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Journalism in North America faced an existential crisis as a result of the rapid drop in advertising revenue that began during the 2008–2009 global recession and continued with the rise of Google and Facebook. This put in doubt the profitable transition of news delivery from print, radio, and television to digital media. The news business had been transformed by advertising from a craft practiced mostly by printers in the 18th century into a big business in the 19th century and one dominated by profit-driven corporations by the late 20th century. The rapid decrease in advertising thus reversed the evolutionary course of journalism from a commodity sold for profit back toward a craft practiced for civic purposes by smaller businesses. Alternatives to the profit-driven model for journalism were sought into the third decade of the 21st century. For example, in 2019 Canada moved to allow charitable donations to nonprofit news media, similar to that enabled in the United States under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. tax code, which provided a viable business model for some journalism websites. This entry examines the current status of journalism and reviews its evolution in each of the countries of North America: the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Old and New Media in North America

The trend toward commercialization of news reached its height in the United States, whereas the news ecosystems of Canada and Mexico developed slightly differently as a result of political and cultural factors and were thus less dependent on advertising. Private ownership dominated broadcasting in the United States after it emerged in the 1920s, but Canada adopted a hybrid public–private model and state-controlled broadcasting dominated in Mexico until the 1990s. From its apex just after the millennium, however, the advertising “bubble” began to deflate because of widespread broadband Internet adoption and then burst with the so-called Great Recession. Most advertising fled legacy media such as newspapers and television, which hoped to replace it with digital advertising as they transitioned their operations online. Instead, Google and Facebook dominated digital advertising, forcing legacy media to downsize rapidly as their revenues fell, leading to a loss of local reporting. In 2018, Canada became the first major world economy to subsidize journalism, funding a C\$50 million (US\$40 million) Local Journalism Initiative for underserved communities, which was followed the next year by a C\$595 million (US\$450 million) bailout of news media over 5 years.

The displacement of old media by new media, which was widely expected at the millennium, had not transpired a quarter century after the introduction of the World Wide Web, leaving journalism in a state of limbo. Online journalism proved unable to find a profitable business model for general news, although niche websites on specialized topics proved sustainable through subscription. Revenues from digital advertising were insufficient to sustain a newsroom of any substance, and online subscription schemes also failed at first to make up for lost legacy revenues. Experimentation continued, however, as the metered paywall introduced by The New York Times in 2011, which allowed readers a few free articles every month, was adopted widely in the United States and Canada. The persistence of old media and the inability of online journalism to find a sustainable business model thus made displacement of old media less likely as time passed, with accommodation of new media being the more likely outcome.

Journalism in the United States

The Revolution of 1776 that founded the United States of America saw press freedom enshrined as the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. A resulting libertarian model of the press, however, exposed the perils of unrestrained press freedom during the yellow journalism era at the end of the 19th century and was replaced with a so-called social responsibility model. American journalism proved central to national development first through trade and commerce and then through industrialization, important political and economic reforms, modernization, and finally globalization. It thus proved an exemplar for press systems worldwide and as the watchdog on power needed for democratic rule, as exemplified by the investigative reporting that drove Richard Nixon to resign the presidency in 1974. Those aspects of journalism were not emulated as widely in other countries, whose rulers feared similar consequences.

American journalism was pivotal to the nation's establishment through revolution, as a vigorous colonial press fomented discontent with British rule, but it subsequently struggled to justify its practices and growing power, maturing through several phases of development. An early “party press” saw journalism focus on politics, with

newspapers often founded as party organs. The growth of advertising saw newspapers increasingly abandon overt partisanship in a quest for the mass audience. This for-profit model of the press saw competition dwindle as publications merged or perished in a race for market leadership that usually left only one daily newspaper in a town or city.

Technology continually diminished America's press, as first radio and next television cut into its audiences, then the Internet threatened to extinguish it. Newspapers struggled to compete first with the immediacy brought by radio in the 1920s and then with the images that television added in the 1950s. Publishers responded with technological advances of their own, such as high-quality color printing and satellite transmission, which allowed national dailies to be printed in different parts of the country and even globally. Both were exemplified by USA Today, which was founded in 1982 by the Gannett newspaper chain. USA Today featured short stories and colorful graphics.

In the 1990s, online journalism, which allowed anyone with a computer and an Internet connection to publish on the World Wide Web, threatened mainstream media. This enabled so-called citizen journalists and bloggers to proliferate online while established news media struggled to adapt to the digital world. By allowing advertisers to reach customers directly online and then through social media such as Facebook, the Internet siphoned off much of the advertising revenue that once supported mainstream journalism. Mainstream media were forced to retrench, mostly by laying off journalists. After several long-publishing dailies folded or went online-only in 2009 and a dozen newspaper companies declared bankruptcy as a result of unsustainable debt, fears grew that traditional journalism might die out. Newspapers survived after downsizing, however, and the chains all continued to publish under new ownership.

Politics returned to the fore with the 2016 election of Donald Trump to the presidency and the New York Times soon had more than 4 million online subscribers. The COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020 brought a renewed financial crisis for journalism and revealed deep divisions in American society brought on by a partisanship which had been fanned by right-wing broadcasters and perhaps worsened by an Internet free-for-all. Whatever the news was, it seemed that journalism in America remained at the center of the story, as it had since the nation's founding.

From Politics to Profit

The press in the United States flourished under the freedom paradigm, with 178 weeklies and 24 dailies across the country by the end of the 18th century. The center of growth was New York City, which experienced a rapid population rise due to immigration from Europe. In the mid-19th century, however, costs began to escalate due to technology, and newspaper publishing was transformed into a big business. While it took only \$500 to establish the New York Herald in 1835, soon steam-driven presses and growing staffs inflated start-up costs for a daily to \$5,000–10,000 by 1840. Adding the expense of sending news by telegraph made the cost more like \$100,000 by 1850. Newsgathering expenses soared during the Civil War, and by 1870 the cost to start a daily newspaper was estimated at close to \$1 million. Despite this, the increased revenue flowing from advertising made it a booming business in most major cities. New York City alone boasted 19 dailies by the late 19th century in a so-called Golden Age of newspapers. The era of mass society saw cities swell, leading to the rise of mass marketing through department stores, which stimulated sales with advertising.

Cooperative newsgathering began in 1846 when five New York City dailies pooled their resources to cover the Mexican-American War by telegraph. This led to formation of the New York Associated Press, which merged with several rival news agencies in 1900 to form the Associated Press as a nonprofit cooperative. The AP distributed stories from its member newspapers, and also opened a growing number of national and international bureaus.

Technology also transformed the structure of news writing, which began as a narrative or even chronological account. The telegraph led to stories instead being written in the inverted pyramid form, which was top-heavy with facts in case transmission was interrupted. This had the added benefit of allowing editors to cut stories from the bottom in order to fit on a page without losing the most important information.

In their quest for the widest possible audience, mass circulation dailies began to abandon the partisan politics

on which the press in early America had thrived. Journalism became more professional as a result. Originally the province of printers, it evolved into an occupation practiced by reporters and editors. Educational levels of journalists increased and reporters grew in status when given bylines atop their articles. They gained expertise and contacts by increasingly work “beats,” which saw them cover one topic regularly, and they soon began to interrogate sources directly through interviewing. Journalism became a subject of higher education in the late 19th century, being taught first in college English departments before several freestanding journalism schools were established early in the 20th century.

Increasing Professionalism

The fin de siècle yellow journalism practiced by New York City publishers Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst was a low point for American journalism, as their sensational—and often fictional—coverage of an insurgency in Cuba was blamed for starting the 1898 Spanish-American War. This type of discredited journalism in pursuit of profit was soon replaced by a more responsible brand of reporting as exemplified by The New York Times, which proved even more profitable. Stressing accuracy, decency, and conservatism, the Times attracted a wealthy readership by emphasizing business coverage. This elevated the informational model over the disgraced entertainment model of yellow journalism by relying more on advertisers for revenue than on readers.

The 20th century dawned with a hard-hitting brand of investigative reporting dubbed “muckraking.” Magazines such as Collier’s Weekly, Cosmopolitan, and McClure’s Magazine specializing in deeply researched exposés of social, political, and economic problems. Investigative journalism fueled reform in the Progressive Era of the early 20th century, which saw the first regulation of housing, food and drugs, monopolies, child labor, and working conditions. Muckraking died out in the 1910s, however, as a more conservative era saw readers grow weary of bad news. The demise of muckraking became complete with the outbreak in 1914 of World War I, which the United States joined in 1917.

Commercialization increased during the interwar years as broadcasting networks and newspaper chains grew, along with their political power. A private Commission on Freedom of the Press (also known as the Hutchins Commission) called for a more responsible and accountable form of journalism in its 1947 report titled *A Free and Responsible Press*. Newspapers largely rejected its findings and pointed out that the Hutchins Commission was made up almost entirely of academics and included no journalists. The new academic field of mass communication, which grew with postwar state universities, compared the social responsibility model it advocated for with the earlier authoritarian and libertarian models. Together with a Soviet Communist model then practiced in Eastern Bloc countries, these models were codified in the pioneering 1956 book *The Four Theories of the Press*.

Television returned the muckraking tradition with investigative programs such as *See It Now*, which was hosted on CBS by Edward R. Murrow in the 1950s and explored such issues as the exploitation of migrant farm workers. The most influential report by Murrow was on Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, whose communist “witch hunts” Murrow exposed as a fraud. This cast serious doubt on the journalism ethic of objectivity, which McCarthy had exploited in promoting his claims of government infiltration by communists. Instead of simply reporting such claims, reporters increasingly began to investigate their substance in a more subjective “New Journalism” that emerged in the 1960s. Investigative journalism was boosted by programs such as *60 Minutes*, which CBS started in 1968 with the advent of color broadcasting and became the most popular show on television by the mid-1970s. Its success spawned imitators on NBC and CBS, then on the new Fox network, founded in the mid-1980s by Australian media mogul Rupert Murdoch.

Television evening news demonstrated the new medium’s power to influence public opinion by regularly broadcasting events such as civil rights protests and the Vietnam War. CBS Evening News host Walter Cronkite, who became known as “the most trusted man in America” for his fatherly tone, deemed the war in Vietnam a lost cause in an influential 1968 editorial. His nightly coverage in the early 1970s helped expose the Watergate scandal, which led to Nixon’s 1974 resignation. In 1980, with the advent of satellite transmission, Ted Turner founded the Cable News Network and headquartered it in Atlanta instead of New York or Los Angeles. With the growth of satellite broadcasting came a proliferation of news channels in the 1990s, such as MSNBC and Fox News, with the latter catering to an underserved market by appealing to conservative

viewers.

Online Journalism

The introduction of the World Wide Web in the 1990s increased the fragmentation of news audiences, a phenomenon which had begun with radio and accelerated under television. The market for news that newspapers once monopolized now had to be shared four ways. Each new medium that emerged had forced existing media to adapt, but the digitization of news threatened to supplant all others. Under the theory of convergence, digital media were expected by some to replace print media, radio, and television because text, audio, and video could all be transmitted online. The new technology was also supposed to democratize journalism, as it allowed anyone to be a publisher without having to own a printing press or a broadcasting station. Websites such as the Drudge Report sprang up in the 1990s and covered politics in particular without the restraint of traditional news media, for example in reporting the indiscretions of President Bill Clinton. Mainstream journalists also found themselves unusually fact checked, such as when document experts went online to cast doubt on a 60 Minutes story in 2004 that claimed President George W. Bush had been AWOL from the Texas Air National Guard during the Vietnam War. Its producer was fired and presenter Dan Rather, who had succeeded Cronkite as host of the CBS Evening News in 1981, retired.

While online journalism disrupted old media, it did not replace them, at least not in the short term. As with all forms of media, the Internet proved to have both strengths and limitations, and gradually old media adapted. Online audiences proved elusive, with shorter attention spans that discouraged long-form journalism and encouraged short attention-grabbing items that became known as clickbait. The clicks they sought were the basis on which online advertising rates were set, but soon oversupply sent rates ever lower. Google and Facebook dominated online advertising, ironically by often circulating links to stories the mainstream media first reported. That left little to sustain journalism, including digital start-ups that struggled to find a profitable business model for general news. Newspapers soon rethought the wisdom of relying on digital advertising and increasingly began to charge for online access to their content. Again they had adapted to competition for news audiences brought by a new medium. Meanwhile, an alternative online journalism ecosystem was sustained by Section 501(c)(3) of the Income Tax Act, which allowed nonprofit institutions, including news organizations, to receive tax-deductible donations. This helped to fund local news websites such as MinnPost and the Voice of San Diego, as well as investigative reporting by websites such as the Texas Tribune and ProPublica.

Journalism in Canada

Differences in history and culture resulted in journalism evolving slightly differently in Canada than in the United States, with the main points of departure being bilingualism and public broadcasting. Canada was settled by colonists from both England and France, with the province of Quebec speaking mostly French while the rest of the country largely spoke English. The result was parallel cultures often referred to as the two solitudes. One important difference between the United States and Canada was in the enshrinement of press freedom. While the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provided an absolute guarantee, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms enacted in 1982 balanced press freedom against the rights of identifiable groups not to be subjected to hate speech.

The press evolved in Canada much as in the United States, with newspapers serving first as political party organs and then as profit-driven businesses owned by chains, but the French-language press tended to be more overtly partisan. The first English-language chain was founded by printer William Southam, who published several Ontario dailies before expanding in the early 20th century into Western Canada. The Thomson chain was started by former radio salesman Roy Thomson, who began buying small newspapers in Ontario in the 1930s after he discovered how profitable they were. Thomson expanded his newspaper empire not just across Canada but into the United States and Great Britain, where he was named Lord Thomson of Fleet in 1964 after buying newspapers there including The Scotsman and The Sunday Times.

The Southam and Thomson chains came to so dominate Canadian newspapers that a Royal Commission was called in 1980 after they traded and closed two major dailies, creating new local monopolies for each

other. The commission proposed a Canada Newspaper Act that would have placed limits on chain ownership, but none was enacted after a change in government. As a result, Canada has one of the world's highest levels of press ownership concentration. The Southam chain was taken over in the 1990s by Conrad Black, who founded the National Post in 1998 as a conservative competitor to Thomson's The Globe and Mail, which had published nationally by satellite since the early 1980s. Black sold Southam in 2000 to Canwest Global Communications, which owned the Global Television Network. Despite a warning by the Royal Commission on Newspapers against allowing cross-ownership of newspapers and television stations, which had resulted in a brief ban in the mid-1980s, Canada placed no limits on such ownership, which was prohibited in the United States and limited in other countries.

Prompted by the AOL–Time Warner merger in the United States in January 2000, the convergence model of multimedia ownership began to sweep the country. Before the year ended, The Globe and Mail partnered with CTV, and the French-language chain Quebecor acquired the provincial network TVA. Canadian news media were devastated within a decade by convergence. Canwest Global declared bankruptcy in 2009 due to its unsustainable debt load while The Globe and Mail dissolved its partnership with CTV as unworkable the following year. Canwest Global was deconverged when its newspaper and television divisions were auctioned off separately. The former Southam newspapers were acquired by a consortium of U.S. hedge funds despite a limit of 25% on foreign ownership. They renamed the chain Postmedia Network and in 2014 also acquired Sun Media, the country's second-largest chain.

Broadcasting evolved in Canada as a hybrid public–private model under the influence of both its British heritage and its American neighbor. Private radio stations sprang up across the country in the 1920s, initially often owned by newspapers. Public broadcasting was first delegated to the Canadian National Railway before a Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC) was formed in 1932 and took over its network of stations. The CRBC was reorganized in 1936 as an arm's-length Crown corporation called the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) modeled after the BBC. The CBC also served as the country's first broadcasting regulator before being replaced in 1958 by a Board of Broadcast Governors, which was later renamed the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. The CBC began a French-language radio service in 1937 and a television network in 1952. Licenses for private television stations were first awarded in 1960, and the following year eight of the new licensees formed the CTV network. Global Television was built into a third national network in the 1970s by Canwest.

In addition to deconverging Canadian media, the 2008–2009 recession reshaped television ownership, as all three private English-language networks were taken over by the country's highly profitable cable companies. The result was a degree of vertical integration between carriage companies and content providers that rivaled the country's stratospheric level of press ownership concentration. Online journalism, which was touted to flourish under convergence, instead stalled in the absence of laws that allowed tax-deductible donations to nonprofit startups. In 2015, Postmedia merged the newsrooms of its duopoly dailies in four of the country's largest cities, prompting Parliamentary hearings that sat for more than a year. The report, issued in 2017, recommended government financial support for news media, among other measures. A package of Cdn\$595 million (US\$450 million) in subsidies over 5 years was included in the 2019 federal budget to assist print and online journalism in Canada.

Journalism in Mexico

The first printing press in North America was shipped to Mexico City from Spain by bishop Juan de Zumárraga in 1536. The *Gaceta de México* was established as a monthly in 1722 and ran mostly business and society news. The first daily newspaper in Mexico, the *Diario de México*, began publication in 1805, but censorship was imposed under Spanish rule. The press flourished after Mexico achieved independence in 1821, but the largest dailies came under the authoritarian control of generals and ruling elites until late in the 20th century. Newspapers proliferated in the hundreds, especially in Mexico City, but the largest dailies were controlled by oligarchs with close ties to the ruling party, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). It dominated Mexican politics in a de facto one-party system from the 1930s through the 1990s and was a regime characterized by institutional corruption. Newspapers depended on government advertising and subsidized newsprint, while journalists received commissions from selling ads and also took government kickbacks. Television was a state-run monopoly under Televisa for almost 50 years. As a result, Mexico suffered under the PRI's

domination until the millennium.

A reappraisal of journalism practices began after an army massacre of student protestors in 1968, reporting on which was one-sided in favor of the regime. In 1976, after a purge at the largest progovernment daily *Excelsior* of top editors who proposed a more independent editorial stance, 150 journalists quit in protest. Some founded *Proceso*, which has been the nation's premier political weekly ever since. Others founded the daily tabloid *Unomásuno* in 1977; several left in 1984 to form *La Jornada*, which became the voice of Mexico's antiregime left. Provincial newspapers also rose to prominence in the 1970s, including as *El Norte* in Monterrey, *El Sur* in Acapulco, and *Siglo 21* in Guadalajara. Younger and more professional, their journalists were forbidden from taking bribes or gifts from government officials. In the place of corruption, however, physical repression against journalists rose sharply, with about 60 Mexican journalists being murdered between 1980 and 1996.

Political liberalization combined with increased competition and professionalization of journalists to create more independent news coverage by the mid-1990s. The broadcasting sector also opened up with the founding in 1993 of TV Azteca as competition for Televisa. Aggressive talk-radio commentators competed for large audiences and advertising revenues. Economic reforms reduced government subsidies for proregime publications. Major news stories like the 1985 Mexico City earthquake and the 1992 Guadalajara gas explosion stimulated public interest in independent reporting. Television coverage, which no longer slavishly supported the PRI, played an important role in reshaping public opinion in favor of the opposition. A series of scandals, the armed insurrection in Chiapas, political assassinations, and the economic shock brought by the peso's devaluation in 1994 contributed to the opposition winning legislative elections in 1997. Political reforms ensured a more permissive environment for independent media, and in the presidential elections of 2000 opposition candidate Vicente Fox defeated the PRI.

Increased political independence for journalists has come at the price of their safety, however. Attacks on the press have accelerated in recent years, with 47 journalists murdered between 2012 and 2018. The human right organization ARTICLE 19 documented 544 attacks against Mexican journalists in 2018, including threats, harassment, intimidation, blocking of access, deprivation of liberty, 72 incidents of censorship, 65 physical attacks, and nine murders, with public officials being the chief perpetrators. It estimated the rate of impunity for crimes against journalists in Mexico at 99.1%. A protection program for journalists introduced in 2012, which included the use of bodyguards, panic buttons, safehouses, camera systems, and bulletproof vehicles, was largely ineffective. In 2019, the International Federation of Journalists and the Committee to Protect Journalists declared Mexico the most dangerous country in the world for media workers, surpassing war-torn Syria. There were 10 murders of journalists in 2019, mostly by organized crime cartels. As a result, both Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders rated the country's press as not free.

See also [Commission on Freedom of the Press](#); [Internet: Impact on the Media](#); [Muckrakers](#); [Newspaper Chains, Ownership of](#); [Partisan Press](#); [Yellow Journalism](#)

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