the study is to avoid sharing too much personal information on Twitter - for the aforementioned lack of social bonds - preferring informative 'third party' content, particularly appreciated and effective according to the study, as a way of increasing

the number of followers by up to thirty times more. Four out of ten users find the sharing of personal information to be a counterproductive habit. With the "Let's have a sandwich" style they have undermined the possibility of seeing their own 'popularity' grow, compared with only 24% of more 'informative' accounts. Interaction is a third element to consider: a greater inclination to the debate which should help in the growth of the number of followers. A positive attitude, a focus on hard information and a judicious interactivity are the most appreciated qualities on Twitter that, translated in the synthesis of Sonderman, "sounds a bit like something your mother told you: 'if you have nothing nice to tweet, don't tweet'".

The goat and the pig

Last Tuesday, the *New York Times* [reported](#) a non-news story, revealing the making of a video that became 'viral' a few days before and was taken up by the media. In a pond there is a goat in danger of drowning. The goat is then rescued by a 'heroic' pig – an adjective that was not spared in many programs that reported the 'news'. The moving and happy-ending video was later revealed to be a hoax created for a new Comedy Central series "Nathan for You" by the editorial staff of the show to promote the launch in an unconventional way. It was a joke on the mainstream media (NBC, ABC and Fox were taken in) and it played on the heavy 'digital illiteracy' of traditional newsrooms. They were unable to immediately see through the hoax, fishing without much checking from Reddit and YouTube, where the bait had been carefully placed with a description with clear and intentional spelling errors.

In an article titled "[What a pig, a goat and an eagle can tell us about the decline of traditional media](#)" Mathew Ingram, in *PaidContent*, has made this episode a starting point from which to begin a broader discussion about the evolution of the journalistic profession in the newsroom, the redefinition of its borders and the intrusion of external players - the users – in a sphere now easily accessible. He starts from the practice of source checking - which in this case was evidently neglected so as to take full advantage of funny, zero-cost content - and highlights the trend of traditional media to gather and disseminate amateur online material indiscriminately. As in the case [of the eagle and the child](#) a few weeks ago, in times of the "[democratization of distribution](#)" - as Om said, quoted by Ingram - it's easy to find news, or at least presumed news, which for reasons of negligence or acquiescence are amplified without much verification. The author warns that it is necessary to give attention to what is amplified, considering that imitating *Buzzfeed* or Reddit on traditional media can only lead users directly to the original source.

Anyone can be a journalist, not everyone is credible

This is the theme of *user-generated content* which makes the boundaries between amateurs and professionals much more flexible, at least in the perception of readers. The topic was discussed during a UNESCO event, a [meeting](#) organized by WAN-IFRA (World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers), in a debate - [reported](#) on *Editors Weblog* - that can be considered from different perspectives. If it is true that "everyone has a voice," as noted by panelist Amadou Matha Ba, Chief Executive Officer of the African Media Initiative, many participants stressed the importance of the role of the journalist in society and the chaos of information, emphasizing the responsibility of choice, collection and reporting of news, maintenance of ethics and professional credibility - a defining and founding feature. In a debate that ranged over different theories and led some to be less inclined to continue to use the term "citizen journalism", Philippe Massonet, Global News Director of the *Agence France-Presse*, reminds us that citizens are part of the entire information community and should be treated with respect.

The meaning of journalism is reporting facts on the spot, as has been shown during natural disasters when people without any kind of professional training testify to what they see with their own, simple means. "That role has to be protected" explained Frank La Rue, UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression: "Journalism is defined by the function, not by the degree." What is the future? One of the ways to continue could be the imposition of a person with a determined and credible role in the middle of a messy and unverified flow (considering the episode of the 'hero-pig'). A new and more urgent challenge facing journalists is the following: "We need to transfer our knowledge - said Annette Novak, Board Member of the World Editors Forum - We are moving into the biggest transition of knowledge in the history of the world."

In a scenario where the players involved are not all professionals but rather new members of an open industry - like simple Twitter users without expertise, says Novak - the industry must find a new way to "revive a dying industry": training new people, creating new identities, in full connection with an ever less passive audience.

The hard life of a digital freelance journalist

This week the online journalistic debate has developed mainly [on the case](#) which involved the journalist Nate Thayer and *the Atlantic*. Last Monday, Thayer [published](#) his email exchange with Olga Khazan, the global editor of the magazine, who had proposed to publish [one](#) of his articles - about the relationship between basketball and diplomacy with North Korea - in the online version. The piece should have been edited and reduced from 4,000 to 1,200 words and done for free.

"We unfortunately can't pay you for it - she wrote him - but we do reach 13 million readers a month". The journalist explained his reasoning for his refusal - I have to "feed my children", "I have bills to pay" -, also decided to publish the entire exchange on his blog. This causes a [huge debate](#) on websites, blogs and Twitter about the role of freelance journalism in a context of crisis,

new online production methods and challenges which aspiring journalists should accept to be able to enter the profession.

Felix Salmon of *Reuters* was among the first to intervene. He [highlighted](#) the evolution of the online journalistic profession, aimed at becoming a writing, reading, and aggregating team process that cannot contemplate only simple textual production. Consequently, comparative pay levels become less clear. Along with the production model, the economic prospects of freelance journalists would change radically and they would no longer be able to live solely on this type of activity.

Analyzing the basic economic reasons, almost all of the *media company* budget is used to pay the permanent members of the editorial staff, Salmon added, causing a progressive thinning of the portion of investment dedicated to external collaborators and making this an uneconomical approach for the profession. It is possible to make profits with digital journalism, Salmon specified, but it is clear that under certain conditions, and without the certainty of an open-ended job, the field has become almost disadvantageous: "It's fair to say the web is not a *freelancer-friendly* place".

The value of work and 'visibility'

"The economics of writing have changed," says Mathew Ingram [in PaidContent](#). Of course, the Internet, adds Kelly McBride [in Poynter](#), has totally messed up a stable pay scale, based on the simple word count, which started from a minimum of 10 cents and upwards. The web, product reformulation and the distribution-content divide have ended up remodulating this equation. It can no longer rely just on the written lines because there are no precise references any more, nor - as seen before - is there the univocal impression that on the web the job is only at the textual level. This leads to the rethinking of the value of the work itself, and how it should be paid in a scenario ever more open to competition and less convenient for those who land there. Choire Sicha has posted in *The Awl* [a long, open conversation](#) on Branch, which involved numerous experts with many different points of view about the value of the freelance profession and its corresponding payment.

It is no longer possible to compete and survive in a scenario 'doped' with the introduction of new players, less and less professionalized, who offer their work in exchange for the promise of increased visibility - like the successful model of portals such as *Huffington Post*. More and more often, in an attempt to meet this supply curve - lowering their financial claims - the journalists themselves offer an entire catalog of free content. They behave this way in exchange for a 'reputation', in "a vortex of hope and hard work" (Karen Fratti [in Mediabistro](#)) that ends up contributing directly to the collapse in guaranteed salaries - as recalled by Matt Yglesias [in Slate](#). In this case, the editor of *The Atlantic* proposed a similar exchange quoting the total of the monthly visits of the website as a counterpart to the required editorial commitment.

[Commenting](#) on the story and the post of Salmon, Mathew Ingram notes how the author of Reuters has, perhaps, underestimated a particularly interesting fact. *The Atlantic*, which subjected the freelance to an undoubted humiliation despite the "no offense taken," could easily excerpt chunks of the article of Thayer, citing and linking to the original, as often happens in other websites like *GlobalPost* or the *HuffPost* (*crossposting*). In that case how could a journalist quantify the fame returns through a simple external reference? Would it make any sense to distort a laborious professional work, agreeing to read your own article in chunks, on different platforms, without being paid? Journalism, recalls Phil Carr [in PandoDaily](#), is a kind of vocation that takes more than 40 hours per week, and requires hard work, passion, travel and time for editing of articles which are worth the effort spent. "Now as amazing as writing for free is – Yglesias continues in *Slate* - there are still good reasons to refuse to do it. For example, maybe, you don't like writing; you'd rather spend your time writing-for-free for a different platform (your own blog rather than *the Atlantic*); you have an offer to write for someone else for money instead".

'Write for free - it's an opportunity'

According to many, the current economic outlook would not recommend a 'strong and pure' approach which could become counterproductive and hinder the progress of the career of an author. "If you do enjoy writing and you don't have a money-making writing opportunity, you should definitely be writing for free", Yglesias says. Other authors who have taken part in the debate have added, working as a collaborator for free, could be regarded as a necessary - albeit disadvantageous – approach phase in the climb that should lead to the 'permanent' job. "Contrary to the opinion of some of my media colleagues, I'm thrilled there was an opportunity to be a poor freelance blogger", explained Gregory Ferenstein [in TechCrunch](#). "If it weren't for underpaid writers, I never would have had the opportunity to be a journalist".

Even Jane Friedman, in "[The state of Online Journalism Today](#)", admits that she could have accepted the offer of *The Atlantic*, although it depends on the work situation and the sensitivity of the individual. "Based on Thayer's career profile - already an appreciated reporter specialized in Southeast Asia affairs, *A/N* - it's easy to see why he said no". From the same pages of *The Atlantic*, Stephanie Lucianovic defends unpaid work, [justifying](#) the choice of the free-of-charge collaboration, aiming at the freedom of artistic expression. "I don't always consider writing '*work*'. Sometimes writing just happens". It's a personal act for which you think - and hope - to be paid for, however, it has been carried out by the author anyway, without much effort.

The Atlantic's stance

The strongest and most precise reply comes from Alexis Madrigal, senior editor of *The Atlantic*, in a long article that explains the reasons that led to this dispute. Madrigal points out that he often prefers to hire a new full-time member than pay a freelancer, after assessing the pros and

cons of content of external authors. All the more so, he says, if 90% of visits to the website comes from pieces written by components of the 'team' where there is 95% used of the invested 'editorial' capital. Apologizing to Thayer, Madigral agrees with the unpredictable evolution of the editorial scenario. The landscape has completely changed, it is totally different from what was imagined for years. Access to the profession and a decent economic perspective appear to be actually unsafe. None of the models so far tested, in the magazine field, seem to really function.

Meanwhile, *The Atlantic* has sought to explain and defend its position on several fronts. Questioned by Salmon, Bob Cohn, the editorial director, spoke of an error by the editor and admitted that maybe it would have been better to carry out a simple crossposting, without necessarily opening the topic of unpaid wages with the author, as is standard in this type of publishing practice. On his blog in *The Guardian*, Roy Greenslade points out that *The Atlantic* almost certainly does not generate profits for the owner David Bradley and his team. In another layer of irony - Salmon notes in an update to his post - it turns out that Thayer's piece itself was deeply indebted to - and yet didn't cite or link to - an article on the same subject published in *The San Diego Union Tribune* in 2006.

CHAPTER II

May – August 2013

The ups and downs of crowdfunding

One of the most important pieces of news of the last few days concerns the issue of online journalism and its sustainability and the [so far mediocre](#) results of the fundraising organized by Andrew Sullivan. [As reported in recent months](#), the blogger had decided to leave the *Newsweek/The Daily Beast* platform, which hosted his historic *The Dish*, to find a way to financial independence. Relying on the importance of his online presence attained over the years through his loyal community, Sullivan asked his readers to financially support his "[declaration of independence](#)", fixing the amount of the contributions to be collected at the remarkable figure of 900 thousand dollars. The beginning was quick. The total subscriptions rapidly reached numbers that immediately brought to mind that this was a historical precedent, showing a new way for online journalism, *crowdfunding and personal branding*. However, recently, the collection has stopped at the figure of \$680,000, an increase of 'only' about \$30,000 in less than two months. "The most passionate readers have already joined", Sullivan summed up [in a post](#) in which he provides an update on the performance of the project. "It gets harder after that". Worth noting is the fact that the same post registers (at the moment), in terms of social shares, thirty tweets and a few Facebook 'likes'.

One of the easiest criticisms to express, looking at initiatives such as these, would be to note the fact that Sullivan has probably overestimated the ability of 'mobilization' of its readership, fixing the *break even* point in numbers maybe overly ambitious. Some examples of crowdfunding, based on more modest and accessible figures, contradict the idea that it is a bankruptcy model for the funding of journalistic activities. Italian journalist Andrea Marinelli has reached and exceeded, through Kapipal, the \$3,000 required amount needed [to finance his trip to the United States](#). His purpose is to report on homosexuality in America, during a historical-political hiatus that will lead the judges of the Supreme Court to speak for the first time on gay marriage at the end of June. The project, which has already exceeded \$3500 a few days after the deadline of the collection, is the second experiment of Marinelli, who had already managed to get funding [in 2012](#) – with good results – for another journey told in the book *L'Ospite*, presented during the last edition of the International Journalism Festival ([video](#)).

Twitter is looking for journalists

The new forms of journalism are increasingly looking to avoid editorial structures - disconnecting itself from a legacy that seems to sink together with unsustainable costs - and to distance itself from the classical 'newspaper-website' form so as to allow a more fluid way of reporting the news, without intermediaries. New *born-digital* platforms can make their voices heard, imposing themselves as 'editorial' presences in a new process of production, sharing and reading of the news. Another interesting item this week regards the newly-created job of [Head of News and Journalism Partnerships](#) at Twitter. The company has advertised for someone able to operate as "responsible for devising and executing the strategies that make Twitter indispensable to newsrooms and journalists, as well as an essential part of the operations and strategy of *news organizations* and TV news networks". The company is aware of the revolutionary result of its use in the journalistic environment, "both as news is given" and for "the new way to connect journalists and their readers", [and it seems to want to exploit it](#).

It is the first time that a technological company looks to the news industry as a primary feature, notes Michael Wolff [in the Guardian](#). "Google, Yahoo and Microsoft have all, to varying degrees, devoted resources to news and seen opportunities in it, but as an information *commodity*", a resource in the service of the industry. They have never seen themselves as having a *news gathering* and filtering function - he continues - that seems to be precisely what Twitter is looking for, at a time when it seems ready to become a kind of independent *news operator*. From a multifaceted tool without a precise function - Wolff concludes - Twitter has found itself as a revolutionary element in the news business.

A few days later, the scenario imagined by Wolf was denied by Mark Lukie, the creative content manager of Twitter, [in an interview](#) with Mark Glaser of PBS MediaShift. "Twitter doesn't have ambitions of being a news operation. Since Twitter is so central to what a lot of newsrooms are doing, naturally there's a lot of hype around this position", Lukie reassures. "No, Twitter has no editorial team nor a newsroom: we're simply providing a platform". It is interesting to note that more or less at the same time Facebook broke into this world with a post - on [Media on Facebook](#), which has just been launched - which [recommends best practices](#) for journalistic use of the social network. This confirms the interest of the new giants of online media in the old - and crisis-hit - journalism industry.

“How do you get your news?”

In the current publishing scenario where news is available to anyone - whether for production or distribution - the work, reading and discussion area has changed considerably such that it is now rewriting the boundaries of the newspaper and the news factory in their most basic processes. "How do you get your news?" is the question Callie Schweitzer, Director of Marketing & Communication of *VoxMedia* (another *self publishing* platform which [aims at becoming an](#)

[independent editor](#)) tries to give an answer to [on Medium](#). Forget the days when *The New York Times* was waiting for the reader outside the front door. We are witnessing, at this stage in the process, a reversal of the terms, where above all it is the reader who is looking for the news. News comes via social networks, email, instant messages - Schweizer notes - destroying the nature of the front page of papers as a 'manifesto' able to establish an agenda (Mathew Ingram talks about this in his keynote speech at the International Journalism Festival - [video](#)) and the opening of the homepage as a new habit for routine consultation of the news. The arrival of journalism without a 'front page' - [Ingram explained](#) - is gaining greater approval.

Justin Ellis [on NiemanLab](#) reports on the launch of the [preview of the new website of Reuters](#) which seems to embrace this tendency. The characteristic of the new layout would be the chance to make every single page a sort of small homepage in which one can find not only the desired article but also an overview of the rest of the content. This would help the reader, coming from *direct links* scattered around the network, to find what he would have lost without the obliged passage through the main page. And all with an optimized design for clear reading and an arrangement of different types of 'reminders' that would not be too intrusive. "Every page is your homepage", Ellis explains. *Reuters* is trying to move before others, with a format that would be the most adaptable for mobile tools; a healthy, economically attractive sector, as indicated by traffic data to sites from mobile devices, up from 25% last year to about 33% (not coincidentally, *The New York Times* [has just launched](#) a new version of the site).

Journalism without newspapers

The search for and consultation of news - to answer the question of Schweizer - now passes through an entire industry of social, customizable aggregators (last week the [newsonomics](#) of Flipboard, Zite and Pulse was analyzed by Ken Doctor). These aggregators are perfectly suited to the new habits of users, the technology market and somehow, Doctor points out, to the Internet ecosystem imagined by Steve Jobs, a galaxy of autonomous apps designed for specific functions to use without the need to surf the net. "The mobile world moves more quickly than anyone — including Google — expected," Doctor continues. "In an app world, who needs search tools?" As it may seem hyperbolic - admits the same author - the question is beginning to find its first confirmation of legitimacy in the data provided during the week [by BuzzFeed](#), which recorded a sharp fall of traffic from search engines - down by 20% from August 2012, with traffic from Google down by 30% alone - against a substantial growth of the traffic generated by Facebook.

In the open sea of content and endless searches on the net, tools such as aggregators – which can suggest news similar to our tastes and to those of our social contacts, and on multiple devices – stand out almost naturally. Recently, the market has seen the entry of a new player. With [the purchase](#) of the Instapaper reader and the redefinition of [the social reading platform Digg](#), there is a much more "editorial" point of view. Returning to the theme of the technology

industry playing "the media", Betaworks seems definitely to want to start to create an 'information ecosystem' alone, exploiting the imminent closure of Google Reader and the technology industry turmoil. From a simple social bookmarking tool, the new Digg - with simplicity, synchronization between multiple devices, acquisition of feeds, social content and [a strong editorial input](#) - aims to make a new reading, retrieval and discussion platform. This is a demonstration of the fact that in the 'new world', so-called *old media* need to start keeping an eye on everyone, even on those who have always viewed the online journalistic product as merely content not too dissimilar from a recipe, a map with street directions or a photo to preserve and share.

A home for anonymous sources at *The New Yorker*

In the last few weeks, Italian news has been dominated by the debate about online anonymity, with different positions on the protection of personal and work information on the web. With [the launch](#) of [Strongbox](#) by *The New Yorker*, the discussion about the right to data protection and privacy is back in the news in the United States from a different point of view. Strongbox is an archive platform where people can send documents and messages to the magazine in complete security and anonymity. Based on the [DeadDrop](#) project set up by [Aaron Swartz](#) and Kevin Polusen, it will use a system of reception and access to documents through several steps. With the transition from one medium to another, the use of the Tor network and the protection of the identity of the sender through the adoption of random encrypted username, Strongbox should bring 'sensitive' contents to the attention of *The New Yorker* - on servers separated from the rest of the Condé Nast infrastructure - whose transmission requires the utmost discretion.

The first comparison is with Wikileaks whose data security, Alex Fitzpatrick notes on [Mashable](#), has been greatly undermined by the Bradley Manning case, and the efficiency of the project affected by the legal position of Julian Assange. Strongbox is simply an extension of the mailing address, *NewYorker.com* states, a sort of natural evolution of the *contact form*, from the address on the inside cover of the first issue of the magazine in 1925, to the inclusion of a phone number in 1928 and an e-mail address in 1998. The [launch post](#) explains, perhaps in a slightly ambiguous way, that it is a sort of 'Dropbox' for sources who wish to maintain "a reasonable amount of anonymity". However, the journalist Greg Mitchell, intrigued by the article, [asks](#) how 'strong' is the impenetrability of Strongbox, effectively. With curious timing, the project was launched the same week in which we [discover](#) that the Obama administration, and in particular the Department of Justice, has secretly intercepted AP's phone lines for two months.

What if mass media were an accident of history?

The revisiting of a new relationship between the individual and the multidirectional media universe makes mass media the last terminal of content and documents but not the platform that holds the exclusive prerogative of news and sources, including the most sensitive. What if the

concept of 'mass media' were to be put into question? This week Mathew Ingram [on *Paid Content*](#), starting with [a study by Lee Humphreys](#) on communication patterns prior to the information industry as we know it, raises the question. The thesis of the post is resolved with the title: what if mass media were only an accident of history? We tend to think that once we reach this kind of media production there are no other alternatives, as if the TV and newspaper market of the twentieth century was the perfect and definitive winning option of the historical progress in the field, destined to last forever. In recent years, these certainties, month after month, have begun to be less and less sure with the services - and new communication models - imposed by tools like Facebook and Twitter.

"There is often a pervasive nostalgia for 'the good old days', when a handful of newspapers and TV networks ruled over the media landscape", Ingram begins. The research of Humphreys describes how, for a long time, communication was led by a one-directional type of production. More personal, it found its own medium in private diaries which, during the nineteenth century, began to be exchanged and read becoming a product for public use, and personal at the same time, finding the strongest achievement with the advent of Freudian psychology. A system of personal writing – that was also reflected in the first journalistic and literary production of the twentieth century - which can be assimilated to that of today's blog or, better, to a "slower and less widespread version of Twitter".

The point is to ask whether we should aim for a sustainable future 'at all costs' for a system that has established itself over the past decades, but that is not - Ingram assumes - necessarily destined to survive forever, since already today the products related to this model can hardly find a profitable position in the market. Returning to a debate that has taken hold in the last few days, which reappeared on online news with alternating rhythms, [this is the best of times and the worst of times for journalism](#).

Why 'Snow Fall' is - or is not - the future of print

The industry is dealing with a process of radical reconstruction of journalism as a product for readers and advertisers, in a context where the first are able to almost completely replace the media, and the second tend to move more and more towards mobile, [regardless of the type of content](#). A few months ago *The New York Times* published a *longread*, multimedia article, innovative and appreciated, both by readers and 'critics'. It is the famous "[Snow Fall](#)" by John Branch, visited by nearly 3 million unique users and [winner of a Pulitzer last April](#). The project, which we have [already spoken about in RoundUp](#), was back in the news again, when Om Malik [on GigaOM](#) talked about it as a way - for *The New York Times* and all the mainstream press - to reinvent themselves and scoop BuzzFeed.

According to Abramson, the executive editor of the *Times*, Snow Fall has become a sort of precedent that everyone wants to emulate (a [recent example is Newsweek.com](#)) but not everyone

can afford to, committing months and months working for an essentially free product, and "25 million dollars" to serialize the format and produce "100 projects in Snow Fall style". It is an advantage, in terms of possibilities and brand, that only newspapers such as the NYT can capitalize. Om suggests making this model an editorial format as a starting point, a new core business to be placed on the market like a Hollywood product, with *product placement (creative advertising)*, distribution channels (multi-platform), and stars (big names), exactly as they would do for films.

Abandoning forever the idea of a print-centric journalism, leaving behind the legacy of the old editorial structures and playing like 'natives', with a flexible team capable of producing content on multiple media. Hamish McKenzie [of PandoDaily](#) has a completely different view about Snow Fall and the curiosity created around the project. For McKenzie the success would not be easy to replicate and it would not be useful to reverse the trend of the falling advertising market in an economically depressed scenario. In a market in which the news industry [is no longer attractive to advertisers](#), "no multimedia ad for Land Rover in a 'Snow Fall' story is going to fix that". According to McKenzie, it is an entire model to be rethought, in an industry that has to learn how to deal with a *post-advertising* era (regarding this issue, one should watch "[Beyond advertising](#)", a panel organized in association with the *Columbia Journalism Review* at the International Journalism Festival). McKenzie concludes that the solution may be a paywall, perhaps more affordable subscriptions and a smaller newsroom, or ecommerce. "One thing for sure that will not solve that problem, however, is 100 variations on a one-hit wonder".

Who is making money on the web?

The experiments are numerous and not all failures. This week JP Mangalindan analyzes for [Fortune - CNN Money](#) seven cases of online media, their results in terms of contacts and economic returns and their future prospects. They are the most well-known groups and all are American. In different way, they are working in more sectors and trying to offer products that are clearly recognizable and possibly successful. The first case is *The Huffington Post*, 73 million readers all over the world, more than 500 employees, known for its combination of high - which earned a Pulitzer - and low content. A case history born from an investment of one million dollars - which was followed by another 20, then 315 of AOL - profitable until 2010, the year before the acquisition by the American service provider. The second is *Gawker Media*: online since 2001, read by 40 million users and whose mission, as the tagline says, is "Today's gossip is tomorrow's news". Founded by Nick Denton (from his home, literally), it has now approximately 150 employees and is based on a program of brand advertising and e-commerce on different sites of the platform (*Jezebel, Gizmodo, Deadspin*) that contributes to revenue, with positive results compared to the costs, since 2006. The next project is the launch of a new publishing and discussion platform called Kinja.

In 2009, Choire Sicha, a former writer for *Gawker*, founded with Alex Balk *The Awl*, a brilliant blog which has 3 million monthly visits (according to the data from last January), thought up by Sicha, after finding that in other newsrooms, for him and people like him, there was no space. "We finally just decided to stop working for those people who did not care about us". A business model based on a few simple ads and *advertorials*, *The Awl* does not provide numbers in terms of dollars. However, it seems that its finances are under control. Online since 2003, the Vox Media group will begin to be profitable by the end of the year. Vox operates the sports blog *SB Nation*, the hi tech site *The Verge*, and the recently-launched videogame-focused *Polygon*. The group is working on the creation of innovative advertising projects to entice advertisers to purchase space - for which, CEO Jim Bankoff says "web advertising sucks".

It is the *BuzzFeed* model, another case analyzed by Mangalindan, which makes of *native advertising* and alternative advertising a major source of attraction for big brands. Over 40 million unique visitors in March, *BuzzFeed* (which [was presented at the International Festival of Journalism](#) by executive editor Doree Shafrir) comes from an idea of Jonah Peretti, the co-founder of *HuffPost*. With cats ([here](#) an *investigative report* of this week on PBS about why cats "dominate internet") and politician scoops, [according to the Wall Street Journal](#), *BuzzFeed* should end the year with \$40 million in revenue. Both *Business Insider* (24 million readers, profitable in the first quarter of 2013) and *SAY Media*, the group of the tech site *ReadWrite* (20 million users), should be followed.

From "Snow Fall" to "Snow Fail"

Snow Fall, the *longread* and multimedia post of the *New York Times* [which we have already discussed](#), is back in the online debate after having been a starting point for many discussions on the future of web journalism [in the early days of its release](#) and in the following months. This week Cody Brown, the founder of [Scroll Kit](#) - a New York startup specialized in graphic layouts for websites - has launched a video to show how it is possible to reproduce that kind of article in a very short time. The post entitled "[The NYT spent hundreds of hours hand-coding Snow Fall. We made a replica in an hour](#)" certainly caught the attention of the newspaper which [contacted the author](#) through its legal team, intimating that he should remove the video and, later, eliminate any reference to the *New York Times* for copyright issues (the video, still offline, contained pieces of Snow Fall useful for practical demonstration).

Brown told the whole story [on Medium](#), explaining his position. The video was meant to be a tribute to that type of journalism which everyone wants to replicate and which Jill Abramson, executive editor of the NYT, also [admitted](#). It was to be a kind of homage to the product, to make it a model to which to refer. The position of the NYT was evidently different, [probably disturbed](#) by the demonstration of how easy it can be to reproduce its latest highly-praised 'jewel'. As many

believe, the strength of Snow Fall lies in the nature of its origin at the *New York Times*, a unique model of newspaper with a strong brand, time and money to produce such content. This argument was irreparably compromised in the Cody Brown video. A controversial case which puts a groundbreaking newspaper of publishing innovations and business models to the test of critics.

"More curious now about how [@codybrown](#) re-created the design of Snow Fall than I was before [@NYTimes](#) lawyers got involved", Anthony De Rosa, social media Editor of *Reuters*, [admitted on Twitter](#).

NYT's business model, criticism and satisfaction

It was a ridiculous situation [according to Matthew Ingram](#) of *Paid Content*, who is unable to explain the blind reaction of the *Times*. In a Twitter exchange [reported by Sara Morrison](#) in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, Paul Carr, editor in chief of *NSFWcorp*, replied to the blogger of *GigaOM* and *Paid Content*. Carr defends the NYT, emphasizing that [to reproduce somebody else's product](#) - obviously copyrighted - to advertise one's own brand and products could be [an operation that is not right](#). In a post titled "[Everyone Secretly Hates Snow Fall](#)", Choire Sicha of *The Awl* examines another aspect of the story. Snow Fall is not in *itself* a successful model, rather the result of a *hype* that generated contacts, not full readings (as proof, the average of 12 minutes on the site is too short for a complete reading of the piece). Furthermore, it eclipsed the phenomenon of data journalism of [Nate Silver](#), who in less time and with fewer resources had obtained comparable results. Sicha adds "We all like Snow Fall, we're just tired of having to hear about it at conference after conference".

In recent years, the business model of the *New York Times* has been characterized by the choice of the so-called [paywall](#), which led to satisfactory results for the group. We have analyzed this on RoundUp [on more than one occasion](#). A few days ago Mark Thompson, CEO of the group, [explained](#) to Columbia students that it was a winning, revolutionary choice of which they are very proud in New York. "The launch of the pay model – Thompson stated - is the most important and most successful business decision made by the *New York Times* in many years", affirming that they have around 700,000 paid digital subscribers reached through the company's products. At first the skepticism among industry experts was palpable, he admitted, but it was a risk that the newspaper decided to run in order to maintain a level of income able to ensure the independence of the newsroom.

Yahoo buys Tumblr

In the hybrid landscape inhabited by web companies and media, the news of the week is the acquisition of Tumblr by Yahoo for \$1.1 billion - considerable sum to which David Karp, CEO of the microblogging platform, could not resist. In a post on the official blog of Tumblr, Karp reassured all members, [explaining](#) that the site will not change ("We're not turning purple") and that the control

and the management will remain with the old team. Meanwhile many members feared, more or less jokingly, that the arrival of the web giant would represent - as happened for Geocities and Delicious - the death of the service. Marissa Mayer, CEO of Yahoo, decided to reply by using the typical language of Tumblr users, giving the news of the acquisition on Yahoo's tumblelog [with a GIF](#). A cool way to introduce herself and try to calm the waters.

The lost coolness of a portal has been one of the key points of this commercial operation, [as noted by Peter Kafka and Kara Swisher of AllThingsD](#). Tumblr is a hybrid between blogging and a social network and very popular among the young (mostly North American). As can be seen [from this table](#) elaborated by Quantcast, the demographic index of Tumblr users shows an clear disproportion of young people aged between 18 and 24, making the platform an attractive product for the young market and the use of their data that Yahoo can use to optimize the other services of the group. 300 million young people, *mobile users*, captured in a stroke - [Felix Salmon of Reuters notes](#) - who represent the future of internet users and a perfect index of consumption to be used in a commercial key. Tumblr is "the perfect platform for Yahoo's brand advertisers to use if they want to start building up relationships with consumers, rather than just bombarding them with banner ads".

Is it a success? Not necessarily. [According to Jake Lodwick of PandoDaily](#) for example, "big companies aren't just big versions of small", but other entities, with their rhythms, that end up being killed by the purchaser. There are those who argue that the \$15 million per year in revenue guaranteed by Tumblr (according to the data of 2012) risk not being able to justify the "[desperate](#)" outlay of Mayer.

For young people Facebook is a problem

The portion of the social market in the hands of young people is certainly the most attractive; new consumers who take for granted some online services, using them as an extension of real life. A [research](#) project by the Pew Research Center confirms this figure. It analyzed the relationship between young people aged 11 to 19 years and Facebook. Scrolling through the data, it turns out that most teenagers look to social networks with concern. Facebook is seen as source of stress more than a relaxing activity, an extension of public relations that leads to approximately half of the interviewed *teens* to delete posts and comments, to dose and choose carefully the content to publish, more for reasons of *social reputation* than for the evaluation of data and content to share with others on a proprietary platform. Only 9% of those interviewed, in fact, were 'worried' about any third party access to personal data.

A major concern is the presence of parents ('friends' of their children in 70% of analyzed cases), which leads many of these young users to migrate to other services where they feel able to express themselves much more freely. According to the data, Twitter is to benefit from this

transfer; 24% of users aged from 11 to 19 have signed up compared to 77% on Facebook, with a significant increase of 8% compared to last year.

The research [summarizes](#) that the real concern of teenagers on Facebook is the growing presence of adults, the uncontrolled use of other users and the unnerving management of their own 'public' reputation (the so-called "[Facebook drama](#)") that could lead to a loss of interest in the platform and [the signing up to new services](#) (but not to a permanent abandonment).

The death of the social media editor

The redefinition of the role of social media editor, and new newsroom organization, has been the focus of online journalistic debate of this week. Events have led some experts in the field to change their professional lives and maybe, in some ways, the future of news production. Among them, the announcement of the transformation of the *Wall Street Journal* social media editors Liz Heron and Neil Mann to [the new role of emerging media and multimedia innovation editor](#), a change of definition that appears to be a clear signal of how working in contact with social media will require, in the future, a growing integration with the rest of the editorial staff. There will be needed a new, constantly changing role (such as the open position for [engagement editor](#) at *Mother Jones*) and, at the same time, activity increasingly addressed towards a growing online (as well as offline) presence of a newspaper that can no longer be entrusted to a single 'specialist' but requires shared and consistent editorial strategies.

These developments lead us to reflect on the '[death](#)' of the position of social media editor in general. This thesis has been analyzed by Rob Fishman of *BuzzFeed* in a post subheaded "[Every reporter works for Twitter](#)". Fishman highlights the problems that emerge from the management by a single person of the entire social sector ([as predicted in 2011](#) by Jennifer Preston, former NYT), a role that if undervalued – as [told](#) by Choire Sicha of *The Awl* – risks compromising the work of the entire editorial staff. Some will set up a special team to integrate into existing working groups, others "don't need social media editors because everyone there is basically a *digital native*" and "it's already in their DNA" like *BuzzFeed*. What is certain is that there continues to emerge the need for a connecting role between promotion, collection and refinement of the news, like "an anchor on television" as explained by Anthony De Rosa.

Leaving Reuters for an app

Last Tuesday Anthony De Rosa, social media editor of *Reuters*, [announced](#) his decision to leave the press agency [to become the editor in chief](#) of *Circa*. It is an application for iPhone and iPad founded by Ben Huh, CEO of the memes-and-kittens site *Cheezburger*. With *Circa* it is possible to follow news with a system similar to Twitter and receive news summaries and updates in real time, selected by a team of editors. It works differently from applications like Summly ([just purchased by Yahoo](#)) which is based on search algorithms. The news - as noted by Andrea

Iannuzzi [on his blog](#) - is not in itself particularly interesting. The peculiarity is the fact that in leaving such a central position in such a high profile media organisation, and joining a tech startup ([which he will join in June](#)), De Rosa seems to indicate new and yet completely unexplored roads in digital and non-digital journalism. It is the redefinition of the journalistic job and the concept itself of news in all its forms and processes. It is, of course, a bet on the future.

"Welcome to the new world", [Ben Huh tweeted](#), hailing the arrival of De Rosa. An increasingly mobile world, where [a quarter of tablet owners](#) begin to prefer reading in digital rather than in old formats, and where "people aren't reading 3,000-word articles on their phone", De Rosa recaps [on AdAge](#). "On a mobile you need to be succinct", he continues, explaining that the revolution of content generated by Twitter is affecting the needs of users and hence the *news industry*, forced to adapt to this model and to rewrite the basic structure of the news format. This is not all. Circa intends also to set up a project for the production of original content, showing the will to forcefully enter into competition with traditional media. De Rosa's choice cannot but be seen as a confirmation of how fast things are changing.

Where do I put my article?

De Rosa's farewell to *Reuters* drove Jack Lail, multimedia editor of the *Knoxville News Sentinel*, to ask [if journalism still needs articles and whether articles have a future or not](#). This week Mathew Ingram of *PaidContent* tackles the topic in a post titled: "[The new writer's dilemma: You wrote something really great – now, where do you put it?](#)" The thesis of the post refers to the proliferation of new *publishing* platforms that allow the spread of content depending on their form. The question is no longer just about writing and deciding which is the proper media to publish in - something that was previously unthinkable - but to modulate one's own writing on the platform which will host it on the basis of content, length, audience. For example, Jeff Jarvis admits to being impressed by the elegance and structure of [Medium](#), feeling tied in the writing phase and 'different' when he decided to write for the platform of Ev Williams.

In recent weeks *Medium* [has been increasing its presence](#) with contributions that are often able to draw [attention](#) and generate debate. Medium is the platform created in late 2012 from an idea of Williams, co-founder of Twitter, that will allow (it is still in beta version and accessible only by invitation) anyone to propose articles, based on selecting and *curating* work of a series of 'reasoned' contributions ("[With Medium, Twitter co-founder Evan Williams wants to save you from Twitter](#)" – *FastCompany*). Felix Salmon weighed in on the topic "Where to publish your article", [in the Columbia Journalism Review](#), citing his own experience on *Medium*. Salmon speaks of "promiscuous media" and the need to adapt one's own product to the medium, a capacity to be learned through continuous exercise that makes anyone who writes on the web a *curator*. A market requirement, which will lead to a more fluid media ecosystem in which the winner will be whoever meets these demands in the most 'elastic' way: "Let content live where it works best".

Competing against Twitter: FastFT e Fre.sh

And what of Twitter? It does not intend to be a *news organization*, merely an essential platform for the online presence of newspapers. It is a process similar to the transition of old print methods to typography, Michael Wolff [writes in the Guardian](#), which for decades has configured the way of thinking, presenting and 'rolling out' the news. The substantial difference, in the comparison made by Wolff, is that with the new 'digital capitalism' the characteristic of the monopolization of the functions under a single brand has been imposed. A trend that encloses the market of a service to a specific brand (Twitter, Google, Amazon). The result is that there are many 'printers', many 'printings', many types of 'paper' on which to print the old newspapers, but to make things like Twitter and with Twitter, it needs to be on Twitter and contribute in some way to its growth (as already mentioned "Every reporter works for Twitter").

"We're the platform for global information distribution for the people, by the people", Dick Costolo, Twitter's CEO, explains. "[We're a complement to news orgs, not a replacement](#)". It is not a coincidence that recently the company made agreements with important *content providers* such as Time, Bloomberg, Vevo, Condé Nast and Vice Media, as if to show that news organizations must play with the rules of San Francisco, under penalty of exclusion from the future of web content. However, there is no shortage of alternative experiments, as shown by the new projects of *The Financial Times* and *BuzzFeed*, namely [FastFT](#) and [Fre.sh](#), two independent platforms that [reproduce](#), in a rather essential way, internal and external articles. Link, title, brief summary, live updates, in a process that aims at speed (regarding [the product of the FT](#)) and aggregation based on the *hot topic* (referring to *BuzzFeed*). Like Twitter, but with more context - and some more characters - summed up [Jeff John Roberts on PaidContent](#).

The state of news media

Not too many surprises emerge from the data contained in the latest [World Press Trend](#) analysis presented a few days ago by the World Association of Newspaper and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), except some 'anticyclical' anomalies to observe carefully. The continuous and progressive decline of newspaper circulation in the 'old' West has emerged, with a collapse of 6.6% in North America (-13% since 2008) and of 5.3% and 8.2% in eastern and western Europe. A negative sign also for advertising revenue which showed a decline of 42% over the last five years in the US. Declines in North Africa and the Middle East are more contained (which in advertising still earn 3% on an annual basis) and Latin America (+9% *revenues* from advertising), while Asia experienced a growth in circulation of 1.2% (+9.8 in 5 years) and of 3.5% in advertising revenue, a market driven "mainly by China, India and Indonesia", [according to Pichai Chuensuksawadi](#), editor in chief of *Thailand Post Publishing*.

It is a figure that does not change the overall look of the market, which shows a tendency towards a significant drop in advertising revenue, much greater than the fall in newspaper circulation. In this regard, one of the most interesting results of the [research](#) shows that the sale of single copies has collapsed by 26%, while subscriptions have decreased by 'only' 8%. These numbers, in some way, explain one of the most curious trends in the research; in countries such as USA, Germany and France, the time spent on news content on tablets is the same as that spent on reading printed newspapers, a clue perhaps to the growth in subscriptions declared by the *New York Times* almost exclusively due to the introduction of the paywall.

Paywall infatuation

The exaltation of the paywall model has been one of the recurring themes at the World Newspaper Congress in Bangkok. Editorial and publishing groups are well aware that on the Internet the willingness to pay is significantly undermined by the possibility of using competitive and free content, but the system of the *Times* remains the object of envy of many - even for those who could not afford it, emphasizes Jeff Jarvis, professor at City University in New York - pushed by a kind of paradigm shift. "The general impression was that it would be impossible to reverse the culture of free (online) content", Gilles Demptos, director of Publications and Events for WAN-IFRA Asia, explains - but "The great news is, that is changing", and that the willingness to contribute financially to quality is increasing, especially if one considers the 325,000 new subscribers and readers of the NYT from 2011 onwards (by the erection of the 'wall') and the forthcoming adoption of the system also by *The Washington Post*, [announced this week](#). The problem, however, exists. According to Jarvis, the paywall, while a success for big name newspapers, risks being insufficient. "This infatuation with paywalls", he explained, may encourage the news industry "to replicate its old, industrial business models in a new, digital reality", ignoring one of the major problems of the current market, namely lack of *engagement*.

In Jarvis' opinion, newspapers should learn how to build stronger relationships with their readers, following for example non-traditional media such as Reddit, a *social-oriented* and active community of 70 million monthly users (for example, [NPR has been moving in this direction](#) for a while). On the web old 'brands' work only in a few cases (and the NYT is the most paradigmatic case, [against that of the new Newsweek](#)); the general lack of *brand-identity* and a strong *readership* base necessitates in consequence the winning over of new and old groups of users.

How will the media be in 2017?

Users will determine the future of newspapers and their forthcoming business models. This is what has emerged from [the analysis of PwC](#) (PricewaterhouseCoopers) about the scenarios of the

media sector in four years. The research, which extends its reach to the whole digital sector, imagines a 2017 in which users - more and more consumers or products of advertisers, fewer and fewer readers - will shape the market with new habits and new commercial desires. A dominant aspect, according to PwC, is the growing demand for content where and when *users* want, the absolute control of the use of the product (the Netflix phenomenon is exemplary in this sense) because it is only "connected to the consumer, who really has control." Of course, such a broad range of options could provoke indecision and bad judgment, but the phenomenon - [the research](#) notes - can be an opportunity for companies to act as a filter helping readers to navigate, discover and choose from a multitude of content.

Most offers on multiple media always mean more uncertainty in terms of advertising. The interpretation of 2017, according to the PwC report, will be the careful analysis of data and multi-platform metrics, to gain as much money as possible from the already conglomated rise of content consultation on *second screen* mode (for example, watching TV while tweeting from a tablet). Hence the need to reinvent one's own products and modulate them according to their use because "content" always remains "the king". However, you still need to figure out how to format, package and sell it. The report does not leave much hope for old players. The growth of revenue from *digital* advertising is expected to reach 37% in 2017, and paper (newspapers, magazines, books) will grow by less than one percentage point.

What's your digital strategy?

It is clear that in such a context it becomes essential to work on a well designed digital strategy that allows the ferrying of one's own group through the crisis and, at the same time, to indicate an alternative to the ongoing revolution. The problem, Alan D. Mutter of Editor & Publisher says in [a post on this subject](#), is that there is no single answer. The approach - Mutter suggests - is to think about this marketplace as a "kinetic" entity, constantly changing, which risks not having any more points of reference at any time of the year and perhaps forever, regardless of its own choices. The introduction in the technological market of the "new iThing", he continues, can be as influential and unexpectedly decisive as the iPhone and the iPad were six and three years ago, rewriting the media as we know it.

The idea is to continue to deal with the technological evolution, with changing expectations, preferences of consumers and in the way investments change, keeping the pulse of these three factors and scientifically analyzing the market without being afraid to find new more promising markets, to invest in *side projects* even "cannibalizing" one's own existing business (the example cited by Mutter is the *Boston Globe* with the site *Monster.com*). It's important - he concludes, in this series of suggestions for the future and the digital survival of the *media companies* - to keep trying, with creativity and courage, testing new products as soon as possible, listening to feedback and correcting or withdrawing rapidly, in a cycle of necessary iteration.

Who is the Tesla of media?

It is the research for the perfect product that can change the characteristics of the market of referral forever, rewriting the rules of the game. This week [Mathew Ingram asks](#) if it is possible to find an equivalent of Tesla Motors in the media sector. Tesla is the car company that has innovated more - and put to the test - the whole American motorsport scene, through the production of successful electric cars in an industry which has always been hostile. Does there exist, Ingram asks, a disruptive figure in the media, the way Elon Musk (the founder of the car company) has been for his industry? The first answer the author gives is "*Huffington Post*", since it is the closest thing to the old models (online newspapers, as well as the simple car for Tesla Motors) but revolutionary in its own way.

HuffPost, Ingram suggests, has overturned the opinion of those who did not believe it could stand on the unpaid work of hundreds of writers (or bloggers), nor on free content. It was believed that the readers would not appreciate the nature of the aggregator, and there would be an inability to build such a strong and wide audience in such a short time and have the capacity to evolve from a *viral media* to a website with purely journalistic credentials (in 2012 *HuffPost* won a Pulitzer Prize). Last but not least, the group believed strongly in the "science" of *viral content* through analysis of data and the implementation of specific and innovative *tools*. In recent times, the baton has been passed to *BuzzFeed*, not surprisingly headed by Jonah Peretti, co-founder of the *Huffington Post*. Could Peretti be, the author concludes, the Elon Musk of the media?

Good morning Miss Prism! How a scoop was born

For a little over a week, the worldwide media has been in a tizz thanks to [one of the scoops of the year](#). The details of this story have developed day by day, while of the slides given by Edward Snowden to the newspapers only a handful have so far been made public. There have been many different theses formulated about this story and newspapers and columnists [have been divided](#) on the merits and motives of Snowden's whistle-blowing (check out [our notebook](#) on Spundge).

A story such as that of PRISM with its construction, first contacts, developments, is [strictly related to the world of journalism](#). From what has been learned so far, Snowden contacted the video journalist Laura Poitras (specialized in issues related to monitoring and freedom of the press) via e-mail, asking her to move the conversation to safer means. In an interview released with [Salon](#), Poitras said she had some doubts about the story. For this reason she decided to contact Barton Gellman of the *Washington Post* and Glenn Greenwald of the *Guardian* in order to get confirmation. According to [Michael Calderone of the Huffington Post](#), Greenwald was supposed to have been contacted separately by a former CIA collaborator who, the [New York Times says](#), would [have worked hard](#) (the *Times* uses the term 'frustrated') explaining to the journalist the importance of the documents. In fact, Greenwald appeared to be reluctant to accept 'the rules of

the game' and follow a series of technical precautions which Snowden had recommended - such as using an encryption program to communicate.

[Charlie Savage of the New York Times](#) adds a detail about a 'clandestine' meeting that took place twelve days ago in Hong Kong, between Greenwald, Laura Poitras and Ewen MacAskill, a reporter for the *Guardian*.

The story is different for Gellman of the *Washington Post* (who has won two Pulitzer Prizes with the Post). Contacted by the filmmaker, he was supposed to have worked later on the article keeping a low profile and submitting it to various members of the editorial staff. Only later would there have been rumours of a possible publication of the scoop in another newspaper, most likely prompted by the same source, and Gellman decided to force the online publication - although he would have preferred, by his own admission, "at least a day or two" more. [The piece](#), which came out 20 minutes before Greenwald's article for the *Guardian* (who meanwhile had already written about the case of Verizon which was a prelude to the whole NSA *affair*) was subsequently modified.

PRISM and journalism

Ed Bott on *ZDNet* criticizes the *Washington Post* coverage, quoting some points from the article. One of the examples given is the replacement of the sentence that defined the ability of the NSA to track "a person's movements and contacts over time" in a more generic "track foreign targets". According to the author of the post entitled "The real story in the NSA scandal is the collapse of journalism", there would be all the elements to believe that the assembled article of the Post has been written with excessive "hurry" and approximation, as confirmed by Stewart Baker, a former NSA General Counsel. The hypothesis is that the *Post* took a leaked PowerPoint presentation, from an anonymous source, and built an entire article, leaped to conclusions without evidence and ignoring the opportunity to listen to specialists or bring evidence to support it. The confirmation of the thesis is the testimony [on CNET](#) of an anonymous former official who talks about "incorrect reports, as they were based on a misreading of the document". Of course, for such an important newspaper which has among its medals the historic Watergate scandal, what happened is not the stuff for a nomination for the next Pulitzer Prize, says Bott.

This is not the only issue of a journalistic nature raised by the case. This week, Dan Kennedy, assistant professor at the Northeastern University School of Journalism, [recalled](#) what could be the legal issues which newspapers may face when publishing news documented by sources who have acted illegally to acquire information. The professor replies to an unsigned editorial published in the *New York Times* that, although it does not attack Snowden for his choice, recalls how the former employee of the CIA should "prepare to pay the price for civil disobedience", forgetting that the same newspaper could also pay the consequences.

The First Amendment, Kennedy reminds us, protects the publication of documents obtained through the violation of the law by a third party, in compliance with a strong spirit of anti-

editorial censorship, while providing consequences subsequent to the publication - for newspapers as for the sources. It is a subject on which it needs to keep vigilant, the author points out. In a time when 56% of the people interviewed by the [PEW Center](#) admit that they have no problem with this type of intrusion, it would be difficult for public opinion to be on the side of the *whistleblowers* and the *news organization* that work with them. If Snowden is in trouble, Kennedy concludes, "so are all of us".

‘Blogger beats journalist’

The former employee of the CIA would have trusted Greenwald for his 'external' condition compared to classic publishing and his positions on civil issues. Renowned blogger and activist of the Freedom of Press Foundation together with Laura Poitras, Greenwald would have been contacted in February because of his nature as a journalistic outsider. This is the thesis analyzed by Mathew Ingram in *PaidContent*, who talks about - in agreement with Jay Rosen, professor of the New York University - the best possible response to the long-running debate between journalism and blogging, between the figures of professional journalist and blogger - in this case a lawyer and writer, which Greenwald was before turning to journalism.

The New York Times, Ingram points out, talking about the PRISM saga and its protagonists, refers to Greenwald as a "blogger", a definition which the public editor of the *Times* criticized, defining it demeaning for the work of the author. An outside position from the journalism circle, also in geographical terms. It was the *Guardian*, the British newspaper - less involved in the dynamics of American publishing – and an author resident in Brazil, a country in which Greenwald lives, to get the scoop. The same Snowden, according to Laura Poitras, would have been skeptical at the idea of contacting mainstream media - especially the NYT - and would have rather contacted the London newspaper to ensure a more objective voice and less involved in US events. If there is a lesson to be learned from this story, Ingram concludes, is that not being part of the establishment media is starting to pay off. Furthermore that a blogger, in some way, can make the history of a newspaper and journalism.

The expansionist aims of *The Guardian*

"It is a very American story – but a very British scoop", Ollie John and Kharunya Paramaguru begin in [Time](#), in an article that explores the expansion plan on a global scale of *The Guardian*. A project which finds a considerable incentive in the news concerning the control of Verizon's users and the PRISM affair and, according to the editor Alan Rusbridger, continues regularly. The ambition of the British newspaper to become a global brand is not a secret. After purchasing a few days ago the domain *.com* (to replace the British *co.uk*), *The Guardian*, however, counts on digital editions in America and Australia, and a US readership that covers a third of its

entire traffic. It is a enforced choice, according to Charlie Beckett: "I don't think they're going to make enough money in Britain. They need to have alternative sources".

The numbers speak for themselves: with a paper circulation more than halved in ten years, *The Guardian* has been owned by a trust since 1936, which provides "financial and editorial independence", but according to Andrew Miller, the chief executive of *Guardian Media Group*, will not last "more than three to five years". Certainly the story of the NSA has a global reach, and will help the newspaper in its spread overseas, but the risk - according to George Brock, professor and head of journalism at City University London - is to remain a hybrid for the American audience, between the niche product and the media on a large scale, losing its quirky *British identity*. "Everyone knows what a *Guardian* reader is - a kind of muesli-crunching cynic" as Beckett puts it pithily.

Freelance: a sustainable model?

This week on [PBS MediaShift](#) Josh Stearns discusses freelance work, a topic often overlooked in journalistic debate. With the gradual reduction of the number of journalists in the newsroom, the figure of the freelance has become crucial, allowing newspapers to purchase work at lower prices and without particular obligation. In recent years, Stearns highlights, only a few published reports were able to frame the issue, but now - thanks to cases like [that of Nate Thayer](#) - the issue is back in the limelight.

In short, the future of freelancers is "[economically dismal](#)". "It's increasingly impossible to make a living as a freelancer as the price of 'content' drops", [Jay Rosen admits](#) on Twitter. The *MediaShift* article tries to focus on the undervalued issue of security, regarding both personal (without any assistance) and data and systems used (personal and, for this reason, more vulnerable infrastructures). "The atomization of news doesn't just apply to content, but is a lived condition for huge numbers of individual journalists who have had to rethink what it means to work in the news", Stearns concludes.

The message was clear even to the journalists interviewed by Noah Davis of *The Awl*. In an article titled "[I Was Paid \\$12.50 An Hour To Write This Story](#)", Davis tries to unravel the current condition of American freelancers, inserting it in an editorial context - especially digital - that is extremely depressing. The described system is in continuous loss, not able to remunerate the freelancers as they deserve, failing to make profitable online this economic relationship. The author explains it well: "Assume an editor pays a writer \$100. Taking as a random decent example a \$5 CPM (every thousand impressions, A/N), the article would need 20,000 pageviews to make that \$100". That's tough. It is a scenario with fewer and fewer professional journalists (-15,000 units since 1997), which neither recognizes quality nor guarantees significant returns, even for large groups. Davis concludes by recounting how he has managed so far to succeed. The article will be worth \$250. He believes its value is higher, but admits that he would accept even less.

Journalism with drones

[Research](#) conducted by *Digital Journalism* entitled "New perspectives from the sky - Unmanned aerial vehicles and journalism" (edited by Tremayne Clark and the University of Texas) has been published. The study analyzes the reflections on the journalistic profession of the use of so-called 'drones' (that can be bought [on Amazon](#)) which are different devices from those used for war and espionage. They can be controlled remotely to capture or collect - for example - samples or evidence moving quickly up to hundreds of meters high. The use of these quadricopters - as witnessed in the document - is constantly expanding, proving to be an excellent method to bring interesting panoramas or revealing public gatherings (from Occupy Wall Street to [Taksim Square](#) in recent days) or natural disasters. Its use, however, imposes some ethical, technical and professional questions.

In an article written by [Rachel McAthy of Journalism.co.uk](#), who cites the report "[Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems and Journalism](#)" by Robert Picard (of the Oxford University Reuters Institute), one of the first observations is about legality and regulation. "Anything that goes into the air comes under the jurisdiction of aviation regulators," Picard warned, but the problem is that "most media know absolutely nothing about aviation law." Not to mention that such means are able to go anywhere, overcoming limitations and getting closer to people, invading privacy and the right to privacy. The safety issues of the reporter are also to be considered because he can still be detected and tracked when, even at a distance, his cover is revealed. In conclusion, Mark Corcoran, the senior editor of the Australian ABC, explains that drones "won't replace the journalist on the ground" but they can be useful to "reduce our exposure to risk."

In this regard, the "[Society of Professional Drone Journalists](#)" - quoted by Brian Resnick on *National Journal* - has drawn up a "[Hierarchy of ethics](#)". A pyramid of priority on the use of drones in journalism considering at the base the need of their use (in other words: it must really be worth the effort), then, going up, the observance of safety measures, regulations and public spaces, personal privacy and the rules of traditional journalistic ethics.

Facebook and the news

According to [research](#) published by the Northwestern University in Qatar, [Facebook would be](#) the third most frequently consulted source of news throughout the Arab world. The study, which recorded the responses of more than 10,000 people from Egypt to the United Arab Emirates, showed interesting data especially with regard to the cases of countries such as Tunisia, in which the social network of Palo Alto appears to be the most informative accredited source with 52% of positive feedback. Taking an average of all countries, it predictably emerges with the supremacy of *Al Jazeera*, followed by *Al Arabiya* and Facebook.

The Tunisian figure is particularly interesting - [according to Justin Martin](#), professor of journalism - because it shows a higher level of social media activities compared to the United

States and Europe due to a greater skepticism of traditional media and a strong critique of the status quo - which in recent years has resulted in the so-called Arab Spring. In this regard, it is also worth mentioning the result of Twitter, quoted - only marginally - in the answers from Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

Otherwise, the intentions of Facebook to accreditate itself also - maybe above all - as a center of retrieval of news and aggregation of feeds is becoming more and more evident. [Only this week Zuckerberg's company launched](#) Twitter style hashtags and the new video capabilities of Instagram, in full [competition with Vine](#). That's not all. Another project has been discussed, which moves precisely towards this strategy: that of social reader. The race to replace Google Reader, that will cease its service by July 1st, has triggered a real challenge between [Feedly](#), the [reinvented Digg](#) and Facebook, interested in becoming a hub of information for users and selling new data to advertisers. [Eliza Kern of GigaOm](#) criticizes this opportunity because she says it is now used to work on social networks on speed and not on the storage of feed of bookmarks - the reading of which, moreover, may become public and accessible to one's own social circles. This is something that users have never liked much, considering the [failure](#) of *autoposting* tools such as that of the *Washington Post*.

Knowing how to read social data

Meanwhile, newsrooms have adapted to this situation. On Wednesday, [Rachel McAthy of Journalism.co.uk](#) published a guide to how newspapers can work with social data to target their publishing strategy, since being able to interpret these numbers - according to Michael Roston of the *New York Times* - allows one to become first and foremost a better *storyteller*. Just last week, however, Twitter 'opened' its analytics data to the public, making it easier to understand one's own online performances. The products suggested by the article include SocialFlow, Sprout, Bitly and Chartbeat. At *Metro*, as explained by its social media and community manager Richard Moynihan, the social media team also looks at how the users consult the page, the *scrolls*, time of permanence, the behavior with texts and videos, giving great importance to the demographic aspect - data taken from the pages of Facebook, to know always what, how and when to publish content on the site.

It is a task that often refers to the marketing wing of the newsroom or to a few 'insiders', but, according to the social media manager of *Metro*, it should be made available to all in order to ensure consistent coverage of social media from the editorial point of view. Moynihan, however, gives interesting advice about being patient ("not all stories are made for social"), while Roston of the *New York Times* reminds us how important it is to work on headlines. In an online production environment oriented to the construction of *seo-oriented* headlines, Roston reminds us that content structured for optimization on search engines does not always run on social networks. It is

necessary to know how to be able to adapt, to be prepared to read and accept the *mood* that comes from the network and try again and again.

There is no "magic formula", Amanda Zamorano of *ProPublica* concludes, it is necessary to "experiment and figure out what works for you and your audience, and frankly, your journalism".

Native advertising will not save newspapers

This week, Scott Karp, CEO of *Publish2* (a company specialized in *digital-publishing* technologies) [recalled](#) the theme of [native advertising](#), a kind of advertisement that in online newspapers promotes products and services through content similar to that hosted on the original site. Karp explains that *native advertising* could become the cutting edge of digital media because it is a system able to offer the added value of editorial care of insertion for investors - and even "salvation" for the future of printed newspapers. The author admits that a very similar system (the one of the *advertorial*) has always existed in the print media. Nevertheless, old headlines, still strong for brand value and solid local presence, can benefit from this system working in synergy with companies to create cross-media advertising strategies, helping them to invest and work in a media landscape with known characteristics. According to the post, it is a new source of revenue which should be able to "save the newspapers" on its own.

Mathew Ingram [on PaidContent](#) is critical on this point. First of all, he refers to the ethical objection raised by Jeff Jarvis (who answers incisively, [on Twitter](#), with a "NO!" when asked if native advertising will save newspapers), regarding the possibility that the press will offer misleading content to its readers ([here](#) is a debate on the subject). The thesis of the CEO of *Publish2* has been challenged, however, by a more specious point of view. The *advertorials*, Ingram explains, [have never been able](#) to save the newspaper market by themselves. Therefore, it would seem rather difficult to believe that they can begin to do so now given that the industry seems to have very different perspectives to look at than that of print survival through advertisements which has been in continuous decline for years. "The past can't buy the future for newspapers", John Paton, CEO of *Digital Media First*, [reminds](#) us. If it is sure that from the point of view of integration between marketing and news, newsrooms can do more (breaking down what is called the "church/state barrier"), it is much more difficult that such a strategy can ensure long life in a market that is dying.

Ingram, however, does not forget to emphasize the fact that Karp works for a company that sells systems for the integration of *native advertising* for editorial platforms, "which might explain his interest in this solution".

How to evaluate the success of a post?

Native advertising was not the only 'direct confrontation' of the week. [On Fortune](#), Gregory Galant, CEO of [MuckRack](#), has faced the issue of evaluation of the results of editorial products, showing how social metrics (of which we spoke [last week](#)) might be key tools for the present and decisive for the future of online journalism. When the *share* buttons are included in articles - as is now the practice, the CEO reminds us - the performance of each of these can be recorded and analyzed. In this way the author can face a new challenge that is revolutionary compared to traditional production. He learns to be judged in real time and act accordingly from the editorial point of view, focusing on content that is able to intercept the positive reaction of the readers. Galant compares the classic and the unidirectional production to an Olympic race without data and quantitative analysis, in which everyone competes against everyone and where the score can be kept just by chatting with colleagues, earning their compliments. In the age of print no one could have known the effective influence of one's own article, the author continues. Now, it is possible.

Alex Halperin [on Salon](#) disagrees with the CEO of *MuckRack*. He reminds Galant that there are still jobs, party invitations, prizes, television appearances, concrete signs able to certify the success of one's own work, and that social media are not the only useful method to quantify its effectiveness. As with the debate on *native advertising*, in this case too the working nature of the author who launches the 'provocation' has been called into question in the reply. The theory, Halperin explains, "would have had more resonance if coming from a man with a different bio", trying to focus on the role of Galant in *MuckRack*, a news and social media aggregation service for journalists. According to a [study](#) conducted by [Oriella PR Network](#), half of the surveyed journalists measure success via unique visits, with a propensity of French reporters (77% of those surveyed) analyzing social data.

Journalists and social networks: love is in the air

The relationship between journalists and social networks has become almost natural, both in terms of the collection process and the discussion and sharing of news. This week, the study mentioned previously, entitled "[The New Normal for News](#)", has analyzed this relationship by studying the online behavior of more than 500 journalists in the world (Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, New Zealand, Russia, Spain, Sweden, UK and USA); 59% of the surveyed journalists admit to using Twitter regularly, with a growth of 12% over last year, and 51% use social platforms to find news, although not relying blindly on them (the figure falls to 25% when the source is considered 'unknown'). Also interesting is the data that shows increased working hours (46%) and less and less competitive salaries. Additionally, 39% of those surveyed define themselves *digital-first* (especially in Italy, Russia, Sweden and India).

Moreover, the web is full of *best practice* for journalists on how to approach these tools. As the time goes by, their peculiarity is that, due to the continuous experimentation which takes place in the newsrooms ([as we saw last week](#)), they become more and more precise, and seem to want to

hit exactly some habits typical of the online news audience. The most recent advice comes from the Conference of [Vocus #demand13](#) by Jay Rosen, who condenses in 10 points his "[social media tips](#)". "Don't be a jerk", share good stuff, create solid content and stay credible are fundamental rules, trying to focus on one's own "specialties" and own niche of reference without hoping for magic formulas that help to become 'viral' because "there are none", Rosen says. This week also Steve Laurantaye, reporter of the *Globe and Mail*, [has published his 26 'golden rules'](#), which open and close significantly with "You are one tweet away from being fired".

Readers don't read, they 'snack'

Mobiles Republic [has just published the results of a study](#) conducted this year on the reading habits of *News Republic*, the app produced by the company. More than 8,000 surveyed draw a clear picture of how the consultation of online content is evolving and what is now the trend, namely "snacking" ("People aren't news reading: they are news snacking") rather than reading. There is no more 'reading' of the news in the classical sense: readers prefer to have many small tidbits of news over a longer time period and on mobile devices; 75% of those surveyed admitted to reading the news more than once a day, 70% for tablet owners.

The most widely used format - according to research - is the aggregator, preferred by 73% of those surveyed, a major increase compared with the 33% of 2011. In the same period, the liking of *branded news* applications, especially those of leading national dailies, collapsed from 60 to 40 percent. Social networks prevail as news aggregators: 43% of readers use Facebook to check news updates, an increase of seven percentage points compared with the 2011 data, confirming the fact - Gilles Raymond, CEO of *Mobiles Republic* concludes - that media organizations "must have multiple streams of mobile news distribution in order to reach the mobile audiences and continue to thrive". All of the data can be seen in [this infographic](#).

Journalists who hate journalists

The decision of the journalist Glenn Greenwald [to publish in the Guardian](#) the information obtained by Edward Snowden on surveillance programs in the United States has prompted, during the last few weeks, several analyses which included much more than what this story has told so far, encompassing a large part of the world of journalism. In the last few days, the debate has become more intense because of [numerous allegations](#) made against Greenwald, particularly [on NBC - Meet the Press](#) by David Gregory ("Why shouldn't you be charged with a crime?") and by the reporter Andrew Ross Sorkin ("I'd almost arrest him") [on CNBC](#). The issue, as noted by Eric Deggans of *Poynter*, has compelled the American media to a kind of 'self-analysis' that has led to a public questioning of the profession and the idea of journalism - both from a 'philosophical' point of view and more concrete perspectives.

The nature of the work of Glenn Greenwald has been defined from the beginning in an unclear way by some of the media who told the NSA story. Activist, blogger, Greenwald's position [has often been regarded as 'external' to the sphere of journalism](#), a subjective or unprofessional activity undermined by his unwavering activism - which, it should be remembered, has earned him the 'confidence' of the source who contacted him for his 'sensitivity' to human rights and surveillance. [According to Jay Rosen](#), for example, insinuations such as those of Gregory would look very closely like a way to distance the British reporter from a kind of "club of journalism", as well as the repeated 'attacks' by other colleagues who have not hesitated to call him various names – such as "polemicist" coined by Andrew Sullivan. All arguments, according to Rosen, have been used to delegitimize the work of the *Guardian* reporter by the hottest new club of the "Journalists against journalism". David Sirota summarizes this point forcibly, on [Salon](#). In this club the best journalism is not that which challenges power or intends to shed light on obscure mechanisms, it is that which tries to protect it and keep low the attention to its work.

Defining the 'journalist' today

[As we mentioned](#) recently, Margaret Sullivan public editor of the *New York Times* criticized the definition of "blogger" [used](#) by the newspaper to present Greenwald, [deeming it](#) contemptuous, as if to say 'you're not one of ours', although without judging it as generically offensive. Who is a blogger? Where does activism end? - if it ends. And what does, or does not, a journalist do? The question has inspired more than one point of view. Sullivan herself [is back on the subject](#) this week, defining a journalist as one who "doesn't shy away from the adversarial relationship between government and press", a definition that "deserves respect and protection". Jeff Jarvis in *BuzzMachine* [faces the issue](#) moving from the actor to the action itself, the real moment when the practice of journalism can be defined. Anyone now can act as a reporter, under certain technological conditions – Jarvis reminds us – enough to make the search for a single definition of "journalist" almost superfluous, if not strictly for legal terms. It is the journalism that makes a journalist, in the moment in which he provides his services to an informed community, including anyone who wants to contribute to this 'mission'.

A journalist, Jarvis says, is able to give added value to the process of debunking rumors, verifying facts, analysis and adding context. It is the transformation of journalism from a craft into a real act, agrees Deggans of *Poynter*. "We are servants of an informed society. We always have been", Jarvis concludes. How to define who, doing a community service as an ordinary citizen, gets to do real journalism? An example is the so-called "[random act of journalism](#)", an expression coined in 2011 by Andy Carvin, the digital editor of NPR, describing phenomena such as the one of the Pakistani Twitter user who inadvertently launched the first update on the capture of Osama Bin Laden. It is evident how a media landscape where anyone with an internet connection can do journalism - and even make history - 'behind one's own back' can lead to a less marked distinction

between citizens and journalists, including bloggers and professionals. The thesis of Mathew Ingram on [Paid Content](#) is that thanks to the web, journalism is now something you do, not something you are.

If activism 'threatens' objectivity

It is a process that would have led to something really new, still undefined: "We are beginning to realize that journalists come in a variety of shapes and sizes and come with a variety of commitments," Jay Rosen tells David Carr in an article in the *New York Times* entitled "[Journalism, Even When It's Titled](#)". With such a statement Rosen also recalls the central theme of the political and ideal participation in the journalistic professionalism. Despite the fact that activism is an important peculiarity in the career and work of a journalist, the professor at NYU says it does not necessarily mean that this kind of approach - or vocation - is the opposite of what a journalist does, or should do. It doesn't matter what moves the work of a reporter, John McQuaid echoes on *Forbes* in the article "[Why Glenn Greenwald Drives The Media Crazy](#)". The ideological motive or the pure agnosticism regarding what you are working on are both legitimate, but what really matters is how the information enters into the public sphere, the validity of the offered product, the debate it provokes, and not who put it there.

This argument is strengthened, according to Carr, if we consider the equation journalist = "political and ideological eunuch" as silly, since "it is not a matter of being a journalist or an activist - confirms Greenwald himself to the *Times*' reporter - but a false dichotomy. It is a matter of being honest or dishonest: all activists are not journalists, but all real journalists are activists". In a post on his [blog on Rolling Stones](#), Matt Taibbi explains that from his point of view "All journalism is advocacy journalism". In the work of each journalist there is always a legitimately ideological motive, a licit support that can be hidden or proudly shown - as in the case of Greenwald - but that cannot risk compromising the work of a professional. As the expert David Weinberg says: "[Transparency is the new objectivity](#)". Carr concludes his article for the NYT with an objection that leaves room to maneuver with skepticism. Being an activist - he explains - can often lead to move the main focus of one's own work from the revelation of the truth to prevail rhetorically in a controversy, even when this affects the same objectivity in a journalistic profession - which is where we are today.

The legal issues: who and what is 'journalist'?

In a scenario made of acts of [unaware journalism](#) and story of the truth devoted to the publication of the facts in the name of democracy or a subjective ideal principle, the legal question - the one most closely evaluated nominalistically - becomes perhaps the most complex. The American media are questioning, in a broad way, the First Amendment which defends freedom of expression,

trying to square it with the condition of Greenwald as a blogger, activist, ordinary citizen who may have crossed the line in the legal legitimacy of his own profession. The issues at stake are more than one: how to treat those who are considered by many in the journalistic and governative environment non-journalists, and so not entitled to the same legal protections? And how far journalism can go in the publication of sensitive and confidential data? What to do when the journalist, simply in doing his job, breaks the law? Carr and the Public Editor of his newspaper admitted in substance that the journalist (and only the journalist) is actually the most successful actor to benefit from the guarantees of the First Amendment.

There is a problem about a clear definition, difficult to determine - given the vastness of the subject and the digital revolution under way - and that has recently received [the attention of the U.S. Congress](#). Felix Salmon [believes](#) the issue needs to be highlighted and discussed publicly. It is now clear - he continues - that for many Greenwald is a traitor, someone to prosecute, and although he is not persuaded by these arguments, Salmon admits that the media should necessarily address the issue, understanding the ethical and legal limits of journalism, dealing with this sort of 'minefield' of ethics and definitions. It is a difficult subject to discuss publicly, perhaps not without consequences for the profession, but something definitely more constructive than the attacks made on Greenwald thus far. The question to be answered is that of Kevin Kelleher on *PandoDaily*: ['What the hell is a "real journalist" anyway?'](#) and, above all, who decides?

CHAPTER III

September – December 2013

The war on journalism

Journalism is awaiting a transformation which will not just invest its most "instrumental", professional or economic side. The confrontation between paper and digital, which still animates the old newsrooms and commits publishers and advertisers to find a profitable path, is only the first step to the stage of profound and structural uncertainty that really dominates. These are the elements of a historic transition where it is necessary to understand who the real protagonists are to know how to distinguish the actor from the medium, the platform from the profession (which is doing fine, [according to Mathew Ingram](#)).

"Journalism is coping with two crises which are wrapped together", [explains](#) George Brock, Head of Journalism at City University London. The crisis of the business model, in which advertising as a means of economic support no longer works, and a more widespread crisis of confidence in the media as shown by more than a few symptoms: [the Leveson Inquiry](#) issue and the wiretapping scandal in Britain, the difficult relationship between Obama and the press in the U.S., the pressure on journalists - and [those around them](#) - involved in the NSA affair, the very low levels of credibility of the industry in Italy.

In many cases there is a distortion of different (productive or not) values in an ecosystem almost indifferent to journalism, undermining its historical construction. A sort of "war on journalism" fought on several fronts, which threatens the cathedrals built in the course of time which are in inexorable disintegration, from the role of journalism in society and its reproducibility (and therefore its survival) to its market penetration.

The war on journalism

The story, the analysis and the divulcation of news from the American source Snowden for the NSA case, for example, forced the *Guardian* [to ask](#) the help of the *New York Times*. Such was [the pressure](#) of the British government on the newspaper of London [to accept](#) the proposal of *ProPublica*, which has offered to provide its services to defend the valuable work of connection with sources, verification and narrative put to use by Greenwald. In a way, newspapers and journalists "grouped together" against a system that was hindering the process of news disclosure and divulcation, and that [prompted the directors of several worldwide newspapers and the World](#)

[Association of Newspapers and News Publishers](#) to officially protest to the UK government about the detention of David Miranda, Glenn Greenwald's partner. It was a united reaction in response to an unusual action, as if they had thrown down a gauntlet in the face of information.

The sharing of sources between newsrooms, in response to such a blatant attack on the freedom of information, is what Jay Rosen said was an action "[to make journalism harder, slower, less secure](#)", to create a network and to share the work in a sort of "state of emergency" as during a time of war, to encircle the system and continue to make journalism in an objectively hostile era. In the *New York Times*, David Carr pointed out that people like Assange, Snowden and Greenwald are themselves - in a sense - autonomous newsrooms, deciding in a very personal way how and when the news must be published (and in some cases answering to their own "activism" rather than a pure journalistic spirit - which does not mean [it demeans the practice of the profession](#)).

The war of content

The other battlefield is the redefinition of the newspaper-scheme, the editorial work, the final product, and the whole process of selection and divulcation of news. While the possibility of a return to the glorious past seems gone for good - especially since, [according to some](#), the unique "golden age" of the paper would have to be traced back to the first half of the 20th century, before the arrival of television - the weapons on display in the field are now certainly completely different. Adapt or perish, Brock [warns](#), admonishing those who apply for work in the industry of the future and those who have to train the new recruits.

On [NewsEntrepreneurs](#), James Breiner, director of the Global Business Journalism program at Tsinghua University in Beijing, lists some of the required new media skills ranging from the multimedia story (audio, video, photos, slides) to the analysis of large amounts of data, the ability to do "marketing" with one's own signature and work on social networks; in other words, an all-round digital first protagonist who is more focused on the creation of meaning and storytelling with clear and inimitable content - a recent example is the [timeline](#) of [Joshua Eaton](#) of *Al Jazeera America* about the Snowden affair - than chasing page-views (numbers that [according to Felix Salmon](#) and [many others](#) are no longer sufficient to validate the success of an article or an editorial initiative). It's a way to get new distribution channels and [new users accustomed to the consumption of the Internet and to different "rituals"](#).

The war of business

This summer the thesis "[the Internet did not kill the newspapers](#)" - and certainly not journalism - has found the biggest confirmation with [the purchase](#) of the *Washington Post* by Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon (which has been talked about extensively for weeks - [here](#) you will find a number of useful links to get an idea of the debate). The passage of the newspaper has become emblematic, not as much for what it apparently represents - new media which buys old media, or

the infamous "[iceberg that rescued the Titanic](#)" - as for the future of a headline (or simply a brand) such as the *Washington Post* in the hands of a man who comes from a different and successful professional experience. It's about who on the Internet, unlike traditional publishers, has managed to find a business model, but also the one who, in a sense, has opened yet another new battlefield of this "war on traditional journalism". There is a trend towards the purchase of headlines by new actors and "outsiders" (only this summer, as well as Bezos, Buffet bought [his 'new' 28 newspapers](#) and businessman John Henry took over the *Boston Globe*) who look at these publications as "companies" for their intrinsic value rather than for their "historic" product.

One of the interpretations is the transformation of the newspaper-product (or news-product) to commercial content adaptable to the Internet market, in an environment that has already seen the opening of heterogeneous affiliation models such as [Amazon Prime](#). This is the sense of the Bezos acquisition, and that of his first address to the newsroom: put consumers - and not "readers" - at the center of the work. With a circulation that within a few years has fallen to an average of just over 400,000 copies per day, the fate of the *Post*, according to some [like Ken Doctor](#), could be that of an assimilation to the Prime model, the privileged subscription offered by Amazon which guarantees the almost immediate delivery of the purchased products and a range of other exclusive services for only \$79 a year. Pay a little but consume more, as noted by Frédéric Filloux on [MondayNote](#). Prime customers spend an average of about \$1,200 per year compared to \$524 of regular users. An incentive to buy, with a strong editorial brand, a capillary system of delivery and a widespread and low-cost reading tool (Kindle) that could open up a whole new phase for the *Washington Post* and probably for the entire market.

The war of data

There is more. Companies like Amazon hold huge amounts of data about their users, so as to know the tastes, the way they purchase and use the products purchased, and be able to somehow "listen to the readers" to offer them the product that best fits the expectations of a specific market. Answering a few questions, and simply meet them: "Why did people read a story? How did they find it? What did they think of it?" is the thesis of Thomas Owen on [ReadWrite](#), who, however, speaks of "tips" of the public to listen carefully but to not fully follow, to avoid a "desire to analytics" cynically painted in recent weeks by [The Onion](#) with the fake letter of the *CNN.com* managing editor for [the article on Miley Cyrus at the MTV VMAs](#). The same "packaging" of news may become subject to significant changes in this race towards new readers. And the models on the net, aside from Amazon, are many.

Another success story - as well as another company rich in data about its users - is Netflix, which this week Markham Nolan, managing editor of Storyful, [looks at with a specific interest](#) from the editorial point of view. It may not be far off when news will be redrawn to please the tastes, the economic capacities, the availability of readers' time. As it works right now for the TV series - for

which Netflix offers to buy episodes individually - very soon the need to buy an "unpacked" purchase could establish itself in the world of the media market, article by article, in *mediaspheres* in which one could aggregate in a virtual shopping cart products of different origin as already happens for video content of the portal. There is an ample choice of Netflix original titles and shows of several production companies. In fact, Netflix has begun to produce, using big data available on its almost 40 million users, thus making itself both producer and multi-channel platform.

The war of format

In the world of news, in its small way, the news aggregator [TechMeme](#) has begun in recent days [to rewrite the titles of external items proposed](#), adopting a more "editorial" and less mechanical vision when much of the work of filtering and selection of the news was left to the algorithms. [Digg](#), another experiment [we have already written about](#), has been traveling for weeks on this ground, finding the consent of a loyal and growing community that recognizes the capacity to collect, with a visibly editorial hand, news from different sources with a consistent style. Circa does the same. These days, the app that breaks the news into bite-sized pieces is ["expanding" beyond the iPhone](#) to bring its products to the "browser" public beginning to enter into serious competition with other media. With its micro-posts [Quartz](#), the economic arm of Atlantic Media, since this summer [has become a serious competitor](#) to industry blue-bloods such as *The Economist* and the *Financial Times*.

It is just one of the weapons of this war, which in the end - perhaps - will see as losers only the paper as technical support and those who intended to enter the profession expecting a certain kind of scenario which is on the way to extinction.

Twitter is no longer a social company

This week, many of the comments on the world of online media have focused on Twitter, its future as a social platform, as a distributor of news and advertising content and as a financial player. After launching the IPO, the San Francisco company intends to radically change the interface. [According to Mike Isaac of AllThingsD](#) and [Matt Buchanan of The New Yorker](#), the goal of Dorsey and his partners would be to orient the *core business* of Twitter to the mobile universe, trying to establish itself as a major [second screen application](#), the most natural «social soundtrack for TV» and the newest platform to test new advertising models. An evolution that may seem just commercial or aesthetic, which invests more than one level starting from what Twitter is in the media universe, and how it has earned this position over fierce competition.

In an article published [on the website of the Harvard Business Review](#), Maxwell Wessel says it has become obvious how Twitter has now become anything but a simple *social company*. It is an open platform, optimized for public content, able to survive in the changing media marketplace

thanks to the simplicity of a service that over time has established itself as “essential”. Whether you are a millionaire film producer or a YouTube user - says Wessel - you both need to involve the public in the same way and ensure that your product is shared: «There is a job to be done, and Twitter handles it quite thoroughly». John Naughton, [on the Guardian's Comment is free](#), goes further. He talks about Twitter as a service that «has the power to control the expression of public opinion in the political debate».

According to the author, it generates a different impact compared to Facebook but - most of all - it has the ability to make any *user* a news agency, transforming «ordinary people into broadcasters». Twitter, essentially, is a systemic innovation that invades both media and citizens, despite being created - like any company on the market - to make profit and monetize to the penny everything it offers.

TV first

The reason for the imminent Twitter restyling is to enhance multimedia content and conversations focusing on a stream much more similar to Facebook, Instagram or Pinterest for convenience and visual impact - applications where the photos, which have the highest rates of *engagement*, appear directly in the *timeline*. One of the major recent innovations has not been missed; [the blue vertical line](#) that reconstructs conversations between different users, disrupting the chronological order of the tweets and removing one of the pillars that the whole system of Twitter has been based on for years: the simple chronological sequence of tweets. These are substantial innovations for users but a change in strategy mainly for reasons of advertising, pieces of a larger mosaic that indicate the real goal of the company: to go straight to the TV market.

Since the summer Twitter [has been testing](#) the so-called "TV Trending Box", a section of the site - and the app - focused on the most commented shows. It is an autonomous stream for television, which should be at the center of the new Twitter and its future business strategy. A bet that focuses on the potential traffic generated by real-time events, which are increasingly commented on within social networks, and new territory for *mobile advertising*, which on such a medium would find a whole new market in which to invest, and on a parallel platform that ‘completes’ - rather than competes with - TV advertising. A new course, completely *ads oriented*, says John Herrman [on BuzzFeed](#), the direct consequence of the future IPO: more ads, but more «familiar», more similar to the «tweets from the people you follow, and (...) the subjects they’re tweeting about».

“Native advertising, a peril for journalism”

For a long time now, the real challenge of online advertising has been to look like editorial content ([as shown here](#)) and create what David Carr, on the *New York Times* this week, [defines](#) as the «storytelling» effect. *Native advertising*, which has already found widespread use on websites

such as *Forbes*, *The Atlantic*, *BuzzFeed*, and (most recently) *The New Yorker*, is nothing more than advertising «wearing the uniform of journalism, mimicking the storytelling aesthetic of the host site». Carr reports the words of Joe McCambley, the inventor of banner ads - «the guy who ruined the Internet» - who expressed himself rather skeptically: when you accept ads of this type, although duly labeled, «you are gambling with the contract you have with your readers». «When you go to *Forbes* - which was among the first publications to adopt the *native* model in the section *BrandVoice* - you expect sound business advice and news (...). But what you get instead is a mix of staff content, contributor content and sponsored content. It's hard to know where you are». The search for a model of sustainability, based on the 'sale' of journalistic values, risks devaluing the whole news apparatus – it is a «peril for journalism».

From the purely economic point of view, however, the model offers a glimmer of hope. This is the case of *Quartz*, the economic and financial news portal of *The Atlantic* (which we talked about [last week](#)) that, according to publisher Jay Lauf [interviewed](#) by *TheMediaBriefing*, [should achieve](#) its first profits in 2015 (just three years after its launch) thanks to the help of a strategy focusing on *native advertising*. A tough task, made up of experiments and analysis of feedback on advertising content, that seems natural to Lauf: «Advertisers are killing off print faster than it might die naturally» and a way «in a world that does not include people paying for your content online, or at least for a large chunk of it» must necessarily be found. At the moment, both for *Quartz* and *The Atlantic*, the revenue from digital advertising rose from 10% to more than 60% in five years.

Journalism for the rich

The editorial scenario of the future is yet to be written and the search for sustainable models is obviously still open. This week [on *Le Monde*](#), Bernard Poulet analyzes worldwide publishing in the light of the [purchase of the *Washington Post* by Jeff Bezos](#), his relationship with the newspaper-product and the future of print media. Poulet reflects on Bezos' notion of newspapers as «luxury goods», where news travels «at two speeds»; on the one hand a kind of expensive, elite news for rich, well-informed, influential readers, on the other free news of low quality, following another agenda, which bases its survival on lower production costs and probably large amounts of advertising.

Newspapers for rich and poor, essentially, where the social role of journalism, the guarantee of horizontal information in the service of the people and an informed democracy, is likely to suffer significantly. The same journalistic profession is becoming increasingly inaccessible on a purely economic level. This week, the subject was addressed by Sarah Kendzior [on *AlJazeera*](#). In the last few days, the U.S. Senate has tried to encode the journalistic profession by giving an exact definition of it and the protections it should enjoy. The bill talks about staff or the self-employed who have worked for a year in the last twenty years or three months in the past five years. This

sparked criticism from those who called the guarantees insufficient for those who practice journalism as independent bloggers and do not have a real profession (we have already written about this [here](#)).

«Journalism is increasingly a profession only the wealthy can enter», Kendzior explains. People who have at their disposal a «financial parachute» that makes their freelance career possible are at an advantage, [adds](#) the Canadian author Alexandra Kimball. Journalism schools, which are often a prerequisite in many countries to enter the profession, have an average cost that is quite high (with fees ranging from 30 to 80 thousand dollars in the U.S.) making journalism, in countries such as Great Britain, the third most 'exclusive' profession to enter and the one with the least social mobility. «The result – Kendzior concludes - is that journalism is a profession which most Americans cannot afford to formally enter», beyond the actual definitions.

Newspapers like horses

On 5 August 2013 Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos [purchased](#) *The Washington Post* for about \$250 million. With the acquisition, he obtained both a historic newspaper and the status of an acknowledged expert in digital media. He is regularly asked about the prospects [for his products](#) and indeed the entire industry. Bezos [explained to NBC](#) that he is not going to guarantee the *Post* a very long-lasting paper lifetime and that [sooner or later it will be clear to everybody](#), as it has been clear to him [for quite a while](#), that the printed newspaper is nothing more than "a luxury item, such as having horses, but it is not the primary way of commuting to the office" (we have already discussed [here](#) the topic of of newspapers for rich and poor).

"He is both right and wrong" summarizes Mathew Ingram [on PaidContent](#). Even if the transition from one means to another, and from a whole system to another, is evident there are still many who - following the metaphor of Bezos - continue to prefer the horse-drawn carriage over automobiles. For sentimental reasons essentially, but also for more 'ideological' ones. Cars - as well as the Internet - run fast, causing more frequent and potentially more dangerous mistakes. Over time, this argument has been repeatedly endorsed by those who seek to oppose inevitable evolution, and that may very well be overturned if the scientific, technical, industrial and cultural benefits of motorized transport and digital information are considered. What Bezos has in mind, Ingram adds, is perhaps a [more personal and social media](#) closer to the pre-print coffee shop than the newspaper, a sort of throwback in the way news is received and discussed.

If decline forces innovation

With the same attitude, many protagonists of the news industry are confronting this kind of systemic evolution. In another post on [PaidContent](#), Mathew Ingram explains that this "inexorable decline" for media companies and newspapers can be experienced in two different ways; as a victim, viewing Google as a content thief and bemoaning faded splendour (that of the "horses"), or

by experimenting - if they can afford it - and trying to learn from mistakes and the responses of users. Besides the case of *The Washington Post*, Ingram cites the example of *The Boston Globe*, which has recently launched [61Fresh](#), a "Twitter-powered" news aggregator that collects local news tweets grouped by an algorithm based on geographic parameters. It is not certain that such an experiment will help save the *Globe*, says Ingram, but it is a clear example of how the game can be played.

This week Henry Blodget, *Business Insider* CEO and editor-in-chief, [explained](#) at the IAB Mixx Conference in New York that he believes this is the best time to jump into the fray. The "golden age" for journalism is now. "The world is vastly better informed than it ever has been in history" he says, and not only through conventional news outlets but also thanks to phenomena like YouTube and blogs that have made the ability to create and share news more easily. More skeptical is Ken Auletta of *The New Yorker*, who reminds Blodget how a profitable way to get to this 'magnificent panorama' has not been found yet, and that there is an entire continent - the mobile one - to colonize and make fruitful for the news market that - as [recalled](#) by Jack Shafer on 15 August - has never been economically 'useful'.

How much are you willing to pay for digital news?

On the issue of [economic sustainability](#), Mathew Ingram writes a post entitled provocatively "[The unfortunate fact is that online journalism can't survive without a wealthy benefactor or cat GIFs](#)". He explains that the business models put in place in recent years are different, and that "serious" journalism - as he calls it - has never been able to survive except through external aid. According to Ingram, news has always been subsidized, in a sense, even in the 'classic' newspapers, by all the entertainment products and services that were used to finance them (horoscopes, comics, movie times and open pharmacies information). All this content began to lose its utility to the print media when the Internet was proposed as a more ready and accessible resource. For Ingram, the situation would suggest to the media companies only four possible solutions: finding benefactors (like Bezos), asking for donations (*ProPublica* style), having another business (as AOL with *The Huffington Post*) and focusing on entertainment (*BuzzFeed*, GIFs, etc.).

How many people really pay for digital news? [The question is asked this week by Alan D. Mutter](#), who provides some data and a secure perspective: "Now that roughly a third of the nation's newspapers are charging for access to their web and mobile content, the early evidence suggests that digital audiences aren't nearly as enthusiastic about paying for news". If you try, for example, to compare the number of subscribers to *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal* to those of digital services such as Netflix and Spotify, the relationship appears to be quite eloquent. Netflix alone - which reigns unchallenged in the industry - [has 40 times the subscriptions of the Times](#): a difference that has even more frustrating confirmations in the index of penetration of the two newspapers compared to 2.4 billion worldwide internet users (0.04% for the WSJ and 0.03% for the

NYT). The disparity in the demand for news and entertainment content suggests that "the market for digital news may be less robust than newspaper publishers want it to be". Meanwhile, according to research [presented](#) at the SIIA Digital Content and Media Summit, short regular news items published in particular on mobile devices win out.

The problem of online comments

It is necessary to let readers participate (the aforementioned [engagement](#)) in the life of a newspaper, in the process of putting together and publishing news in all its phases. It is needed to intrigue users, adds Larry Kramer, publisher of *USA Today*, [at the Wrap's Media Leadership Conference](#), emphasizing "the importance of discovery", to interest them before and after reading a story. Kramer continues: "the publication of a story isn't the end of the process; it's the beginning. It's more of a conversation-starter". The substantive importance of the meaning of the process of discussion around the news also emerges from the case of *Popular Science*, the science and technology news website, which [has decided](#) to eliminate the comments section at the end of its articles so as not to undermine the quality of its content and of the reading experience of its users.

Derek Thompson of *The Atlantic* gave an [overview](#) of the state of the comments section in the American news industry. There is *The New Republic* which hides them; there is *Quartz*, which debuted without intervention of the readers and now provides the tools for annotation paragraph by paragraph; there is the exemplary case of the system Kinja, used by the websites which form the *Gawker* group, that allows each commentator to transform the comment into a sort of autonomous post, like those of the employees of the newspaper. Since the beginning of online news, the debate on the 'dangers' of feedback has been rekindled periodically. Thompson, as well as [the online editor and reporter](#) John Kroll [on his blog](#), cannot provide an univocal opinion. Kroll, for example, analyzes the pros and cons: the synthesis of the various opposing arguments is that the freedom to comment is a choice which involves responsibilities and benefits. In the end, to ensure this freedom to readers, it would be enough to administer and moderate comments with patience (the post of Kroll currently stands at zero comments).

Why are newspapers in decline?

This week one of the most [discussed](#) articles in the world of journalism and its evolution is published in *Journal Inquirer* of Connecticut by its managing editor Chris Powell. The thesis of the piece starts from known suppositions: journalism, which is in a sales crisis, must recalibrate its function within society, and the fact that its decline coincides with the rise of the Internet is neither an excuse nor an alibi. According to Powell, newspapers still have an indispensable role - especially at the local level - but their crisis would have to be attributed to the lack of willingness of readers [to pay for the news](#). Are we sure - Powell wonders - that the news is still interesting to people?

In a context in which politics is considered as boring - if not counterproductive - bureaucracy, and poverty and fear impoverish the sense of community, social disintegration may be the primary cause of this lack of interest in current affairs and in what happens beyond the front door. "If you don't want to know or couldn't care less, that's your right, but then the problem is much bigger than journalism", says Powell. The article sparked [more than one controversy](#) especially when Powell says that "newspapers cannot sell themselves to households headed by single women who have several children by different fathers", who can hardly speak or read English and constitute a rising share of the population, as opposed to two-parent families involved with their children in "normal" local communities such as schools, churches and civic groups ("The managing editor of the *Journal Inquirer* has interesting/horrible views on newspaper customers", [sums up](#) Philip Bump of *The Atlantic*).

On [Bloomberg.com](#), Megan McArdie focuses on another of the causes of this decline. Historical newspapers, that seemed invincible giants, have lost their market share as dramatically as their influence on the advertising industry. After the glories of an almost monopolistic past, newspapers have faced competition from new channels which, rather than catching the attention of readers (who "as a rule" they don't aim at), have won over the advertisers, compromising the market forever and relegating their digital heritage to compete not with other *news outlets*, but with platforms that can put up advertising. According to [eMarketer](#), in 2012 Google, Yahoo!, Facebook, AOL and Microsoft represented nearly two-thirds of total digital ad spending. Most people do not get the articles in the way that the media would have liked and expected for years, says Tim Lee of *The Washington Post*, because "instead of turning print WP readers into digital WP readers, we have turned them into consumers of posts they find via Google, or Facebook, or Twitter". The game needs to be played against other teams: new, better organized and perfectly in line with the tastes and habits of users.

"There are many ways"

The willingness to pay for news has fallen substantially, especially among the young – who, according to [research from the Pew Center](#), have almost totally lost interest in newspapers. This week Karthika Muthukumaraswamy analyzes the processes and developments [on The Huffington Post](#). There is little desire to contribute financially for online content, Muthukumaraswamy says, but there is still a small niche of consumers willing to fund projects, even to help set them up through *crowdfunding*. It is what Brooke Gladstone [called](#) "consumer surplus", which from the point of view of digital information has its most exemplary case in the blog of Andrew Sullivan, funded by an elastic paywall of \$19.99 per year (which we have already spoken about [here](#)). The propensity to personalize the news, in the choice of the authors to support and the thematic areas to follow, is becoming clearer and clearer. A trend that started with RSS feeds and its derivatives and has now reached the "personalized magazine" for mobile tools (Flipboard, Zite, Pulse),

applications for *leanback* reading (Instapaper, Pocket) and other projects that are still in an embryonic phase ([Circa](#), [CrowdNe.ws](#)).

[According to Ken Doctor](#), far from the world of journalism, there are those who have the ability to tempt customers' wallets, like Amazon and Apple. A similar approach, such as the iTunes model (as anticipated [in the post of Benton](#) in 2011), may be a good solution for the collapse of the paywall system and free news.

"There are many opportunities for doing good work in new ways", recalled Anderson, Bell and Shirky in [Post-Industrial Journalism](#). The problem, Dean Starkman states in the [Columbia Journalism Review](#), is that money goes elsewhere and [numbers, unfortunately, "do not lie"](#), as demonstrated by the [data from Germany](#) where newspapers seem to be having a harder time even than in the US. This week another paywall has fallen; the *The Dallas Morning News* [is the second relevant online newspaper](#) to backtrack in front of the "payment wall" after *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Free access to content began on 01 October. The causes have been [expressed clearly](#) by CEO Jason Dyer: "The paywall solution hasn't worked. It didn't create a massive groundswell of subscribers". Publisher Jim Moroney says "In the first quarter of 2011, we became one of the first daily newspapers to ask consumers to pay for the content we distributed digitally. Now, we are going to experiment with another approach". From the research, it is evident that subscribers were willing to pay not for the content itself but for the method of delivery and what it represented ("a print experience"). The challenge, Moroney concludes, is to discover how many consumers will be willing to pay for a "premium" digital experience.

"We are not the Taliban of free"

Among different approaches to the problem there is that of *The Guardian*, the British newspaper whose ownership is held by a trust that protects its independence, which has decided almost "ideologically" to publish only free online content. This week Ken Auletta of *The New Yorker* [dedicates](#) a long profile to the newspaper, its editor, its overall strategy and the troubled waters in which it navigates financially. In the last few years a more "aggressive" approach has been established, especially with regard to investigative journalism and scoops, with the aim of making them a "trademark" of the newspaper. It happened with the phone-tapping affair which involved the Murdoch group, with the Wikileaks case and with the NSA and its British counterpart GCHQ, for which [it had shared the work with The New York Times and ProPublica](#). "We need to be global", the *Guardian Media Group* CEO admits to *The New Yorker*, and it is not a coincidence that recently the American structure of the newspaper has been reinforced, purchasing the domain .com and starting the expansion of the brand in Australia in 2012. Not relying on the paywall, the arena in which it competes is the same as the BBC - the *all free* omnipresent

competitor in the Anglophone market - that ensures an oversupply which, in the UK at least, means they are unlikely to survive, the CEO admits.

How much longer can the "everything for free" philosophy last? From a purely quantitative point of view, this journalistically compelling strategy is apparently paying off, taking the website to third place among the most read English news portals (after *The Daily Mail* and the NYT). But its significant online presence still seems to be unprofitable and fails to translate into revenue necessary for the survival of the group - which has begun to make statements such as "We are not the Taliban of free". The print paper is definitely doing worse: daily circulation has collapsed to about 190,000, half compared to that of 2002, leading to losses in nine consecutive years for about \$50 million. There are different perspectives: some people believe that a "too big for the digital age" newsroom should be unequivocally dismantled, others - like Jeff Jarvis - imagine for *The Guardian* a lighter future, devoted almost exclusively to digital and a paper edition on sale "only on certain days". A still very strong brand, a globally recognized voice as a liberal sentinel, that would still have the opportunity to put forward its own brand and its own unique investigative work - the real added value. However, it has yet to figure out exactly how.

The slight presence of women in newspapers and journalism

One of the most [appreciated](#) articles this week is by Adrienne LaFrance of *The Washington Post*. She conducted [a study on gender bias in news production](#) that starts from a clear fact: only 24% of people who we read or hear about in the media are women (according to a research in 2010 by [Global Media Monitoring Project](#)), and reporters who contribute to the so-called *hard news* (politics, crime news, economy, science) are in the clear majority men (between 56 and 67%). LaFrance checked all her production from August 2012 to August 2013, imagining she would find more comforting data. In her articles written for *The Post*, *NiemanLab*, *Denver Post*, *CivilBeat*, *FastCompany*, *Medium* on different topics (a total of 136, from the 2012 elections to the Boston Marathon bomb), only 509 women were mentioned compared to 1556 men - and 52 of her 136 posts did not contain any names of women. There is a margin of error, considering for example that the measuring instrument (a [Gender tracker](#)) does not recognize names like Hemingway or Beyoncé, but the average is striking.

Such a result is perhaps a natural transposition in numbers and words of a still heavily male world, in which women are under-represented at all levels, but it also raises the issue of journalism's role in society. To the question "Is it your job to merely reflect what's out there?", LaFrance wonders if it is possible to look to journalism to reverse the trend, to take advantage of the strong influence it still exerts in the public sphere in order to change things. This kind of gender bias, she concludes, is a problem "but change is possible" if individual journalists and major media institutions take up the challenge.

The digital turning point of *The Financial Times*

When major media players experiment with new methods, many have a strong feeling of being in the presence of a historic moment due to the [symbolic leading](#) power of those who innovate. This is the case of *The Financial Times*, which a few days ago gave serious "[food](#)" for debate and emulation with its [choice to radically revise its product](#), from the way it is packaged to the final result of its production. The newspaper, as reported [in a memo from the editor Lionel Barber](#), has decided to favor its *digital* version over its paper one, choosing to 'squeeze' the newspaper into a single global edition that will be launched in the first half of 2014 (currently it publishes different editions in various countries). There will be a reconfiguration as an in-depth and analysis-based media product, rich in data and graphics, combined with a portal that will focus on the aggregation of internal and external content. The goal of the website will be to add value to the news context on the web and 'dictate the line' for the product that will be on news-stands.

A *newspaper* with less *news* on paper, with reduced production costs and cycles, always faithful to the pursuit of investigative journalism, but with an agenda which will be derived directly from "the web offering - not vice versa", Roy Greensdale sums up in [The Guardian](#).

The decision is based on the figures of the worldwide average daily circulation of the printed newspaper (about 230,000 copies in August 2013), [15% fewer than in the same month the year before](#). These numbers justify the change, especially if we consider that, as noted by Barber, the newspaper registers about 100,000 more digital subscribers than print sales, reaching a total (among digital circulation and paid print) of about 600,000 readers. [According to Laura Hazard Owen](#) of *GigaOm*, the digital subscribers would be around 400,000. Andrea Kannapel of *The New York Times* [calls](#) this change the closest thing to a transition from print to *all-digital* that has ever been proposed at these levels. Kevin Anderson wonders whether it is time to ask [what should a newspaper do in the digital age](#).

This choice - Anderson explains - will not marginalize the newspaper, which will continue to send to print a product able to give its opinion about the most important issues. However, it is evident that the transition is revolutionary and indicative for everyone, and shows how the industry and its leaders still want to meet these challenges to face the future.

Bypassing the paywall

Katharine Viner, editor-in-chief of *The Guardian Australia*, has tried to answer the question in a lecture in Melbourne. Her speech, [transcribed on the website](#), is a complete and programmatic portrait of the current state of journalism, of the relationship with users and the centrality of the readers, of how the web has transformed news advertising and its flows. Her idea of news does not impose the newspaper-structure onto the web, but becomes the interpreter of what she calls "the web's ecosystem", both in structural - with an 'open' offer - and "psychological" terms. It is not enough anymore to put classic journalistic products on the web, hoping that the journalist's work ends with publication. It is necessary to rethink the life of the product in relation

to how it is received and discussed by its readers, showing it to be open to input from them for the construction of public credibility. This becomes an almost equal exchange with the reader, which can be fruitful in terms of credibility and transparency as in the production and fact-checking of the news - and from this point of view, especially with the help of 'professionals' of *crowdsourcing* such as Paul Lewis, *The Guardian* has always set the agenda as a globally recognized model.

From the need for open journalism an [almost 'political' criticism](#) to the paywall system has been started. "How could the future of journalism be safe behind a paywall, when the future of journalism is going on outside of it?" Viner asks. The paywall system is perceived as "antithetical" compared to the *open* web, an updated version of the old journalism without external intervention and public discussion. A sort of digital re-release of the paper, of the system that is defined by the Danish academic Thomas Pettitt as the "[Gutenberg Parenthesis](#)", the period between the 15th and the 20th centuries where news was distributed in a unilateral way only on fixed, printed, indisputable means. "You can't take advantage of the benefits of the open web if you're hidden away" Viner explains.

The risk is discovering yourself to be anti-historical, linked to an outdated idea of the reader - a mere paying passive actor - and journalist, as the unique and uncontrolled depository of news - which now travels and is discussed in the form of "free flow". The challenge is to overcome this structural and "mental barricade", adapting journalism not only to a purely technological evolution but to combine street and elite, shaping the classic production to the web ecosystem, embracing activism, bloggers and readers.

The centrality of the reader

Even for Raju Narisetti, Senior Vice President of News Corp, it is quite evident that newsrooms are to be rethought. He expressed his opinion [in a speech at the International Newsroom Summit in Berlin](#). It's time to stop arguing about *digital* or *print first* - Narisetti urges - it's time to start focusing on our readers. It is not just a way of welcoming indirectly Katherine Viner's invitation to embrace user intervention ("News will have to go to readers - they do not have to come to us"), but also an opportunity to remind editors and journalists that analyze the way in which the public experiences their products to be able to interpret the feedback. It is necessary to represent tastes with an advertising and editorial point of view. Newspapers are faced with increasingly fierce competitors, Narisetti reminds us. Opponents compete with new and different weapons: advertising is spread over multiple platforms, and advertisers have realized that to be able to 'sell on the net' they need to tell stories independently, becoming storytellers who live their own narrative without necessarily spreading it across multiple distribution channels. The call is mandatory: it is necessary to please everyone, readers and advertisers at the same time.

In this regard, the view is changing rapidly. This week Ken Doctor of *Nieman Journalism Lab* addresses the issue of advertising in the press [at the World Publishing Expo](#), focusing on

certain data. Global print advertising has fallen 39%, equivalent to \$51 billion, between 2007 and 2013. At the same time, there is space for new investment in digital, starting from the 'handicap' position where two-thirds of the online advertising money goes to Google, Facebook, AOL, Microsoft and Yahoo. Doctor proposes some alternatives to fit this scenario and to get to 2014 with a strategic advantage: adopting new forms of advertising and offering more comprehensive marketing services to advertisers; devising a different paywall model ("paywalls 2.0"), more elastic in relation to the requests of readers; "selling more stuff", services and digital products that go far beyond the traditional journalistic standard. Worth noting are the recent adoption by the BBC of a [music streaming platform](#) in partnership with Spotify, YouTube and Deezer, or the attempts to diversify its product that *The Washington Post* [is launching](#).

The fusion of old and new media

"Once upon a time, there was *old media*" writes Bob Cohn of the *Atlantic* on [FolioMag](#). It was an edited, top-edited, copy-edited and fact-checked slow job. "And there was new media", fast and hungry. A dichotomy that both readers and journalists learned to recognize. Two different standards, halfway between the two worlds of ancient accuracy and a chaotic Far West of "the spontaneous expression of instantaneous thought...accountable in immediate and unavoidable ways to readers" ([Andrew Sullivan, 2008](#)).

This 'wild' world has been able to adhere to the rules of traditional journalism, the "certain core beliefs typically associated with old media". Cohn's thesis is that the *gap* between digital and paper, in terms of content and production, has been filled or, at least, is on its way. Drawing on his experience at *The Atlantic* - among the most successful examples of digital-paper interpenetration - the author admits that a good part of the newsroom understands how the work of these two 'phases' must necessarily be homogeneous. This is not just about moving desks into the same room, but to learn the language of the other, silently adhering to different platforms, understanding through various attempts how to propose their own journalism and make it work for the widest audience of *readers* as possible - and not only for *visitors*.

A clear example of how the relationship between accuracy, speed and virality in the network is a precarious and dangerous balance emerges from a story published on *Gawker* this week. In a comment, later echoed by one of the authors of the website, a photo of a letter [from Facebook](#) in which a father disowns his daughter who disowned her gay son has been published. The newsroom decides to [publicly](#) discuss it, doubting the authenticity of what later turned out to be a fake with 17,000 likes and 9,000 shares. "Hey, social media, what do you want, a heartwarming hoax or the dispiriting truth?", [asks Nick Denton](#), the founder of the website, sharing the post on Twitter, which collects all the concerns on the issue, but also invites discussion about the process of news production on the net. It is a system often hungry for uncontrolled news with a high potential of contacts, unchecked stories that are able to circulate just because they "circulate", altering the

balance between the viral nature of online content and journalistic accuracy. Two goals, [explains](#) John Cook, editor-in-chief of *Gawker*, sometimes at odds with each other, especially in stories like this.

Greenwald leaves *The Guardian* for a new website

The blogger and journalist Glenn Greenwald, author of the series of articles for *The Guardian* that have so far unveiled the NSA scandal and plans for global monitoring, decided a few days ago to abandon the British newspaper to found a new news company, together with filmmaker Laura Poitras and reporter of *The Nation* Jeremy Sahill. Both journalists chosen have excelled in recent years for their 'politically active' and independent reporting. Greenwald [thanked](#) *The Guardian* for the opportunity and the newspaper wished Greenwald the best as well. The reporter revealed that he received an offer that no one in journalism would feel able to decline. The three, plus a newsroom which should cover a rather varied thematic range («from sports to politics», [according to Reuters](#)), will be supported financially by Pierre Omidyar, founder of Ebay, who has already guaranteed about \$250 million after a long courtship ended successfully as recently as 5 October (although the term used by Omidyar was «join forces», there have been [criticisms](#) about the operation, [such as that of Anonymous](#)).

The amount, similar to that offered by Jeff Bezos to buy *The Washington Post*, will gratify the desire of Omidyar to enter the news industry and satisfy what has been defined, on *Poynter*, as a '[journalist's sensibility](#)'. «I have always been of the opinion that the right kind of journalism is a critical part of our democracy», [he explains to Jay Rosen](#). Pierre Omidyar is [also the founder of the Democracy Fund](#) (whose aim is to support global causes regarding media, active citizenship and transparency). He is also the financier of the Hawaiian website [CivilBeat](#). According to Omidyar, the need to expand as much as possible the range of subjects to be covered is substantial for a greater spread of the new entity («It cannot be a niche product») and for a wider debate about democracy and surveillance. The same subjects which - in the words of the creator of Ebay - have led him to get involved and invest in this completely new publishing venture.

The effects of mass surveillance on journalism

It is not news that surveillance practiced by governments, and by authorities in general, curb journalistic work. It is what has been confirmed in a 15-page letter, written by journalists and researchers of the Columbia Journalism School and by the MIT Center for Civic Media, [published](#) on the website of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, entitled «The Effects of Mass Surveillance on Journalism». Cases such as that of the NSA scandal, which reveal how governments monitor flows of private information, certainly make the contact between sources and journalists more difficult - although they are protected by law - helping to build a climate in which surveillance becomes substantially detrimental to the reporters «as sources cannot know when they

might be monitored, or how intercepted information might be used against them». More specifically, they explain: «The NSA has made private electronic communication essentially impossible».

The public complaint also came from journalists of *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Associated Press*, who denounce an incredible - and, in a sense, justified - increased distrust in the transfer and dissemination of material (protected or not) to journalists. «Mass surveillance - the post concludes - is not merely a theoretical risk to a free press, but has real consequences that are already preventing journalists from doing their job».

Last week, *The Guardian* [received criticism](#) from *The Daily Mail* which called the liberal newspaper «the paper that helps Britain's enemies» which with «lethal irresponsibility» has crossed the line between what should be considered publishable and what should not, in the name of «national security», that is undermined by the publication of «the secret techniques used to monitor terrorists». *The Guardian* [replied](#), asking worldwide major newspapers directors and journalists who have reiterated the concept of essentiality of the publication of news of public interest in the name of democracy. This week, a few days before his farewell to the newspaper, Glenn Greenwald published in the *Comment Is Free* section [an article](#) where he called attacks such as those of *The Daily Mail*, or others like that of Chris Blackhurst of *The Independent*, an «epitaph for journalism».

If the journalist decides to obey power blindly, welcoming - for example - its 'invitations' to not publish some detrimental information, would it still make sense to speak of journalism? And who is a journalist if not someone who works with an 'ideological' mission? Hence the debate in the U.S. Congress about who is to be considered a 'journalist' rather than an 'activist' in order to indicate who is worthy of legal protection (we have already spoken about this issue [here](#)).

Self branding

From this point of view, the persona of Greenwald [is interesting](#). Blogger, activist and lawyer, who has never collaborated with *The Guardian* as a «typical employee of a news organization» (Ben Smith [of BuzzFeed](#)), he is the only one with his friend and colleague Laura Potrias to have access to the full 'file folder' of information provided by Edward Snowden. Greenwald has never given access to the documents to *The Guardian* for which he published the leaks that, in large part, are still in his complete 'possession'. It could be thought that with the signing of an author like Greenwald, Omidyar has brought home a famous signature, a product with a high viral potential (for 'politically active' issues too, according to the [Upworthy](#) example [described this week on the NYT](#)), a bearer of sensitive information for the world's democracies and the exclusive of the publication of the next document on the case. It should be added that in the past months *The Guardian* received strong pressure not to continue to

publish this type of content due to national security issues, so as to bring the newspaper to share work with other newsrooms.

[According to Jay Rosen](#), the model could be the one which he has called a «personal franchise model», with a recognized journalism personality - both in terms of reputation and specialized knowledge of a particular subject - with recognised independence to be used as an interpreter and ‘testimonial’ of the whole product, a sponsor of the *outsider* spirit of the new newspaper. In an article published [on NetNewsCheck](#), Lou Carlozo analyzes the dynamics, the fortunes and the stories of those who are ‘self-branding’, aiming to become brands rather than working for an already established one. Among cited examples, beyond the obvious and already discussed case of Andrew Sullivan (for whom we speak of opinionism rather than reporting), there is the recent one of [AllThingsD](#), which left the group of *The Wall Street Journal*, and that of [Jim Romenesko](#) - who worked for *Poynter* and is the creator of a personal website that became one of the favorite readings of David Carr of the NYT - which will earn, at the end of 2013, 30,000 dollars (instead of 180,000 dollars a year he made at *Poynter*). The post analyzes the risks of independence and *self branding*, a move often difficult to sustain economically that requires - Romenesko says - more than one failure before discovering the secret of success.

Do as Twitter

News like the above and the acquisition of *The Washington Post* by Bezos - [says](#) the author and software developer Dave Winer - can act as «creative stimulus for the rest of the journalism industry». Since the new website of Greenwald and Omidyar will be working on a *digital* platform - and for a *digital* audience - in every sense, the example to follow, according to the author, would be Twitter. Creating a stream based on the aggregation of content that will become a trusted and usual resource for readers, to build a relationship of indispensability on both sides. It is no longer a secret that Twitter has repositioned itself [midway between the social network and the news service platform](#). For this reason, a new digital creature, which would like to inform - but also take strong positions - should have the courage to innovate jumping the legacy of the classic newspapers and launching itself on flows, readers and mobility.

Twitter itself [is moving in this direction](#) through the [Event Parrot](#) service, an account created by the company that sends private messages to its followers distributing worldwide news. It's a kind of personal tweetbot with some of the top stories of the day for those who want to stay up to date but do not follow the so-called ‘flow’. «Follow me to receive direct messages that help you keep up with what's happening in the world», says the Event Parrot's bio, the first (with the homologous [MagicRecs](#) that records the activities of other Twitter users) and largest signal of the intention of Twitter to become more a news outlet than a conversation platform. The company [would be in contact](#) with Vivian Schiller, chief digital officer for NBC News, to bring her to San Francisco as the Head of News. It is not the first offer to journalists (as we have seen [here](#))

by a company that, ever more clearly, wants to broaden its base. Although still 'small' compared to Facebook, it offers, to those who are not registered, a unique service thus reasserting its hegemony in the news over other social networks.

Is it necessary to learn how to code?

In the world of media debate, this has been the week of the [ONA Conference in Atlanta](#) and trends have emerged from this event. Great attention has been reserved to the role of data, computer techniques, numbers, and more particularly to the need by old and new recruits to the profession to learn programming techniques, codes that are used to create a website, and how to implement multimedia tools in their own articles (from html to JavaScript). A trend which is confirmed by many, as summarized by Frederic Filloux [on Monday Note](#): 'old-fashioned' journalism is now extinct, the habits of readers have modified and changed according to the device used and the time of day in which it is consulted. News must be there, appealing to the public and investors, different for each need and workable for each means. In effect, we need to learn to speak more than one language, and understand what is the best way to tell our own stories [says media consultant Mario R. Garcia](#) on his blog.

This week, the most discussed article was by Olga Khazan [on The Atlantic](#) about the need to learn how to code. Her stance is critical and clear and tries to find a 'flaw' [in this popular and unwavering belief](#). According to Khazan, whoever intends to become a journalist should spend time looking for an internship, work freelance, learn to write and be in a newsroom rather than work with tools that, in most cases, are useless, and that can be used in a simplified way thanks to the many tools available online. This is all the more true - Khazan continues - if you consider that in 'modern' newsrooms there is a growing trend to segment the work by assigning a specialization to each team member ("like video, interactive graphics"), making unnecessary the need to learn more things which could penalize a foundational aspect of the profession (writing). Khazan's point of view is summed up by Evgeny Morozov [on Twitter](#): «To teach everyone how to code, do we first have to teach them how to read?».

«It's 2013 — are we still arguing?»

There have been numerous reactions to the article of *The Atlantic*, focused on the issue of what to teach in journalism schools and what those already in work need to learn; in short, on the need «to get your hands dirty» (Mark Hansen of the Columbia Journalism School, republished [by Capital New York](#)) with numbers, applications and strings. Steve Buttry explains [on his blog](#) what he thinks are the reasons why it would be essential to open up to new forms of production and learn new ways of working such as *coding*. Journalistic careers are now unpredictable and graduates need «a well-rounded» education, not knowing what their future will be, what they want to do or what the future media landscape will be. They need to 'shine' over the

average media – this is Buttry's suggestion - build a curriculum that stands out over others, offering different skills from those now within the reach of all. The thesis of Robert Hernandez of USC Annenberg [on NiemanLab](#) is more conciliatory: «I do agree that not all journalists need to learn and master coding in JavaScript, Python, or Ruby», but it is necessary - he continues - they know what it is, and that are able to understand what is behind the framework of a piece or an entire website when it goes online, being able to maintain an adequate degree of digital literacy to better communicate with their colleagues. «It's 2013 – are you really arguing against learning technology?».

«A *digital journalist* (or *web journalist*) focuses on producing journalism of the web, not just on the web», Hernandez continues. That can manifest itself in a diverse set of roles, but with the tools that are needed to be known - or at least 'getting a taste' - of almost everyone. The theme of «technological literacy» is one of the fundamental hypotheses of the opinion of Noah Veltman of *Knight-Mozilla OpenNews*. Learning to talk and work with the language of the web is needed in order to continue to devote oneself with the new tools in that 'mission' that journalism has become, and which now comes in the form of new challenges - to understand complex data, make them readable to the widest possible audience so as [not to undermine the basis](#) of an informed democracy. Moreover, Veltman explains that it cannot be assumed as an absolute the thesis that 'all journalists should learn to code' nor the opposite («Journalism is not a monolith»). David Holmes [made a flowchart](#) to answer to the 'binary question' «Should you learn to code?».

Can digital billionaires rescue journalism?

No matter if you are a citizen journalist who publishes your content on *CNN iReport*, an editor of mobile app *Circa* or a reporter of *The New York Times*, it is clear to everyone that there is now a new definition of journalism explains Jonathan Peters [on PBS MediaShift](#). A new role, which is more elastic, which demands - as has been seen - an unambiguous definition in professional terms, when non-legislative. If the platforms for consultation change, just as the demands of readers and methods of production are [constantly changing](#), is it not reasonable to think of journalism, in historical terms, as an obsolete profession? [It is the theory of new media expert George F. Snell](#) who is wondering if in 10-20 years there will still exist this role in the media. It is no surprise, he explains, that journalism jobs are at their lowest levels since 1978 in the U.S. Snell's thesis has been developed around [one of the key items of news this week](#): the recruitment of *The New York Times* columnist David Pogue as a Yahoo Content Marketer. Pogue is just the latest in a long line of journalists who have been recruited by companies (Dan Lyons from *Forbes* to HubSpot, Ben Worthen from *The Wall Street Journal* to Sequoia Capital, but also [the parting of De Rosa from Reuters](#)). «Are we witnessing the decline of a profession?», asks Snell. Is it true that all the companies are already gearing up [to become "media companies"](#)?

Journalism (and not the papers themselves), for what it represents in commercial and social terms, continues to be a strong attraction for the *lords* of the tech industry. «You cannot launch a successful modern media company without technology as an equal partner», says Kenneth Lerer, a businessman who has invested in products such as *The Huffington Post* and *BuzzFeed*, and in the last few weeks a number of events have given a sense of how "the fortunes and ideas of the tech industry" are heading directly towards the news industry. This is the theme of [an article by David Carr](#) of this week, which starts from the editorial project funded by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar (which we talked about [last week](#)) and the investment of \$250 million of Jeff Bezos in *The Washington Post*. [They are just two](#), says Carr, of the increasing examples of the genre (starting with Laurene Powell Jobs with Ozy Media and Chris Hughes of Facebook with *The New Republic*). According to Omidyar [his aim](#) is getting into the content market to find a profitable and lasting way to inform the widest possible audience and to "serve the public interest in a commercially viable way". The tech industry is perhaps the only sector that can do it, but the most common question in recent months is "[can digital billionaires rescue journalism?](#)".

When the 'new' has difficulty in taking off

Three years after the launch of the iPad, products for tablets are still struggling to establish themselves. The tablet magazines readership is just 3.3% of total circulation, and even the top selling industry *Game Informer*, which has reached its maximum with 3 million digital copies, is experiencing a slight crisis. The problem, explains Lucia Moses in a long article [on AdWeek](#), is not the tablet itself (in 2017 users will increase from 128 million to 160 million), but the idea of a 'closed' content, 'printed' albeit on another instrument, unattractive to the reader and for the advertising industry. The lack of interaction, the natural tendency to real-time reading and sharing with one's own contacts, would make this kind of reading an almost obsolete experience. The article suggests that apps like Flipboard take advantage of this need by aggregating content and social connections and managing to bring their members to more than 90 million - despite encountering some hostilities, such as those of *Wired* and *The New Yorker*.

Even the *native advertising* system, another trend of recent times (of which we have [already](#) spoken), is running up against the first unknowns. In addition to [difficulties of users](#) (due to the fact that this type of business content appears to be similar to editorials), advertising agencies also seem to have doubts. To overcome the difficulty of working closely with editorial offices, it's time to "get in the same room" - as can be read [on AdWeek](#) - but reluctance is coming from the advertiser side. Many customers who pay for a functional, effective, high-impact ad still prefer to 'play it safe' and invest in more classical products. We have to make it "easier to understand for our advertisers", explained the Digital Ad department of *Time* Inc. It is a urgent need if you consider that 73% of members of the [Online Publishers Association](#) offer clients and agencies advertising products which fit native advertising.

Investigative objectivity and future journalism: two models

Since two Sundays ago, the [conversation](#) between Glenn Greenwald and Bill Keller, former editor of *The New York Times*, has monopolized the American and international media debate. The themes confronted are the future of journalism and the role of activism and objectivity in its production, which are not new arguments. In the last few months, however, as pointed out by Hamish McKenzie [of PandoDaily](#), the two issues have been brought back in an almost inescapable and natural way inside a completely new general context (regarding the profession) where the news of the NSA affair (and how the sources were processed and spread) are likely to influence the work of journalism and its [definitions](#).

Keller wonders whether the style of the journalist, blogger and activist Greenwald, a work of reportage animated by ideological motivations, is to be considered legitimate and a possible future model, or if a more classical one, adhering to the style of *The New York Times* and the precepts of neutrality without ideological prejudices and opinions, is still to be preferred. Greenwald replies that too often the presumed impartiality ended in influencing the work of the reporter (one of the examples is the number of times the word "torture" has been used to describe [waterboarding](#), a practice which is defined differently in each country where it is practiced). For Greenwald a healthy and honest declaration of one's own 'visions' regarding the matter on which the work is about, accompanied by a clear report of the facts, is a more honest way to address readers to help them participate in the precise vision in which the events are being told, analyzed and commentated.

«All journalism is a form of activism», Greenwald points out. It is better to honestly disclose subjective values, without fomenting the myth of a distinction between those who write without holding opinions and others who risk being affected, even from the institutional point of view (the pressure of governments, the defense of the nation). For Keller, this distinction exists and it is the basis of an objective account of the facts. It represents the ability to suspend one's own judgment, and let the news unveil itself without any deformation, working with a cohesive newsroom which knows well how and when to publish news that might be deemed a «threat to national security» (as in the case of the choice of the NYT in 2005, when it decided to suspend the publication of investigations into the practices of NSA spying). The long exchange generated [a broad debate](#) that found the meeting point in the opinion of commentators like Andrew Sullivan, who embraces both theses *on The Dish* («[Why Not Both?](#)»).

Trying to appear objective «is, in other words, not actually being objective or impartial». Hiding one's own biases, and trying to appear objective, can mean «the opposite of honest». On the other hand, Sullivan continues, Greenwald is still expected to demonstrate a closer 'institutional' production, with a traditional newspaper and a more classical collaboration (with *The Guardian* he has so far worked in an 'anomalous' way, both as a blogger and as a reporter). It is an approach - he concludes - of which there is a need, even as an alternative to the idea of journalism in the NYT

style embodied by Keller to mix the "old testament" and the "new testament" of a journalism for which "the Messiah has not yet arrived" [comments](#) Jay Rosen.

How the collaboration between The Guardian, NYT and ProPublica works

James Ball from *The Guardian* and Jeff Larson from *ProPublica* shared with the audience at the Mozilla Festival in London some of the behind-the-scene stories on the [collaboration](#) between the two newsrooms and *The New York Times* on the NSA affair - as [reported by Journalism.co.uk](#). A union of efforts that has eased pressure on the British newspaper (which cannot benefit, of course, from the protections of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution) and which ensured a more accurate and speedy investigation of the data. It was a story defined as "technically challenging", which required a full-time effort and a large number of employees.

Unlike other 'stories', in which the road between the original source and final scoop was not as impervious as in the Wikileaks case (which, according to Ball and Larson, was able to reach the front pages of newspapers almost 'automatically'), a job of decoding was needed, that involved several people and a necessary collaboration. The work between the three editors "went pretty smoothly", said Larson. There were meetings in which they worked together on information which became articles written by each team - different from one another, each with its respective style and on the basis of the findings. According to Ball the support of specific newspapers, both financially and technically equipped, was fundamental: «Without well-resourced newsrooms you could not do it».

Is writing for free «slavery»?

Last week, in the worldwide journalistic debate, the issue of working for free on the Internet came back, prompted by an article by Tim Kreider [on the Sunday Review of The New York Times](#). The argument returns cyclically producing opinions and debates, and it is the sign - [Mathew Ingram points out](#) - of how the economic and financial issues are destined to become increasingly important in this period of rapid 'upheaval' in the industry - both in terms of the point of view of the industry and that of the individual. Even more if one is facing a revolution of a productive nature: the possibility for everyone, everywhere, to produce content at no cost in an environment in which - according to Kreider - it is practically impossible to make a profit. Internet, like the atomic bomb in war, made everything else obsolete, it is a real weapon aimed against creativity. No one considers a haircut or a can of soda at no cost, he says, just as no one should expect that the intellectual effort of anyone should be rewarded with nothing but 'exposure' («Artist dies of exposure»). Kreider speaks of «slavery», a definition that Ingram on *PaidContent* refuses, reminding us how the marketing scenario and production processes of editorial content have changed significantly - especially in economic terms.

Derek Thompson [in *The Atlantic*](#) tries to evaluate the two opposing theses. No one should work for free, because writing is an activity that should be compensated and not a luxury. However, pretending that no one should agree to work for free is no longer possible, because this possibility has given the chance to break down barriers and categories and bring to light ideas, contents and signatures that previously had not had the opportunity to be read - the author calls it «Intellectual surplus», an exposure for a long-term benefit, according to Dan Lewis [in *Medium*](#). For Lewis, it is quite likely that an exposure in return for free labor is not 'real' exposure, and can not be turned into something really useful. For those who write for free, it is no longer a matter of enriching a *portfolio* of new articles, but to "convert" followers - or at least part of them - into audience. It is an almost necessary sacrifice, especially for young people, according to Daniel D'Addario [in *Salon*](#), who does not forget to point out that writing for newspapers that are not school newspapers - for which one really writes for free - means to work "for negative dollars ", since a well made product still provides a cost in terms of processing.

From The New York Times to Mashable

Other important news from last week was the [passage](#) of Jim Roberts, the Assistant Managing Editor of *The New York Times* - as well as a former leading figure of Reuters - to [Mashable](#), the website for which he will become executive editor and chief content officer. His stated goal is to expand the 'journalistic' base of the newsroom, currently focused on the aggregation of content produced by others and on technological content, through the use of the 'social web-skills' of the website. [Contacted](#) by *PaidContent*, Roberts admitted having great confidence in the projects of Pete Cashmore, founder and CEO of *Mashable*, and in the ambitions of the newsroom, a project of 20 million unique visitors monthly which, according to CEO Mike Kriak, would currently be in positive territory from the economic point of view.

The arrival of a protagonist of 'classic' journalism - although aware of the digital revolution - is part of the [same trail](#) of 'transfers' such as Ben Smith from *Politico* to *BuzzFeed* and Tim O'Brien from *The New York Times* to *The Huffington Post*. It is a growing sequence of journalists who came from stable newsrooms and have decided to give their own 'old media' contribution to new digital projects born without purely journalistic pretensions and different structural inheritances.

Twitter's secret

The launch of Twitter on the New York Stock Exchange has been one of the most significant events of the week, and not only for its above expectation result, which set the price per share at nearly twice the initial public offering. Twitter is not the first social network to land on Wall Street, but it is definitely the one on which have been placed the most expectations and curiosity, considering its birth (an idea that came [from a sketch](#)), its development, its disarming simplicity and the way it became crucial for the media in general, and attractive to users, getting [one of the](#)

[major means of finding](#) and sharing news. [Paul Ford of Bloomberg Businessweek explains](#) - in a cover story that [was creating problems](#) for the selection of the cover image - how Twitter has become central in the life of most web users, a sort of "web identity" that increasingly serves as an access key - or better, a way for registering - to other websites obliged to shape their interfaces (for example the *tweet button* [mentioned by Joshua Benton this week](#)) and their products based on Twitter experience.

Ford tries to examine the hidden mechanism, everything that is behind a tweet: not only as simple set of 140 characters, but also as a means by which information can be captured and reassembled by millions of other websites. It is the mechanism of the 'third parties' applications that thanks to the Twitter API (the set of technical information made available to other programmers) makes Twitter a platform on which software developers of other companies can work, improving the adaptability, making it more valuable at no cost. "All tweets share the same anatomy" Ford explains, but it is something more than a couple of sentences and a hashtag. It is an entire and fascinating technological and financial mechanism that responds perfectly to the human impulse of communication, of the manifestation of the desire "to inform, to amuse, to outrage". Certainly it is nothing new with respect to human nature and its physiological need - some say that Twitter is more a discovery than an invention - but the strength of the medium has been to provide a place, a format, a simplified approach and the ability to access it anywhere with mobile applications (the San Francisco-based company was among the first to understand that smartphones "could work as a broadcast platform").

How Twitter "changed the world"

The definition that Twitter has affected more than one aspect of 'media life' is now accepted. This week the BBC website [has published](#) a timeline to tell the story of its evolution and explain how and what areas of life have been radically changed since its introduction. From the birth with the name of "twtr" in 2006 to a little past its recent hashtag adoption (through the 'invitation' of users, in 2007), Twitter recounted and accompanied much of recent history. From politics, which has experienced a new form of campaign communication and the *failures* of politicians forced to resign, to breaking news (above all [the tweet of Sohaib Athar](#) on the capture of Bin Laden in Abbottabad) and activism, making it the ideal tool to collect, spread and coordinate protests. The dimension of online and of general news began to take on new connotations. In fact, now we very often read about the "golden age of news" ([Bill Keller of The New York Times](#) is just the latest). Even the arts, law and business have been subjected to some influence. Although the numbers of the Californian social network cannot be compared to those of Facebook, "no social network has quite the influence of Twitter".

[Alexis Madrigal of The Atlantic](#) has analyzed the most shared tweets in an attempt to figure out what they were saying about Twitter and its users. Among the top twelve, there is one written

by the astronomer Neil deGrasse Tyson, one by the football player Cristiano Ronaldo, some by *teen* icons, one by the rapper Drake and another by Dropbox, witnessing how the average age of users is obviously low and how the dominant interests are related to sports, technology and pop culture in general. An awareness that must have led the company - the author assumes - to adapt the means to the needs of the youngest users and advertisers (in fact one of the tweets selected by Madrigal is an advertising post), [simplifying the interface](#). The emancipation from "hardcore information experience" with an indirect language (@, #, RT) and a rival such as Facebook did not stop it from establishing itself as a necessary tool, as a 'place to be', in one's own way and with one's own "obsessions".

A platform for news consumption

This week [a study conducted by the Pew Research Center](#), on the habits through which Americans get news, gave new data on the use of Twitter as a *news platform* and the level of penetration of news in the population. Only 8% of U.S. adults consume news on Twitter (which is the platform used by 16% of these), although it stands out that they are younger, more educated and better prepared to read through via mobile than the 30% of Facebook users of the same bracket. Four-in-ten (40%) Twitter news consumers have, at least, a bachelor's degree, compared with 29% of the total population and 30% of Facebook news consumers. 45% of Twitter news consumers are 18-29 years old, more than 34% of those who do it via Facebook and more than double their demographic representation of the whole population (21%). The strengths that emerged from the study are known. The ability to be a collector of real-time news, being at the same time a multidirectional conversation tool ("It is, essentially, sentences with friends", [Kathryn Schulz of New York Mag](#) summarizes in an article which tries to explain how, despite the skepticism, Twitter has 'conquered' her).

Numbers that, despite the precise generalizations, cannot represent the entirety of the population in any way. There are many examples. As the study points out, Ron Paul would easily have won the Republican primary in 2012, according to the analysis of tweets during the elections (55% of the conversations about him were "positive" to the detriment of the actual winner, Mitt Romney). The reaction of Twitter users compared to the polls was quite different, on a national basis, on gun control after the Newton shooting. This week, [Marty Kaplan of Salon](#) launches a warning about the levels of 'ignorance' in his own country. Americans who follow the news are in a minority, while the overwhelming majority "may as well be living on the moon". The main source of news is still TV and 38% of online readers spend an average of only 90 seconds per day looking for news on the web. Young people between 18 and 31 spend only 46 minutes a day watching, reading or listening to news, compared with 66 minutes of the 33-47 bracket and 77 minutes of those between 48 and 66 .

Adapt or die

The challenge for journalism is how to catch new readers, in particular those regular web users who aren't currently news followers. It is a preliminary challenge of the now epic search for a future *business model*, and one that Cory Haik, Senior Editor of *The Washington Post*, summed up [on her Tumblr](#) with the term "adaptive journalism". According to Haik, journalism should be able to offer "the best storytelling for the user at that moment, given how much we can presuppose about their time/space continuum, as it were". In other words, she specifies, adapt the news and tools to the environment and to readers. Catch their attention and adapt to their needs - and to do so, it is necessary to embrace every new technological development, using any platform to ensure that potential readers, in some way, continue to consume news. This week, [Frederic Filloux in one of two posts explains](#) how \$250 million should be invested today (which is the amount [spent by Bezos for The Washington Post](#) and Pierre Omidyar [for the new publishing product which will involve Glenn Greenwald](#)) in digital journalism.

For years, [Haik continues](#), traditional journalism has managed to maintain some relevance by imposing its own 'calendar' (the morning paper, the news on schedule), but in a world dominated by a 24/7-hour *news cycle* the flexibility of sharing news instantaneously is essential, and platforms like Twitter represent a big opportunity. In this regard, the interview released this week by Nate Weiner of Pocket [on FastCompany](#) is interesting. It shows that the average longevity of an article on the internet (at least among those saved on the service which allows the creation of a list of posts to be read at a later time) is about 37 days before they fall forever into the group of content never read. According to Haik "modern technology and social media have forever altered the way in which we transmit and consume information". Nevertheless, the writer concludes, the earliest humans had thousands of years to evolve and develop an organized communication system. Compared to this, the revolution which is taking place in the media has been developed recently: "we just have to be open to change and meet the consumers where they are".

The secret of creating a viral post

In an article entitled [«Viral journalism and the Valley of Ambiguity»](#), Annalee Newitz of *io9* tries to figure out what is the pattern which influences the virality of online content. Her theory, she admits, has no scientific validity, and it is based on her own editorial experience. Newitz explains that we define articles viral when they can exercise influence on social media like Twitter, Reddit, Pinterest and Twitter, irrespective of their editorial value, and on the basis of dynamics yet to be deciphered. The framework outlined by the author shows that 'unquestionable' content gains virality because it does not raise doubts, that «you don't have to worry whether your friends will wonder why you shared this – it's obvious» and includes a quality range from banal *lolcats* to the unveiling of "hidden truths" through fact-checking. What is more difficult is to be able to share analysis, *longform* articles, political comments, for which it is potentially necessary to engage in discussions based on their «ambiguity», hence the title of the article. «There are

plenty of stories that get read, but not shared», Newitz concludes, because «we measure success by what people aren't afraid to share with their neighbors».

This week the same issue is partly addressed by [Derek Thompson of The Atlantic](#) regarding [UpWorthy](#), which is among the more efficient machines in terms of virality with posts which receive millions of visits. The opportunity comes [on behalf](#) of the *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation*, which is going to 'ride' the tool to launch its online campaign against global poverty. The staff of the website, which boasts of being the team that scours the Web for «stuff that matters», is famous for generating more than one headline for each post - so as to test the public and choose the best - with a recurring and recognizable scheme that Thompson calls «unapologetic, sentimental, cliff-hangery as heck, and two sentences long» (an example, «[The Things This 4-Year-Old Is Doing Are Cute. The Reason He's Doing Them Is Heartbreaking](#)»). One of the secrets, the writer explains, is what he calls a «curiosity gap», encouraging the reader to click to satisfy the temporary interest. However, this is not enough. According to Eli Pariser, co-founder and CEO of *UpWorthy*, content shared by users, especially videos, is almost always what was worth sharing: «We look at how much people click, but also how much people share [after they click]. The only way to get something that does really well is to deliver the quality that you're promising in the headline». Nathan Jurgenson expresses a completely different view [on Twitter](#): «Upworthy as the Internet's McRib» referring to a pre-packaged fast-food sandwich, 'branded' with the same - unpleasant - [side effects](#).

Catching the attention of readers

One example of virality, with a hybrid content of socialization and news, is represented by «[North-o-Meter](#)» of [UsVsTh3m](#). Founded by former UX Lead at *the Guardian* Martin Belam, *UsVsTh3m* (a portal that makes the involvement of the user its own core business) has launched, this week, an interactive post of easy questions to test how much of a Northerner the readers are, encouraging who answers to share the results. Created by an internal startup (Trinity Mirror), the game has attracted more than 3 million unique visitors, about 20,000 unique simultaneous visitors, more than one million likes on Facebook and 40,000 tweets. Doomed to *mobile first*, *UsVsTh3m* has increased since September to October from a million to two million and a half unique visitors. According to [Journalism.co.uk](#), the success of this post could get *UsVsTh3m* to go towards *sponsored content*, capitalizing on a result that led (from the start until 12 November) 3.6 million people to interact.

The ability to attract the attention of users is the main key of the success for online content. This is what emerges from Sandvine research on the use of broadband or mobile Internet connections by Americans, which strongly penalizes websites with news content. *BuzzFeed* is an example: despite being a portal of 85 million visitors each month, it is valued at 'only' \$200 million compared to \$115 billion of Facebook, which proportionally has 'only' 14 times its *user* base. «The

market puts a higher premium on the attention that social networks are able to command, compared to content sites», summarizes [Zachary Seward of Quartz](#). According to research, Netflix and YouTube (with the predominance of the latter on smartphones and tablets) both on desktop and on mobile capture more users. This would justify the heavy investment that *BuzzFeed* and *Vox Media group* are making in video content: «Mobile is where attention is going».

Vice and Vox Media: new media play hard

The battle for getting the attention of readers provides new tools, new content, a different way of telling stories and of approaching the reader. One of the week's news items is [the expansion of the editorial staff of Vice Media](#), which will raise the size of its reporting staff to more than one hundred. Born as a free press magazine in North America, *Vice* is now an editorial reality with numerous offices around the world, and with all the intention of getting serious in the news market. «I wanted to build the next CNN» Shane Smith, one of the co-founders, [told the Guardian](#) optimistically.

His intentions are confirmed by what recently happened with the expenditure of \$50 million (gleaned mostly thanks to *sponsored content*) planned for the next three years to enrich the "news" section of the project - historically committed to recount in a particular way current events, surveys and youth cultural phenomena. These trends have been noticed by Mathew Ingram who warns the entire industry: for years *Vice* has been considered - like *BuzzFeed* at the time - a little more than a «toy», but it is necessary to be fully aware of the fact that with these investments, and these intentions (especially after Rupert Murdoch bought 5% of it), *Vice* will be part of the scenario of the future of journalism - whether traditional media like it or not.

At the same time [Vox Media](#) - the group that owns [The Verge](#), the sports website [SB Nation](#) and the portal on videogaming [Polygon](#) - bought the *Curbed network* for between \$20 to \$30 million, extending its offer to the estate website of the same name *Curbed*, to *Eater* (a blog about restaurants and nightlife) and *Racked* (shopping and lifestyle). The trio of newly acquired websites would ensure the new owners an average of about more than five million monthly unique visitors, and the opportunity to offer new platforms and new readers to advertisers. Recently the group has allocated a new investment of \$34 million. According to data from Quantcast, *Vox Media group* could reach 57 million unique visits per month, with an increase of 88% on an annual basis.

Founded in 2003, the group is mainly characterized by the combination of technical content, an extensive use of *responsive* graphics (an example is [the review of Playstation4](#)) and the alternation between multimedia material, regular updates and original *longform* articles. Another competitor to notice, according to the definition of Ingram.

Google is worth more than newspapers and magazines

The traditional publishing industry is not doing well at all, and the comparison with the leaders in new markets appears to be quite eloquent. This week, Henry Blodget, the CEO of *Business Insider*, [presented](#) at "Ignition 2013" [a slide](#) that has made a lot of noise in the American media circuit. According to the tables, as to revenue, Google alone would have surpassed the entire US journalistic industry, both newspapers and magazines. And if the growth of Google now seems obvious, the precipitous decline of the print industry was not obvious at all. That's not all. Looking closely at the data, it is evident that the historic maximum of Google, reached in 2012, was similar to the average of newspaper and magazine income achieved back in 2009, before the crisis of the newspaper industry became even greater. The data leads one to conclude that it has been a structural and systemic collapse, rather than just a cyclical decline.

According to [Tim Worstall of Forbes](#) the real crisis factor does not derive solely from lower prices, but also from the migration of a section of advertising, usually hosted by the printed newspaper, which alone made up about one third of revenues. They are the so-called *classified ads* (typical of American newspapers: job listings, various announcements, private trades) which would have moved elsewhere, to the Internet, to Monster, e-Bay and Craigslist, leaving the old papers without ads or earnings. National newspapers, in which this advertising system has historically had relatively low penetration, have been affected less than others. Confirmation was found in the fact that local newspapers, which have always relied heavily on *classified ads*, have suffered a particularly rapid decline.

The resurgence of paywalls

One of the largest publishing groups in America is back on the paywall road, without fully embracing its philosophy. This week, *Digital First Media* CEO [John Paton announces](#) that, over the next several months, [most of the 75 newspapers](#) of the group will adopt a *metered subscription* model - a 'softer' paywall, which guarantees some free content - in an attempt to make it a "short-term tactic" rather than a long-term strategy. Paton has never been a big fan of paywalls but when he verified the ineffectiveness of other models tested so far, from the *hard paywall* to the agreements with Google, he tried to find a way to make the online work of his newspapers profitable. He decided to bring down 'the wall' of subscriptions to most of the *Digital First Media* newspapers as a way to survive the current environment: «They don't transform anything; (...) I have said that often enough in the past. But it's a tactic that will help us now». On his blog, [Paton clarifies](#) that the crisis scenario that has to be confronted is well known, where «print dollars are becoming digital dimes». However, if costs remain roughly the same, a new revenue stream is needed to survive this 'perfect storm'.

The revenue from digital advertising increased by 89 percent, the CEO says, but «if we are going to complete this journey of print-to-digital transformation» we need more gas in the tank. According to a calculation [made by Ken Doctor](#), with the decision taken by *Digital First Media* the

percentage of US online dailies which have adopted the paywall model will rise to 41 percent. This represents a big change in the trend compared to the setbacks that medium-large sized newspapers were gradually preparing for regarding online subscriptions (by the way, [Los Angeles](#) could be the most *paywalled* newspaper city). This week, [Google announces](#) the launch of a new product that will replace the failed Currents project. It is a Flipboard-style digital news-stand for Android, with *free* and paid content. In the range of choices available with the *Newsstand app*, it will be possible to read *subscription-only* content of *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and users will be able to import accounts they already have with those outlets.

The possibilities that await Greenwald's project

One of the most discussed articles of this week is [the analysis of Frederic Filloux](#) of the business models adopted by the new editorial creature that will involve the eBay founder Pierre Omidyar (who invested about \$250 million) and the former *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald (whom we have already discussed [here](#)). The new newsroom, which has been enriched - although [not without criticism](#) - through journalists such as [NYU professor Jay Rosen](#), is now facing a critical scenario, rather hostile to the new publishing initiatives. It will certainly be an advantage to start from scratch without suffering the weight of hereditary costs, but with the handicap of a natural financial vulnerability devoid of references or examples to follow due to the peculiar nature of the project. For Filloux, one of the first questions to be resolved is deciding whether to aim for high volume access to resell to potentially numerous advertisers - who will be offered many small spaces - or to offer higher quality, build a strong brand and - from the financial point of view - lean on the parent company for as long as necessary.

From the point of view of revenue, one option could be subscriptions, Filloux affirms. Investigative journalism, the heart of the whole project, could justify a subscription campaign that has already born fruit elsewhere, such as in the case of *Médiapart* in France. With a broad English-speaking audience and global coverage - not Washington-centric - the creation of Omidyar and Greenwald is likely to reach a figure of between 500,000 and 800,000 subscribers in a few years, up to \$40/60 million in yearly revenue. On the production side, Filloux imagines a *mobile-oriented* project, highly multimedia (with a web TV platform and a weekly paper version for *longreads*), thematically segmented, able to get into linguistically attractive markets (China), imagining «a global approach to public interest journalism in large democracies, but also in countries that are deprived of a free press».

Online newspapers and the reliance on Facebook

The rise of Facebook has inevitably affected the way millions of readers access and share news. [Research](#) published in October showed that, from September 2012 to September 2013, the average referral track from Facebook to media websites has grown [170 percent](#) and that the rise

depends on the increase of mobile users (+253.25 percent of visits referral track from Facebook Mobile on an annual basis). There are more and more smartphone users willing to share and *like*, says the research conducted by Shareaholic. More than half of this growth was due exclusively to the mobile industry in a global market - according to [another study by the Pew Center](#) - where Facebook represents a segment of 64 percent of adults in the US, of which a little less than half is generally accustomed to consume news on Facebook. Numbers that lead some to wonder if Mark Zuckerberg is the person to look to for the survival of online publishing.

This week [Charlie Warzel of BuzzFeed tries to answer this question](#), reasoning about the latest data. «Facebook has sent unprecedented levels of traffic to publishers across the internet in recent months, a dramatic and unexpected increase affecting a large range of sites serving a wide variety of content», Warzel explains. Analyzing a collection of 200 websites, ranging from *The Huffington Post* to *Slate*, with more than 300 million users each month, traffic from Facebook referral to partner network websites is up 69% percent from August to October. In August, the sudden change of speed exceeded 100 million referrals for the first time. In the same month, Facebook announced major changes to its News Feed algorithm that would affect the reappearance of the posts favoring those with more interactions. Facebook has publicly called on publishers to adapt in order to take advantage of this new type of indexing, and more generally to pay more attention to what is decided in Palo Alto.

More than Twitter, which seems to be an "obsession" for many journalists, Facebook is actually crucial for the proper functioning of its online content. According to Warzel, the 'persuasive' turning point of Facebook (with its [tips of various kinds](#) and a net increase of 170 percent of average visits) with regard to publishers, arrived at the same time [as the IPO of Twitter](#) to remind online newspapers where the real flow of readers and news passes through.

Doing journalism in an entirely accidental way

Eliot Higgins is a 34-year-old unemployed married man who lives in the provincial town of Leicester (UK). He spends his days monitoring military activities in the Middle East under the name of [Brown Moses](#). [Patrick Radden Keefe of The New Yorker](#) dedicates a long profile to the British blogger who has become a precious resource for journalists on Syrian affairs and in particular on the verification of the weapons used in the conflict. He is a long-distance source, who has «probably broken more stories than most journalists do in a career», says Stuart Hughes, a BBC News producer in London. Passionate about weapons and war video games (he can play for more than 24 hours in a row), Higgins has monitored a huge amount of multimedia content continuously, for 18 months, especially on Syria. He has become one of the reference points regarding the type, the use and origin of the weapons shown in the documents found. He cross-checks photos, videos and tweets, assembles playlists on YouTube, collaborates with others using platforms like Storyful, geolocates clashes and bombings, and seems to be crucial in the process

that led to the attention of the world to doubt that Assad's troops used chemical weapons. His work, [Bianca Bosker of The Huffington Post specifies](#), has led to agreements on inspections and the destruction of chemical weapons.

Higgins is not a journalist, he doesn't have any training on the retrieval and processing of 'classified' material, he has never been to Syria and doesn't speak Arabic. He states that he started in part out of boredom and in part out of obsession after realizing - during a *flame* on the Guardian website - how easy it was to get to certain sources and work using social networks. «Brown Moses has been supplying a lot of information for the coverage of the Syrian war» explains CJ Chivers, a New York Times reporter, «so c'mon, let's say it: many people (whether they admit it or not) have been relying on that blog's daily labor to cull the uncountable videos», a job that leads him to sift through about 300 videos per day, all for free. A few months ago, Higgins launched a crowdfunding campaign that provided him with about \$10,000 in less than a month, which made [Mathew Ingram of Gigaom](#) wonder if he can be considered a model of *crowdsourced journalism*, of citizen journalism in 'remote', or journalism in general. Higgins' brother speaks of him as a person who gets tenaciously into things (whether video games or videos on the weapons of war) and in an era of media within the range of all and platforms for UGC, it is easier than ever to fall - accidentally or not - into the realm of journalism.

Greenwald and the “privatization of secrets”

Who is the owner of Edward Snowden's leaks on global surveillance? Is it legitimate to use them as leverage to promote other activities or, apart from journalism, to unveil the truth? This week [Mark Ames asks these questions on Pando.com](#), the website that recently [took over](#) the [NSFWcorp team](#) of which Ames is part, to broaden its offering of investigative journalism. They are questions worth asking «given that [Pierre Omidyar](#) just invested a quarter of a billion dollars to personally hire [Greenwald and Poitras](#) for his new for-profit media venture», Ames explains, especially because they are now the only two people with full access to the files. Neither Snowden nor the *Guardian* nor the *Washington Post* have them in their possession and Greenwald has repeatedly [stated](#) that Snowden would have delivered the material to other people to ensure its publication in any case.

The accusation of Ames, who has been negative about the *newco* of Greenwald and Omidyar, is not just a judgment on the project, but represents also an ethical journalistic issue. Dynamics of this nature, such as the sacrifice of the individual to disclose information related to democratic matters, persuade the public to side with those who decide to challenge power without personal interests (*Pentagon Papers*, for example). In this case, the «heroic whistleblower story arc» has been bent to Greenwald's interests, who has taken advantage of material of public interest to sell the exclusive (along with the alleged monopoly on the documents) «to a billionaire». Greenwald has delegated complete control of information of global importance also from the

financial point of view - such as the collusion between the major tech companies and the U.S. government to control private citizens - to the discretion of the founder of one of those same companies. Although there have been no replies by those interested, it is still necessary to deepen more than one unclear question about the current ownership of the *leaks* and the privileged relationship between Greenwald and his source (UPDATE: Greenwald replied [here](#) «for journalists linking to the *Pando* post - and other matters»).

The relationship between the reader and membership

Satisfying the reader seems to be a winning trend, or at least to be pursued both in '[ideal](#)' and economic terms. This week [Mathew Ingram of Gigaom](#) analyzes the importance of reciprocity between newspapers and readers, starting from the project - overviewed by [Ken Doctor](#) - of a «paywall 2.0» model for the *New York Times*. The basis of this subscription would be a system of micro-paywalls around specific topic areas, to persuade the reader to subscribe to 'vertical' content such as food, real estate, and opinion. Ingram believes it would be more practical to focus on *membership* rather than on «premium» products similar to some already available. The writer thinks that social media broke the system of consumption of news as a simple product, emphasizing the "human desire", the relationship between *readers* and newspapers, particularly with specific writers. «Not product, but people», Ingram says challenging the NYT to leave the «sometimes-know-it-all uncle» attitude (as synthesized by Doctor), unwilling to compromise with its users, and to embrace a model that implies 'closeness' and affiliation.

The *New York Times* should find ways to monetize through the experience of the reader (not through the product), betting on different services (i.e. access to special offerings, event reviews) which the newspaper, due to the importance of the brand and the readership, can easily aim towards.

From this perspective, the choice of *ProPublica* which, this week, [launches a crowdfunding campaign](#) inviting its readers to «join our community» and become «ProPublican», might not be just a coincidence. It is a well-established trend. «The main goal of this approach is to establish a lasting and meaningful relationship with our readers. Conceived of as 'members' rather than 'subscribers'», explains [Ernst-Jan Pfauth of Medium](#). Pfauth is the publisher of a Dutch online magazine, born and raised on the participation of its readers, which has become a publishing example. In a post where he tells the story of the setting-up of his *De Correspondent*, great emphasis is put on the business model which focuses on the relationship with the reader who is to be considered the ultimate user of the editorial work, not just a product to sell to advertisers («the ultimate goal is to improve journalism, not to fill the pockets of shareholders»). There is an exchange with the audience which goes beyond the reading, allowing the reader to become the only real «ambassador» and the only means of «sponsorship» of the work of the website. A strategy that

seems to work (*De Correspondent* has raised \$1.7 million) so far, Pfauth explains, and that over time it is helping to build a broad basis of readers, members, and not just 'visitors'.

The death of TV and the search for mobile attention

The "[newspaper](#)" is not the only media to suffer the effects of the general downward trend. In a post titled «[TV Is Dying, And Here Are The Stats That Prove It](#)», Jim Edwards of *Business Insider* analyzes a number of figures that explains the inevitable crisis of the medium. In the third quarter of 2013, all the major TV providers lost 113,000 subscribers, for a total of 5 million subscribers lost between 2010 and the end of this year (including cable and broadband). There are fewer and fewer televisions turned on, and [fewer and fewer houses that host a television](#), against an «audience» that on Facebook and Google surpasses the entire volume of TV contacts. The number does not explain the flow of users leaving TV because they prefer multimedia content, but shows a [clear trend](#). Mobile tools are replacing television, attracting the attention of their holders, especially at [prime time](#).

The tablet - and the mobile in general - dominates Internet in the first and second segment of the evening and, according to research conducted by Cisco, global consumption of videos on mobile devices is expected [to increase exponentially](#) from year to year.

This is also the case for the investment of advertisers who are beginning to prefer digital media to old tv, which always gets the 'lion's share' in advertising. According to [research by Macquarie Capital](#), there is still a marked discrepancy between the hours spent on *mobile devices* and the flow of advertising investment. In the next few years, this tendency should move most of the advertisers from TV and newspapers to digital. It is a transfer that many are trying to intercept ([Amazon, above all](#)) and that has led Yahoo to hire the journalist Katie Couric as Global Anchor. The TV personality, who is well-known to the public, should become «the face of Yahoo news» [with the aim](#) of attracting as many users as possible to the pages of the group and of offering content adapted «to each of the screens», as explained [on Mashable](#). Meanwhile, this week, the mobile version of the sports website ESPN has [once again edged](#) that of the desktop.

The «digital diaspora» of the newsrooms

Is it true that the rise of mobile devices allows journalism to live far away - and without problems - from the middle of where news happens? This is the question that [Nikki Usher of NiemanLab](#) asks, starting from the *Miami Herald* newsroom case. The newspaper moved about 12 miles from the city center and its journalists are wondering if the new far-away arrangement is a benefit or a disadvantage. The *Herald* is not the only newspaper to undergo this decentralization: it is a trend that has continued to emerge in the last few months, forcing newspapers to sell their property (not least of which, the *Washington Post* [for \\$159 million](#)) and abandon their historic headquarters to move to cheaper buildings «far away from where the news is happening» (as

occurred at *Corriere della Sera* in Italy with its headquarters at via Solferino). If it was not the economic crisis to force it to optimize all the items of expenditure, it would be the digital production paradigm to impose smaller, well organized spaces for different products, to accommodate the construction of new ones and reduce costs.

The migration of newsrooms becomes interesting from a symbolic and industrial point of view in an era where they seem to be almost entirely superfluous, being able to build editorial products anywhere. The *Miami Herald* journalists - in the testimonies gathered by Nikki Usher [who has been following this topic for weeks](#) - continue largely to prefer physical proximity with news and fellow journalists, not settling for a table and an access point in a Starbucks. The newsroom still acts as a collector of ideas and needs to live in the center of the scene to be able to tell the stories of an entire city and deal with its citizens (especially in the case of the *Miami Herald* which is a local newspaper). Therefore, it is worth considering carefully what gets lost in this «digital diaspora», Usher concludes.

Journalism in discussion with power

This week, *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger was summoned by the home affairs select committee of the House of Commons in London to attend a hearing on the revelations of the *datagate* case, published in his newspaper, and the treatment and dissemination of its sources. During the interview, Rusbridger defended the work of the *Guardian* and the role of the journalist as it is today in a global, hyper-connected and multi-level monitored society, [gaining the appreciation](#) of several colleagues. What emerged from the hearing is that the *Guardian* owns 58,000 documents and has published so far only 1% of them (exactly 26) and doesn't intend to share many others. All information would have been examined by the monitoring system that recommends what to exclude for national interest matters ([the DA-Notice](#)), and published after being filtered by Rusbridger's newsroom and the colleagues of the *New York Times*, with whom the *Guardian* shared part of the leaks, with a promise to omit some sensitive data.

The hearing of Rusbridger is just one of the episodes which explain how post-Snowden journalism is undergoing a radical [transformation](#), influencing the way of working with the news ([Suzanne Nossel of CNN](#) and [David Sirota of Pando](#)). The entire landscape of the media industry has been affected - not least the news presented this week by Pierre Omidyar, [the future editor](#) of the *newco* of Greenwald, [on the HuffPost](#) - as there is an increasingly conflictual relationship between media and politics. In this "[war on journalism](#)" (which we have already discussed [here](#)) that has so far been expressed through obstacles and various intimidations, the legitimate work of unveiling the news in the public interest can easily be put 'under investigation', often awkwardly, as in the case of the questions submitted by the committee members, for many rather inadequate, which have provoked [ironic comments](#). They are all exercises about the influence of power wanted

by the same bureaucracy - as pointed out by Rusbridger - which has 'missed' those *leaks* that journalism, fulfilling its mission, publishes as far as it considers right.

The post-Snowden age

Carl Bernstein, one of the two reporters who provoked the Watergate scandal, responded to Rusbridger's "lesson on freedom of speech" - as defined by [Jeff Jarvis on Twitter](#) - with [a letter published in the Guardian](#) (read [the tweet of Dan Gilmore](#)). Bernstein reminds us of the issue of the conflict between journalism and power, denouncing the interference "of the governments in Washington and London" as represented recently by Rusbridger's appearance before the Commons committee. It is an operation which is the fruit of a general 'trend' that seems to "erect the most serious barriers against legitimate news reporting" we have seen in decades. There are and there will always be tensions between the various protagonists who have built the Western democratic system, Bernstein concludes. His strong testimony, due to his professional history related to Watergate and the publication of the Pentagon Papers, tells us that a truly free press, without governmental intimidation, is the only check against despotism, demagoguery, the collapse of democracy and "even criminality by leaders and government officials".

In the digital age we are witnessing the redistribution of information - and therefore of the power - that changes the mechanisms through which [democracy dynamics are widely described](#). Alec Ross, one-time Senior Advisor for Innovation to former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, believes that this "omniscience" may be followed by a desire of "omnipotence", to be exercised in different and much more sophisticated ways. In a speech reported by [the London School of Economics blog](#) of Charlie Beckett, Ross explains how these new weapons, coming greater access to information, can actually change the geopolitical structure of the world. Forms of surveillance, such as those that have been recently discovered, were unimaginable only few decades ago.

It seems almost impossible to think of phenomena such as Wikileaks, which intends to react to these new control structures, as if they were antibodies born spontaneously. Therefore, the concept of the journalistic profession is becoming increasingly important: "The information age is not just the present, it is also the future", Ross concludes. What remains to be seen is how the structures of power and reciprocal control - just like media and governments - will be balanced in an entirely new landscape.

The bubble of virality

From the industrial and editorial perspective, the destruction of the ten-year status quo in the world of journalism now seems obvious. In the English-speaking world a multitude of *digital native* portals are undermining, in terms of attention, investment and contacts, the hegemony of historic newspapers. This week, [Farhad Manjoo of the Wall Street Journal](#) interviews Neetzan Zimmerman of *Gawker*, who is responsible for the 'viral' content and is the bearer of an average of

30 million visits per month, a decisive portion of the general visits of the entire website (read [the statistics of the website](#)). The 32-year-old editor reveals to Manjoo his working methods, focused primarily on personal intuition, an almost inexplicable formula that allows him to understand - with the help of a newsroom and a network of online sources - what might 'work' online, particularly on Facebook, [to undermine](#), in terms of contacts, the *New York Times*. It is a gift: when I lose my edge "I'll have to find something else to do", Zimmerman says.

What the editor finds is the "gap for human intuition in an environment dominated by machines". This week, the same gap lets more than one commentator say that the business model [based on the virality of content](#) - or on the production of content exclusively for this purpose - is sustainable in the short term ([Mathew Ingram](#)). A weak production structure ([Bryan Goldberg of Pando](#)), unable to reproduce with proven efficiency and predict on empirical grounds the actual success of a post, leaves to human intuition the whole secret of virality. The same problem with advertisers, who cannot count on reliable performance or the actual return on their advertising investment (campaigns which almost always require surgical precision and planning). A "bubble" ([Andrew Beaujon of Poynter](#)) which has generated recently a set of websites specialized in *viral content* and that is imposing a new system of representation of the news (this week [Mary Konnikova of the New Yorker](#) explains the success of *listicles* from the psychological point of view). The basis of all these arguments assumes that the purpose of these new creatures is to do "journalism" (see the example of *ViralNova* reported by [Harry Cheadle of Vice US](#) and [Alex Litel of The Wire](#), or [the hoax of BuzzFeed](#) in the last few days).

Newsweek back on the newsstand

One news item of the week is the return of *Newsweek*, a weekly that last year stopped its print edition and now, with new ownership, will reappear on the market. A 64-page magazine that starting from January/February, according to the editor-in-chief Jim Impoco, would like to become an alternative to *The Economist*. At its best, [Christine Haughney of the New York Times](#) recalls, *Newsweek* reached 3.3 million readers in 1991, before declining slowly to its sale (by the group of the *Washington Post* to Sidney Harman for one dollar) and the unsuccessful merger with *The Daily Beast*, followed by the recent acquisition by IBT Media. The return to paper, after being stopped for months, has been defined by [Lucia Moses of AdWeek](#) a "counterintuitive" move. At the same time, the *New York Magazine* announced a cut in its publications. It will be published only twice a month, not four times a month, with about 26 issues and three special annual editions. A sad fate for a newspaper symbol, according to the long analysis of [David Carr of the Times](#), who speaks of the "end of an era".

More optimistic is [Sarah Green of the Harvard Business Review](#), who in a post entitled "Publisher, Stop Crying Over Ink" explains that, considering the growth of website traffic (+19% over the last 8 months) and revenue from advertising on digital (+15%, overtaking those on paper

expected in 2014), the step back on the newsstands would be nothing but a slow and natural evolution, not an involution, of the project. For Carr, Green says, it is evident that "print<digital, the result = bad" while the attention of readers is moving to multiple tools, "so media critics should leave their [sad trombones](#) at home".

How to check non-news?

One of the most discussed issues of the last few weeks (we have already talked about [here](#) and [here](#)) is the 'viral' content created by newsrooms. The widespread debate has emerged after the birth and rise of a large group of *viral oriented* websites ([Upworthy](#) and [Viralnova](#) among others), with the reorganization of traditional media through specific *web friendly* platforms, the spread of uncontrolled hoaxes and the 'hybridization' of platforms like *BuzzFeed* in transition [towards traditional journalism](#). This ambiguity between professional and online *divertissement* is the basis of the recent discussion. [Ravi Somayia of the New York Times](#) tries to define the porous boundary between the two. According to the writer, we can speak of "journalism" when the truth animates the completion and the sharing of an article, but to become viral the truth of the content does not seem to be essential. This is the case of [BuzzFeed and the tweets of the ABC producer Elan Gale](#) about a fake feud on a plane which was accepted as true and published, without checking, in a [viral post](#) on the website of Peretti and Smith.

This is just one of several incidents that have happened in the last few months which seem to put all the blame on the *news outlet* that did not verify the news. It represents a more serious sin for those who are trying to emancipate with their own global newsroom. In a consumer cultural market in which journalism – according to Joshua Benton of *NiemanLab* – "is an act of pointing" readers towards what to read, the choice of what to publish, with or without verification, becomes an essential discriminating factor. "I really have an issue with the word hoax", Gale says, defending himself. "I was broadcasting to my followers who know what I do", referring to his job as satirical writer and the certainty that his audience would have understood a comic gag, a piece of information with no need to be confirmed. The issue is also discussed by Felix Salmon of *Reuters.com* in a post that perfectly sums up the problem in the title "[Can you fact-check a twerking video?](#)".

Salmon gets to the point: what is usually published on the web and on social networks is not shared because of its "truth" and very often imposes - as Nathan Zimmerman, the "viral specialist" of *Gawker*, adds - a "certain suspension of disbelief ". It is a real "gap", where the news barely gets, being less 'attractive' - and therefore less sharable – than a photo or a funny video. The problem is that online newspapers are beginning to invest in this gap to fill it.

The viral rib

In this race for [attention](#), those who are trying to work in the digital media industry can easily slip into a hybrid territory between what the Internet culture would like to be news (a video of a terrifying twerking, for example, that became [the subject of many articles](#)) and classic agenda-setting, which can hardly apply its methods of checking to such content (actually, the video in question was checked). Salmon, however, believes that the debate is just beginning, and that it will be one of the most discussed topics in 2014. On the other hand - the writer continues - it becomes clear how necessary it is to rely on viral content to survive the online news war, so as to bring old newspapers like *the Washington Post* to build "its own" *BuzzFeed* ([KnowMore](#)) creating a "social-friendly" rib with original and potentially viral content, often invoking the articles produced by the head newspaper.

This week, *The Daily Mirror* launches the [Ampp3d](#) project, a collateral website inspired by examples such as BuzzFeed and Quartz specializing in highly-sharable content with a simple and mobile layout, social orientation, *web friendly* titles and simplified reading through the use of statistics and figures. The website, directed by the former Guardian journalist Martin Belam, is an evolution of [UsVsTh3m](#). It reached, only in the month of November 2013 (about six months after launch), 7 million unique visitors. The aim is to bring to *Ampp3d* what has been learned from Quartz, Belam explains to [Justin Ellis of NJL](#), and not just from the point of view of the form. Months of work experience provided the newsroom with tests and data in order to understand what works and what does not on social networks (more on Facebook as the main source of traffic, less on Twitter defined as *abuzz-generator*). It is reasonable to expect other products such as tests and quizzes (as the famous [North-o-meter](#) with millions of likes), 8-bit video games, but also "something else" Belam assures.

Facebook wants to be your newspaper

Given their nature and the reasons for which they are designed, the websites mainly oriented to share content vaguely recall the "handmade" creation of many different "social" portals, or at least an editorial anteroom between social networks and classic news (about the reliance on Facebook by digital publications we have already discussed [here](#)). In the aforementioned article by Felix Salmon, there is a reference to the scheme of the "[Valley of ambiguity](#)". One of the other news items of the week is the change in the Facebook algorithms that, in order to comply with the [scheme](#) of Analee Newitz, should penalize the "light" content on the left-hand side of the page. In an article written by [Mike Isaac of AllThingsDigital](#) it is understood that, according to anonymous sources, Mark Zuckerberg and Chris Cox (vice president of Product) intend to use users' *news feeds* for a sort of "newspaper" with "high quality" content. It would be a part of a daily ritual to emphasize what users should see and not what is popular at the time, on the basis of unclear mechanisms ("Who defines what's high quality content?", asks [Mathew Ingram of Gigaom](#)).

We are generally accustomed to think of Facebook as a platform for sharing status, photos, news, funny content and pictures without any pretense of quality. This sort of 'program' called "Reader" would rather reverse users' feeds providing an experience similar to Flipboard, the software for tablets that selects the news of social circles and presents them in a readable way (according to Isaac, Facebook declined to comment on any of these operations). What is certain is that "Chris and Mark absolutely do not want Facebook to be Tumblr", in other words a social blogging platform with chronological *home feed*, not particularly attractive to advertisers and with content of any kind. Maybe this is the reason why Facebook doesn't support GIFs, Isaac explains.

The young read like their grandparents

News preferences of the so-called *millennials*, the generation of those who grew up with the Internet, are not so different from those of their parents or grandparents, although they read on mobile devices. This is what emerges from a [study](#) conducted by the Pew Research Center. Young people still prefer textual articles, paginated in columns in the old-fashioned way, over multimedia products. 60% of *millennials* surveyed prefer a "print-like experience" on their own tablets and smartphones, a trend more or less uniform among the various categories, including those who are over 40. It is a surprising fact, if we consider that for years - as recalled by [Derek Thompson of The Atlantic](#) - in the eyes of editors, journalists and advertisers the so-called "Generation Y" was to be considered as a sort of separate species, a product of the Internet culture which reasoned and consumed in a very particular way.

Hence the need to invent journalistic and advertising products which could be adapted to this new type of audience. From this point of view, the study raises optimism among advertisers: young people in the age group between 18 and 29 would be much more willing to interact with the ads on a tablet (not on smartphones, where size still makes it a challenge) for the 29% of surveyed, compared with 12% of the 30-49 years segment and 7% of the 50-64. Meanwhile, [Sam Kirkland of Poynter](#) wonders if this obsessive research on mobile and *mobile friendly* platforms (and content) does not end up frustrating the good old desktop users. "I do most of my web browsing on a computer, with keyboard, mouse, and no multi-touch display", Kirkland affirms. In this goldrush towards the *mobile* - asks Kirkland, citing examples such as the new websites of NPR and *Wire* - don't we risk speeding away too quickly and hence losing those who use Internet browsers?