

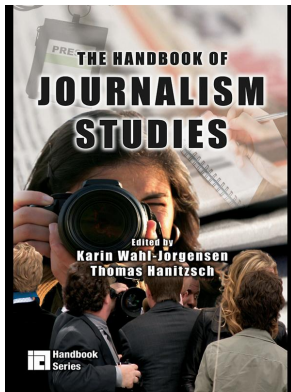
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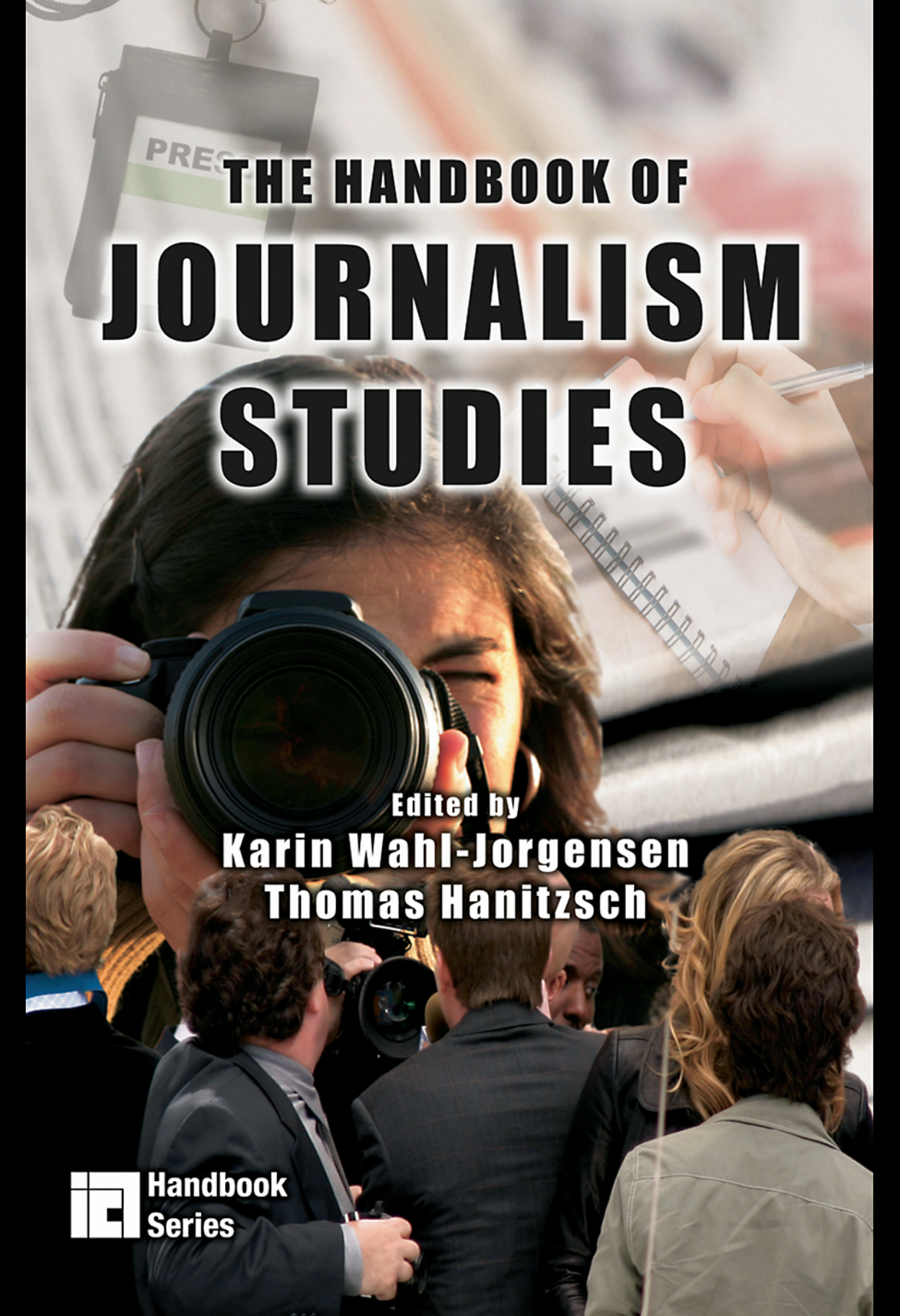
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Thomas Hanitzsch**

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News Organizations and Routines

Lee B. Becker and Tudor Vlad

INTRODUCTION

Journalists and the organizations for which they work produce news. In other words, news is both an individual product and an organizational product. Even freelance journalists—journalists not employed by a media organization—were dependent until recently on media organizations for the distribution of their messages. The complex technologies that have been used to distributed media messages have required resources that few individuals controlled.

The Internet has changed much about the way news is produced and distributed. Journalists now can do their work on their own and distribute their messages on their own. While, at present, most journalists continue to work for organizations that distribute news—news organizations—it is not clear how long that will continue to be the case.

The literature on news organizations and news construction, for the most part, is grounded in the past, when the journalist was weak and the news organization was powerful. That literature is changing, however, reflecting the shifts in the relationship of the news worker to news organizations.

This chapter begins with a brief overview about how news organizations have been conceptualized and studied. It next moves to a discussion of news routines—the repeated activities of journalists who go about their work. The observation that journalists and media organizations follow identifiable routines in producing the news has had significant impact on the study of news work. The identification of these routines has contributed to a major theoretical argument in the literature, namely that news should be viewed as constructed social reality rather than a mirror image of events that have taken place.

A careful review of the initial research on news routines as well as subsequent research in this tradition, however, suggests that the concept of news routines has a significant limitation. Researchers have struggled to identify elements of the routines that vary across time, across settings, among media organizations and among journalists.

In this chapter, we have identified some routines that do vary and have provided a conceptual framework for understanding them. Drawing on the historical work on routines and our own, more recent research, we have suggested a way to view and understand the basic mandates of news work and to see how those mandates affect routines. We believe the review indicates that some aspects of routines do vary across time, across setting, among media organizations and workers.

The chapter ends with a discussion of the questions raised by this literature for future study of news construction, particularly in an environment where news work—and news routines—will not always take place in news organizations.

NEWS ORGANIZATIONS

Research on news construction has come from three perspectives, according to Schudson (2002). The political economy perspective links news construction to the structure of the state and the economy. Herman and Chomsky (1988), for example, argued that the media create news that supports state interests rather than those of the individual. A second approach draws mainly on sociology and attempts to understand news production from the perspective of organizational and occupational theory. Epstein's (1974) classic study of how television network structure influenced news is an example. The bulk of the work on news construction has come from this perspective. A third approach focuses on broad cultural constraints on news work. Chalaby's (1996) study of the development of French and American journalism, which notes the influence of the French literary tradition on its journalism, is an example. As Schudson (2002) notes, the three perspectives are not wholly distinct, and some of the key studies in the organizational tradition have strong cultural and political references as well.

Tunstall (1971) made a distinction between *news organizations*, defined as editorial departments employing primarily journalists, and *media organizations*, which are larger entities that contain more than one news organization plus other types of communication units, such as magazines and publishing houses. In Tunstall's view, these two categories of organization differ in terms of goals and bureaucracy. Media organizations will be more commercially oriented, while news organizations will have fewer routines.

Large news organizations have all of the characteristics of bureaucracies, Sigal (1973) argued. They have a division of labor along functional and geographic lines. Journalists can be differentiated in terms of whether they are reporters or editors. Reporters are differentiated between those who do general assignment and those with specialized topic areas. News organizations are organized geographically as well.

Epstein (1974), in a study of the three major television networks, focused on the way they structured their news gathering and found that there were only slight differences in the processes that those organizations employed to produce national newscasts. Epstein argued that the mirror metaphor was not an accurate model for how television news programs work. If television news was analogous to a mirror, routines of selection and production of news would be of no relevance. The metaphor suggested that all the events of significance would be reflected by television news. Network news, Epstein argued, was a limited and highly prioritizing news-gathering operation. During the period of observation, for instance, Epstein found that 90 percent of the NBC national news was produced by ten crews in five major cities because that was where they had news crews.

Warner (1969), in an earlier study of television news, found similarities between the organization structure there and in a newspaper. He concluded that the executive producer's role, for example, was similar to the role of the editor of a newspaper and that the main criteria identified by the executive producers for news selection and distribution were space, significance and political balance, much as is the case in a newspaper. Halloran, Elliot, and Murdock (1970) in their study of the coverage by British television services and national newspapers of anti-Vietnam war demonstration, found an important similarity among the media. The media all focused on the issue of violence. The authors claimed that it was less a deliberate attempt to distort the event, but

the result of what those news organizations defined as newsworthy. Observed differences among the media in terms of technologies, political orientation, and newsgathering routines did not matter much in the end.

In their overview of the research on the nature of news organizations, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) defined media organizations as social, formal, usually economic entities that employ media workers to produce media content. In most of the cases, the main goal of these organizations is to generate profit, especially by targeting audiences that are attractive to advertisers. The economic pressures influence the journalistic decisions. According to the authors, other factors that affect the content and the routines utilized to generate it are the size of the media organization, the membership to a network or media group, and the ownership.

THE CONCEPT OF NEWS ROUTINES

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) defined news routines as “Those patterned, routinized, repeated practices and forms that media workers use to do their jobs” (p. 105). These routines, Shoemaker and Reese contended, are created in response to the limited resources of the news organization and the vast amount of raw material that can be made into news. More specifically, the routines are dictated by technology, deadlines, space, and norms (Reese, 2001). “The job of these routines is to deliver, within time and space limitations, the most acceptable product to the consumer in the most efficient manner,” Shoemaker and Reese (1996, pp.108–109) wrote.

Tuchman (1972), drawing from the writings in the sociology of work, seems to have been the first to discuss routines in the context of journalism. She argued that a key part of news creation is a reliance on routine procedures for “processing information called news, a depletable product made every day (p. 662).” Tuchman (1973) elaborated on this theme by arguing that organizations routinize tasks because it “facilitates the control of work (p. 110).” Workers always have too much work to do, she wrote, so they “try to control the flow of work and the amount of work to be done” (p. 110).

In Tuchman’s view, journalists exemplify workers with a need to control their work because journalists are “called upon to give accounts of a wide variety of disasters—unexpected events—on a routine basis” (p. 111). News work, she argued, “thrives upon processing unexpected events, events that burst to the surface in some disruptive, exceptional (and hence newsworthy) manner” (p. 111).

Tuchman (1973) compared the classification of news based on a scheme commonly used by news workers with a scheme she created based on the sociology of work. News workers classify news as “hard,” “soft,” “spot,” “developing,” and “continuing.” Tuchman argued that news should be classified based on how it happens and on the requirements for the organization. This led her to classify news based on whether it was “scheduled” or “unscheduled,” whether its dissemination was urgent or not, how it was affected by the technology of news work, and whether the journalists could make decisions in advance about future coverage of the event or not.

Tuchman argued that her classification of news better explained how news organizations actually work than did the category scheme of the journalists. Specifically, she said, her scheme explained how journalists and journalistic organizations control their work to allow them to process unexpected events. The journalistic category scheme, she argued, did not accomplish that goal.

This initial discussion of routines by Tuchman was important for at least two reasons. First, it suggested that news work could be understood from the broader perspective of the sociology of work generally. Second, it suggested “it might be more valuable to think of news not as distorting, but rather as reconstituting the everyday world” (p. 129). Journalists construct and

reconstruct social reality, she argued. Researchers who wanted to understand news should focus on that construction, rather than on whether the end product was biased in some way.

Tuchman's initial interest in news work grew out of a concern with the use of newspaper stories by sociologists to measure community variables. In her 1972 article in the *American Journal of Sociology*, she argued explicitly that these stories should not be treated as a reflection of reality, but rather that news work constructs its own reality. In a debate published in the *American Sociological Review*, Tuchman (1976) criticized Danzger (1975), who used newspaper articles to index community conflict. She argued that news routines, such as relying on centralized sources, systematically support those with political and economic power. Power, in fact, often includes the ability to generate news.

This argument about news as the product of news workers and news organizations, rather than a reflection of some "reality," is central to three articles published during this same period by Molotch and Lester (1973, 1974, 1975). The media are "not an objective reporter of events but an active player in the constitution of events," the team argued in the first of these papers (Molotch & Lester, 1973, p. 258). The goals of the media lead them to select some events over others for inclusion in the news. News, in fact, needs to be viewed as "purposive behavior," they argued (Molotch & Lester, 1974), that is, the product of activities of the journalists and their employers that suite the needs of both. The journalists work with the raw materials largely provided to them by promoters of events to "transform a perceived set of promoted occurrences into public events through publication or broadcast" (p. 104).

Molotch and Lester (1975) differentiate this perspective from what they consider to be the normal view on the part of sociologists and others concerned with news at the time. They argued that most observers make an "assumption of an objectively significant set of happenings which can be known, known to be important, and hence reported by competent, unrestrained news professionals" (p. 235). When news deviates from this "objective" view of the happening, they argued, the usual explanation is that the reporters were incompetent, management interfered, or outsiders corrupted the process through payoffs. The result is "bias." But Molotch and Lester (1975) said they made no assumption that there is an "objective reality," but they rather saw news as the product of the processes that are used to create news.

For Molotch and Lester (1974), news "routines" are important for an understanding of that production of occurrences into news. The media need to be understood as formal organizations that use "routines for getting work done in newsrooms" (p. 105). Molotch and Lester (1975), in a study of the Santa Barbara, California, oil spill of 1969, identified some of those routines, which they say, "may become so ingrained that they become reified as 'professional norms' of 'good journalism'" (p. 255). These include the routines of covering occurrences close to when they happened and then decreasing attention over time, of concentrating news personnel in large cities, and of covering events close at hand less than those more distant.

This formative work of Tuchman, Molotch, and Lester was important for at least three reasons. First, it explained that routine behaviors help journalists create news. Second, it focused on the role of power in determining news. Third, it distinguished between the constructed reality of news and what news workers refer to as "reality."

These early writers about routines did not see these fundamental characteristics of work as variable among media organizations or media workers or across time. Rather, these "routines" were seen as defining characteristics of news work.

Eliasoph (1988) challenged this assumption that routines were universal in a study of what she termed an "oppositional radio station." What she found, however, was that the routines, in fact, did not vary. The reporters at the radio station she observed, KPFA-FM in Berkeley, Cali-

ifornia, followed the same routines as the reporters at the media studied by others. Despite this reliance on the same techniques, however, the journalists at the oppositional radio station did not produce the same type of news as the reporters at the other media. The routines were used for the same reason as at the other media—to make the work of the journalists manageable—but the relationship of the station to its audience, the social and political position of the journalists and those who controlled the newsroom shaped the characteristics of the news product.

Hansen, Ward, Conners, and Neuzil (1994) examined whether the creation of electronic news libraries for the storage and retrieval of previously printed stories influenced the news routines of newspapers. For the most part, they concluded, the routines had not changed. In a subsequent study in the same vein, Hansen, Neuzil, and Ward (1998) concluded that the creation of teams within newspaper newsrooms to focus on news topics also had not affected markedly the routines of news creation.

More recent research using the concept of news routines seems largely to have assumed the lack of variability in the concept. Cook (1998), in his analysis of the role of news media in politics, argues that news routines produce predictable news across time and similar news across news outlets. Oliver and Maney (2000), in work reminiscent of that of Danzger (1975), compared newspaper coverage of community demonstrations with police records of those demonstrations. They found discrepancies between the coverage and the police records that could be explained by what they called newspaper routines, namely a preference for stories about local leaders and those with conflict resulting for the presence of counterdemonstrators. Wolfsfeld, Avraham, and Aburaiya (2000) found evidence that cultural and political assumptions in Israeli society dictate largely fixed routines of news coverage that result in a negative presentation of its Arab citizens.

Consistent with the Wolfsfeld et al. study (2000), Bennett (1996), and Ryfe (2006b) argued that the media follow routines that are the outcome of organizational and professional rules. The use of the word “rules” is significant, for it indicates something that is not variable. For Bennett, these rules explain the consistency of news content across time and circumstances. Writing in the same vein, Sparrow (2006) did acknowledge that routines and practices of the media should vary in response to uncertainty in the environment of the media organization. The nature of the variation, however, is not specified.

The lack of variability in news routines renders the concept of limited value in news construction research. To understand the origins and the consequences of the routines, the researcher must be able to identify variability in the routines themselves. In other words, the researcher needs to find situations where the routines are not followed or in some other way are altered in order to understand why the routines are not followed or differ and to understand the consequences of the routines.

The importance of this early work on routines, in sum, rests largely on its contribution to a view of news as a construction of reality, rather than a mirror of that reality. Schudson (2002, 2005), in reviews of the literature on news routines and on news construction, has both acknowledged that contribution and expressed some concern about it. In his view, it seems that the assumption that real world events are not particularly important in determining what is news was “overstated” by scholars (Schudson, 2005, p. 181). The event that stimulates the creation of news has more impact than many of the early writers on news construction believed, in his view. “The reality-constructing practices of the powerful will fail (in the long run) if they run roughshod over the world “out there,”” Schudson wrote (2005, p. 181). As one example, Schudson pointed to the findings of Livingston and Bennett (2003). These researchers reported that the amount of news based on spontaneous activities increased dramatically on at least one cable news channel, CNN, in the 1994 to 2001 period as a result of the technological change in the industry.

THE CONCEPT OF BEATS

Integrated into the discussion of news routines is the concept of news beats. News organizations generally organize themselves so as to be able to observe events and gather the raw materials that are used to produce news.

The origins of the term “beat” as used to describe the organizational structure of news gathering are not known. One possibility is that the term is borrowed from police work, where police officers are assigned geographical areas or beats that they cover in a routine way. In fact, one dictionary definition of the word “beat” is “a habitual path or round of duty: as a policeman’s beat” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 1964).

The literature examining the construction of news and news routines has given extensive attention to beats. For Tuchman (1978), news organizations use a “news net” as a means of acquiring the raw materials that become news. The net, she argues, was originally designed for “catching appropriate stories available at centralized locations” (p. 25). It assumes that the audiences of news are interested in occurrences at these locations, that they are concerned with the activities of specific organizations, and that they are interested in specific topics.

For these reasons, Tuchman argues, the news net is “flung through space, focuses upon specific organizations, and highlights topics” (p. 25). Of these three methods of dispersing reporters, geographic territoriality is most important. A beat, for Tuchman, is a method of dispersing reporters to organizations associated with the generation of news and holding centralized information.

Fishman (1980), in his now-classic observational study of news gathering, noted that the beat system of news coverage was so widespread when he did his study in the late 1970s that not using beats was a distinctive feature of being an experimental, alternative, or underground newspaper. In Fishman’s view, the beat is a journalist’s concept, grounded in the actual working world of reporters. Beats have a history in the news organization that outlives the histories of the individuals who work the beats. Superiors assign reporters to their beats, and, while the reporter is responsible for, and has jurisdiction over, covering the beat, the reporter does not own that beat. For Fishman, the beat is a domain of activities occurring outside the newsroom consisting of something more than random assortments of activities. Finally, Fishman argued, the beat is a social setting to which the reporter belongs. The reporter becomes part of the network of social relations which is the beat. In Fishman’s view, beats have both a topical and territorial character. Journalists talk about their beats as places to go and people to see and as a series of topics one is responsible for covering.

For Gans (1979), the key process in news creation is story suggestion. Reporters have the responsibility for thinking up story ideas. To this end, they are required to “keep up with what is going on in the beats they patrol or in the areas of the country assigned to their bureaus, and they are evaluated in part by their ability to suggest suitable stories” (p. 87). Other staff members, including top editors and producers, are also expected to come up with story ideas, and nonjournalists are encouraged to do so as well, Gans noted.

Gans’ conceptualization is informative, for it focuses on the generation of the idea that lies behind the story and links this generation of ideas to beats. In this view, raw material has the potential to become news only if it is recognized as having that potential by someone in the news construction business. Bantz, McCorkle, and Baade (1980) called this process of story idea generation “story ideation,” a concept discussed in more detail below.

Beats and Television

For the most part, the literature on beats assumed their existence in news organizations. Yet there was evidence in early studies of news construction of variability regarding beats and beat

structure. Specially, that early research showed that television newsrooms did not make use of beat structure as frequently as newspapers or that the beats television newsrooms used were generally not as well developed as those used by newspapers. Drew (1972), in his study of decision-making in three local television newsrooms in a medium sized midwestern market, found that some beats, specifically to cover city hall, have sometimes been used in television. Based on a study of newsgathering and production procedures at three major US television national networks, Epstein (1974), however, found that fixed beats, except for those in Washington, particularly at the White House, did “not satisfy the network’s basic problem of creating ‘national news’” (p. 136). As a result, correspondents were moved from one topic to another depending on availability and logistical criteria after the assignment editor decided that the specific event was worth covering.

Altheide (1976), in his classic study of a local television newsroom, found no evidence of a beat structure. The primary concern of the reporters and editors was having enough material to fill the newscasts, and they relied on wire services, newspapers, press releases, and telephone calls to get their story ideas. Thus, newspapers and wire service reporters, who largely work beats, indirectly determine what most of the newsworthy events are for television journalists, Fishman said.

McManus (1990), in a study of three television news operations, found that most reporters at the three stations were assigned to specific “areas to search for news,” which he called news beats. The demands of filing daily stories assigned by the news managers, however, resulted in no more than a few minutes a day of looking for newsworthy events. At one station, reporters were supposed to have one day a week to catch up on their beats, but that day was routinely reclaimed by the assignment editor for a pressing story. The size of the station is important in the process of gathering information. A larger station will have more highly active discovery. McManus argued, however, that all television stations consume much more air time on stories discovered relatively passively than on stories resulting from active discovery.

The Concept of Story Ideation

At least part of the answer to the question of why beats are created seems to lie with the concept of story ideation. For Gans (1979), as noted, the key process in news creation is story suggestion. Bantz, McCorkle, and Baade (1980) use the term “story ideation” to describe this process of story idea generation. Something became news, they observed in the television newsroom they studied, as a result of a process that began with the story idea. Individual news workers assessed the information flowing into the newsroom from various sources, such as press releases, general mail, newspapers, magazines, reporter tips, police-fire-FBI radios, and phone calls to determine what could be a story. These story ideas were then discussed in the daily story “budget” meeting, where decisions were made on which of the raw material would become news.

Television organizations, it seems, have found other techniques to generate story ideas. Unlike newspapers, television news operations cannot afford to produce more stories than they will use because of the high production costs and limited number of staff members. As a result, assignment editors disperse their staffs so as to maximize the probability of generating a story.

Some of the techniques used in television news as an alternative to traditional beats are similar to beat structures in that reporters are expected to generate ideas on a specific topic, and some are not. What all these techniques have in common, however, is that they produce the ideas that satisfy the needs of the media organization. While most of the existent literature on news construction sees beats as ways of structuring news gathering, they should rather be seen as one way of generating story ideas.

The Concept of News Philosophy

If story ideation is a defining characteristic of news, meaning that all news organizations need story ideas, and if there are multiple ways for media organizations to generate story ideas, what is required is some understanding of why a particular media organization would employ one technique for story ideation over another. In the terminology of Hage (1972), what is needed is an action premise, specifying when one mechanism for story ideation will be used rather than another.

Recent research on how media organizations respond to market pressures offers at least one suggestion. Media organizations in commercial systems create an identity for their product, or what marketers call a brand. The identity, or brand, specifies characteristics of the news product. This forces media managers to develop what they call a news philosophy, or a view about the nature of the news product the organization will offer. That news philosophy can be expected to shape the techniques for story ideation used by the media organization.

Branding in media industries, and particularly among television stations, only recently has received attention by media scholars. Atwater (1984) found that television news operations do differentiate their product to compete more successfully in a competitive market. Specifically, stations used more or less soft news stories as a way of distinguishing their offering from that of other stations. Such product differentiation is often achieved through branding, or the development and maintenance of sets of product attributes and values appealing to customers.

What media organizations often brand, either explicitly or implicitly, is “news philosophy” (Connolly, 2002). This is the organization’s general approach to the news product (Chalaby, 2000). Organizations make decisions to reflect some aspects of their communities and reject others, to provide a mix of news that is more serious or more entertaining, to downplay or play up news of conflict and news about crime. These decisions are market driven, for they are used to differentiate competitive news products. In radio and television, where competition, at least in the United States, is great, organizations opt for different “news philosophies” and then promote those differences, i.e., brand their products accordingly.

Additional Functions of Beats

This discussion of the concepts of news philosophy and story ideation provides the needed action premise to explain the use of beats in some media organizations and not in others. As market competition increases, media organizations would be expected to be more differentiated in terms of news philosophy, and, consequently, more differentiated in terms of use of story ideation techniques.

While the literature on news construction focuses on the utility of beats as a means of gathering news, research also shows that beats may serve additional functions for newsrooms. Becker, Lowrey, Claussen, and Anderson (2000), in fact, have argued that there are at least three different ways in which beats can be viewed. In one view—the view of the literature on news construction reviewed—beats exist in news organizations because they are efficient—if not essential—tools for gathering news. From the perspective of the sociology of organizations literature, Becker and his colleagues argued, beats are a form of job differentiation. That is, they are a way of putting people into positions in which they can most efficiently operate for the betterment of the overall organization. In this view, newsrooms would be expected to create beats as they increased in size for the simple reason that job differentiation allows an organization to function more efficiently. Finally, beats can be viewed as part of the managerial reward structure. Beats may be ranked hierarchically and, as a result, used to reward those who have performed well and punish or discipline those who have not.

These three definitions of a beat are not in conflict. Beats can serve as the means of generating story ideas as gathering news. They also can reflect job differentiation and be used as a reward structure. Becker and his colleagues (2000) found little evidence in their newspaper newsroom study that beats are used for this third function. Beat structure did vary by size of organization however, though it retained its basic fabric as it grew in complexity, consistent with the view that beats are tools of news construction.

Clearly, then, beats can have consequences beyond those intended by their creators. For example, some have commented on the consequences of the relationships that develop in beats. For Breed (1955), the importance of beats is the power it gives to reporters. He concluded that beat reporters gained the “editor” function. Eliasoph (1988) says that reporting on beats does not necessarily have to be uncritical, depending on the power relations between reporter and source. Soloski (1989) noted that beat reporters are drawn into a “symbiotic relationship” of mutual obligations with their sources. This both facilitates and complicates their work. Donohue, Olien, and Tichenor (1989) argued that writers who regularly covered a beat share a system of meaning, so that stories could be produced efficiently with generally similar results.

ILLUSTRATIVE STUDY

A study we conducted provides tentative support for the posited relationship between news philosophy, story ideation, and adoption of story ideation strategies (Becker et al., 2001). Researchers spent two days observing the newsrooms in two television stations and a newspaper within a medium-sized metropolitan community in the southeastern United States. The television stations were chosen because they were roughly comparable in newsroom size and number of newscasts produced per week, with similar network-related resources. But there was reason to expect differences in approaches to the final news product. The newspaper represented the single daily newspaper for the metropolitan area. The researchers also conducted informal interviews with newsroom managers and journalists. The newscasts and the newspapers created during the time of observation were viewed/read and analyzed.

Some simple answers to the questions posed about the importance of beats emerge from this study. First, though the television newsrooms did not have as obvious of a specialization structure as the newspaper, they did have specialists. For example, specialists covered weather, sports, consumer news, and health. These specialists were responsible for generating story ideas and stories or other content in their special areas. The observations indicate that the television newsrooms did not have the elaborate beat structure of the newspaper newsroom simply because the television newsrooms did not need such an elaborate structure. The television newsrooms need fewer stories than the newspapers, and they could generate the story ideas and the stories from scanners, from the casual observation of their general assignment reporters, from web sites, from press releases, and from listings of community activities that were readily available to them. The study showed that when news organizations decided they needed specialized kinds of content on a regular basis, they created a system to generate it. This was done by designating an individual whose job it was to create this type of content. At one of the television stations studied, these specialists were called “franchise” reporters. Their job was to generate story ideas and then report and produce stories about such topics as consumer news and health issues. Though the sports reporter or even the weather person was not called a “franchise” reporter, she or he functioned in the same way. The station decided it needed a steady diet of sports and weather, and it also decided the best way to get that was to have a specialist whose job it was to create it.

At the newspaper studied, the editors had decided they needed a steady stream of copy from

a geographic area outside the metropolitan area, so they created a beat for that area. The creation of a geographic beat at the paper served a very specific need for the newspaper studied. The paper wanted copy from that region, because it wanted to increase its circulation in the region. In addition, the newspaper wanted to satisfy the internal desire to be regional in focus. The reporter assigned to the beat was expected to regularly suggest story ideas, and to regularly send in stories.

The two television stations studied differed in terms of how they generated story ideas. The smaller of the stations relied more on its reporters and producers, while the larger of the two stations relied more on the talents, expertise, and organizational skills of the key assignment person. The differences seem to reflect differences in news philosophy at the two stations. Clearly a major difference between the newspaper and the television stations was reflected in news philosophy. Conversations in the newspaper newsroom reflected an interest in comprehensiveness, completeness of news coverage, and breadth of topics covered. In the television newsrooms, the focus was much narrower. In both cases, the news directors recognized the limited scope of what they could do in a newscast. Fundamentally, they were interested in a newscast that was interesting to the audience, rather than a newscast that reflected even the major features of the activities of the community. The data are rather clear in differentiating story ideation and creation in the daily newspaper from story ideation and creation at the television stations. They provide less clarity regarding the differences between the television stations. Those differences were small, but they seemed to be significant, in part because they seemed to reflect differences in news philosophy.

The findings of these case studies are consistent with the basic premises generated from the news construction literature in this chapter. Each of the news organizations observed began each news day with a need for raw materials, namely, the ideas to be used to generate news stories. The organizations had limited resources available for the acquisition of these materials, and they developed routines or procedures to guarantee their availability. For the newspaper, these involved beats. For the television stations, they involved less elaborate specialization, but specialization nonetheless. The television stations assigned individuals to produce “packages” on a routine basis, and they assigned individuals within the organization the specific task of creating, assembling and organizing story ideas. Anticipated consumer demand helped shape the characteristics of the news product. Each of the media organizations seemed to have a news philosophy, or a sense of its mission that was shaped by what was successful in the market. They sought to “brand” their products accordingly.

CONCLUSIONS

Ryfe (2006a), in the introduction to a special issue of the journal *Political Communication* dealing with news, argues that the research on news media has produced one largely consistent finding: news is extraordinarily homogeneous. The research also offers an explanation for this homogeneity: news is the product of a set of organizational routines that do not vary across time, place, or organization.

Most of the research on routines is based on the study of American media, Ryfe acknowledges, and it is an open question as to whether routines differ in other parts of the world as well as to whether they have varied across time and can be expected to change in the future. Bourdieu (2001) argues that sameness of content is a feature of French media as well. Shoemaker and Cohen (2006) found more similarity than dissimilarity in the topics in the news in a composite week of newspapers, radio broadcasts and television broadcasts across 10 countries from around the world. Donsbach (1995), however, found that US journalists have a higher level of division of labor than journalists in four European countries studied for comparison. The US journalists

also are more likely to have their stories edited for the sake of accuracy than are journalists in the other countries. Esser (1998), in a detailed analysis of newsroom structure in German and British newspapers, found huge differences in terms of role differentiation; the German newsrooms had almost none, while the British newsrooms were highly role structured. Weaver (1998), in a study of journalists from 12 different national states, found large differences in terms of the roles the journalists say they should play in society. Esser (1998) concluded that the existing scholarship is naive in not recognizing differences in structure and routines, perhaps because that research has focused on the gross similarities in content.

Cook (1998), in a critique of the organizational approach to the study of news, argued that this perspective produced evidence of the necessity of routines but gave little information about those routines. Cook argued that the news media in the United States are more than a series of organizations. The similarities of news content and of the process that produces that content suggest that the news media should be analyzed as a single institution, he contends.

The focus of Cook (1998) and, at nearly the same time, Sparrow (1999) on an institutional approach to news has generated new interest in news routines. Essays and reports by Benson (2006), Cook (2006), Entman (2006), Kaplan (2006), Lawrence (2006), Lowrey (forthcoming), Ryfe (2006b), and Sparrow (2006), most published in the special issue of *Political Communication*, attest to that fact.

Lowrey (forthcoming), drawing on the sociological literature (particularly Meyer & Rowan, 1977) argues that the “new institutional” approach is a reaction to traditional research and theorizing on organizational behavior. That research has viewed humans and their organizations as purely calculating and goal-oriented, and it has not seen their actions in context. The institutionalists have focused on the power of habits, norms and unquestioned typifications in decision making and on the environment of the organizations. The policies and practices of the institutions acquire unquestioned status. Organizations follow them without concern for their effectiveness.

At this point, it is unclear how much difference this new approach is going to make in research on news production. Sparrow (2006) argues, based on new institutionalism, that news media develop standard routines in response to three kinds of uncertainty: over profits, legitimacy and raw materials. The first and third of these are central issues in the media economics literature, which argues that media organizations are fundamentally economic in nature (Alexander et al., 2004; Croteau & Hoynes, 2001; Doyle, 2002; Hoskins et al., 2004; McManus, 1994). Entman (2004) argues that news institutionalism alone will not explain media coverage of foreign policy and suggests an integration of it and insights from the media and foreign policy literature (Entman, 2004).

As we have explained above, we believe the organization perspective continues to have merit. In our view, a defining characteristic of news organizations is their need for story ideas, as these ideas are the raw material of news. The structure of the organizations and their routines result from this need, and these structures and routines, in turn, shape the final news product.

The historical literature has given less focus to story ideation than would seem to be ideal. The result is that the multiple ways in which stories can be generated is not known. Clearly beats, which have been a historical concern in the news construction literature, play a key role in generating story ideas. Other techniques exist as well.

The literature on news routines seemed to have stagnated, because the notion of routines was not seen as variable. This new focus on variations in techniques for story idea generation offers a fresh avenue for exploration. Similarly, the antecedents of variation in story ideation techniques are worthy of exploration. Here news philosophy is identified as one such antecedent. Others are likely to present themselves as well. An examination of variability in story ideation techniques may suggest differences in media content, particularly on the local level, that much of the existing research has missed.

Consistent with Ryfe (2006a), we expect routines to vary across time. We also think that the uncoupling of journalism from media organizations will have a large amount of impact on how news is produced. Preliminary research (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007) has shown that the news agenda of use-driven web sites is strikingly different from that of the mainstream press. It seems likely that citizen journalists, that is, journalists working without special training in journalism and/or working without the constraints of the traditional media, also will generate different story ideas than journalists working for the media. The routines for generating those ideas are likely to be different as well, since they will have little or no link to the present practice of journalism.

Story ideation will almost certainly remain the key process in news production. For that reason, it is where future research can be directed most profitably.

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