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## A special report on the news industry Bulletins from the future

**The internet has turned the news industry upside down, making it more participatory, social, diverse and partisan—as it used to be before the arrival of the mass media, says Tom Standage**

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EVEN IF YOU are not a news junkie, you will have noticed that your daily news has undergone a transformation. Television newscasts now include amateur videos, taken from video-sharing websites such as YouTube, covering events like the Arab spring or the Japanese tsunami. Such videos, with their shaky cameras and people's unguarded reactions, have much greater immediacy than professional footage. Messages posted on Twitter, the microblogging service, have been woven into coverage of these events and many others. "You have these really intimate man-in-the-street accounts, and you can craft a narrative around them," says Jack Dorsey, co-founder of Twitter. A computer consultant in Pakistan unwittingly described the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in a series of tweets. The terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008, too, were reported on Twitter in real time by people who were there.



The past year has also seen the rise to fame of WikiLeaks, an organisation that publishes leaked documents supplied to it anonymously. WikiLeaks and its media partners have published detailed records of the Afghan and Iraq wars, hundreds of classified American diplomatic cables and records from the Guantánamo Bay detention centre. "We believe that true information does good," says Julian Assange, WikiLeaks' founder. "Our goal is not just to have people reading documents, but to achieve political reforms through the release of information."

In January this year Al Jazeera, a news organisation based in Qatar, published its own cache of leaked documents, known as the Palestine Papers, which lifted the lid on more than a decade of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. And by broadcasting amateur videos of the Tunisian uprising to its millions of satellite viewers across the Arab world, the channel played an active role in spreading the protests across the region. Among television news organisations it has led the way in integrating social media (such as tweets, Facebook posts and amateur online video) into its operations in order to engage with its increasingly wired audience. "The way we operate has changed because the landscape has changed dramatically," says Moeed Ahmad, the firm's head of new media.

Clearly something dramatic has happened to the news business. That something is, of course, the internet, which has disrupted this industry just as it has disrupted so many others. By undermining advertising revenue, making news reports a commodity and blurring the boundaries between previously distinct news organisations, the internet has upended newspapers' traditional business model. But as well as demolishing old ways of doing things, it has also made new ones possible. As patterns of news consumption shift, much experimentation is under way. The

internet may have hurt some newspapers financially, but it has stimulated innovation in journalism.

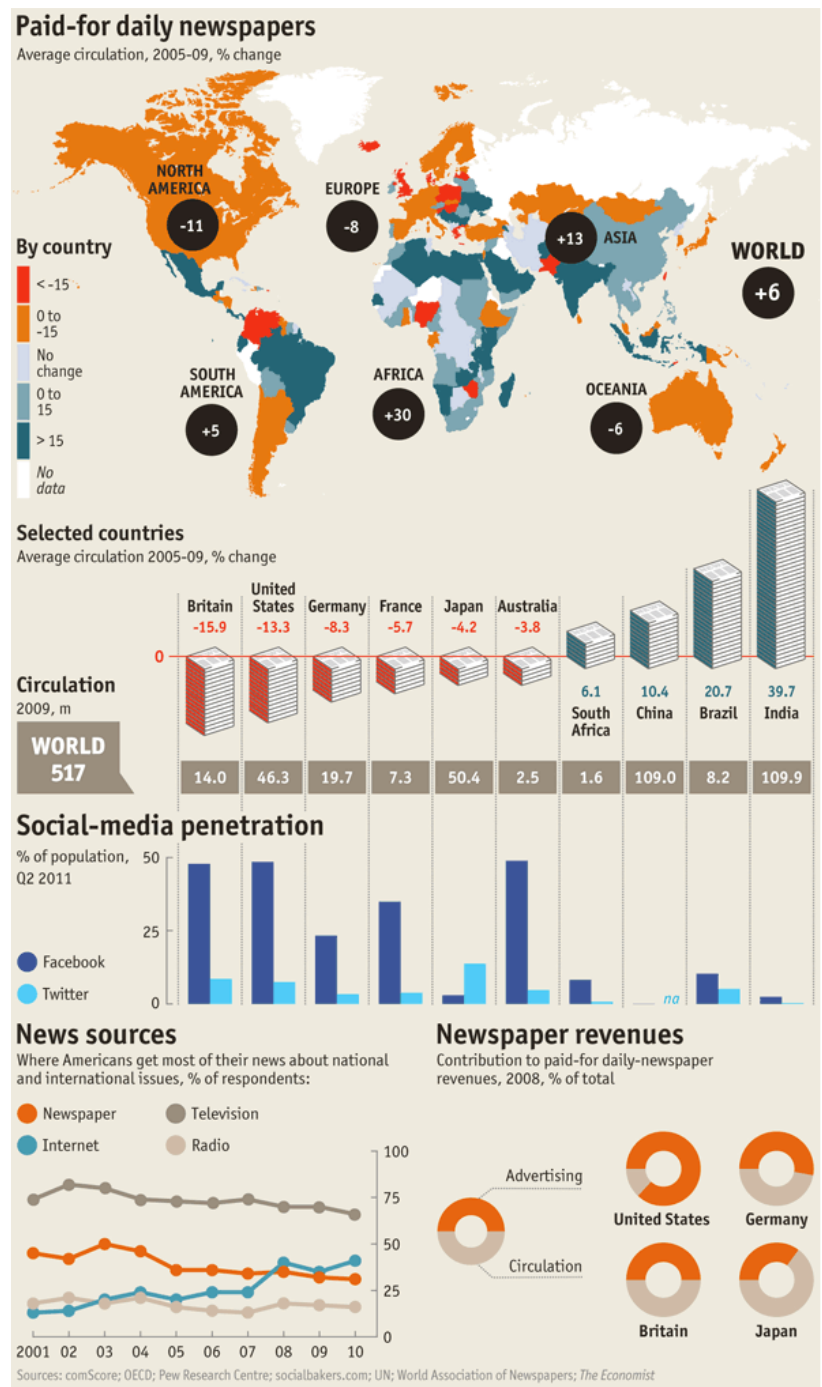
**Reporters all**

For consumers, the internet has made the news a far more participatory and social experience. Non-journalists are acting as sources for a growing number of news organisations, either by volunteering information directly or by posting comments, pictures or video that can be picked up and republished. Journalists initially saw this as a threat but are coming to appreciate its benefits, though not without much heart-searching. Some organisations have enlisted volunteers to gather or sift data, creating new kinds of “crowdsourced” journalism.

Readers can also share stories with their friends, and the most popular stories cause a flood of traffic as recommendations ripple across social networks. Referrals from social networks are now the fastest -growing source of traffic for many news websites. Readers are being woven into the increasingly complex news ecosystem as sources, participants and distributors. “They don’t just consume news, they share it, develop it, add to it—it’s a very dynamic relationship with news,” says Arianna Huffington, co-founder of the *Huffington Post*, a news website in the vanguard of integrating news with social media.

As well as making Twitter, Facebook and Google part of the news ecosystem, the internet has also made possible entirely new kinds of specialist news organisations. It has allowed WikiLeaks, for example, to accept documents anonymously and publish them to a global audience, while floating in cyberspace above national jurisdictions, operated by a small, nomadic team. Other newcomers include a host of not-for-profit news organisations that rely on philanthropic funding and specialise in particular kinds of journalism. Many of these new outfits collaborate with traditional news organisations, taking advantage of their broad reach and trusted, established brands.

All these new inhabitants of the news ecosystem have brought an unprecedented breadth and diversity of news and opinion to the business. This has cast new light on a long-running debate



about the politics of journalism: when there are so many sources, does political objectivity become less important?

This special report will consider all these trends in turn, starting with a look at the state of the industry and the new business models that are emerging. It will argue that as news becomes more social, participatory, diverse and partisan, it is in many ways returning to the more chaotic, freewheeling and politically charged environment of the era before the emergence of mass media in the 19th century. And although the internet has proved hugely disruptive to journalists, for consumers—who now have a wider choice than ever of news sources and ways of accessing them—it has proved an almost unqualified blessing.

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