

INTERVIEW

with John Pavlik

By Mónica Rodrigues

Journalism and Creative Industries in the Digital World

JOCIS interviewed John Pavlik, professor of journalism and media studies and specialist in the impact of technology in journalism, about the digital revolution and the adaptation of media to this new era.



John V. Pavlik is a Professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies in the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Pavlik has written widely on the impact of new technology on journalism, media and society, with a particular interest in the role of the press in society in the U.S. and globally. His next book is *Journalism in the Age of Virtual Reality* (forthcoming from Columbia University Press).

How can creative industries boost their activity with the digital?

There are many ways creative industries can boost their activity with digital media. My research suggests one of the best is by using emerging immersive media such as augmented reality (AR). Although AR has been in development since at least the 1990s, it is still relatively new to the public and presents interesting and compelling ways to create content experiences for users of mobile devices such as smartphones.

What is the impact of virtual reality and artificial intelligence in the creative industries?

The impact of virtual reality and artificial intelligence in the creative industries is still taking shape. But I believe the impact will ultimately be profound, and in both positive and negative ways. VR and AI present powerful new tools to create content that can be dynamic, personalized and immersive. The creative industries will need to adapt new approaches to design and deliver such immersive content. Challenges will include new threats to privacy and user safety, as VR and AI are both powerful and little understood technologies.

How do you see the application of blockchain in the creative industries?

Blockchain could be very important in creating a secure and trusted network for production and distribution in the creative industries.

In your opinion, will the printed newspaper disappear?

No, the printed newspaper will not entirely disappear. Rather like information carved in stone (e.g., tombstones), it will

play a gradually diminishing role, being supplanted by electronically delivered information in a digital form.

In the online world everything is faster and more ephemeral, readers lose interest faster and so there is a need to create more content. Doesn't it call into question the quality of journalism?

Actually, it's just the opposite. Recent research (Knight, Pew) shows that young people want news as much or more than ever. But they have little trust in legacy news media. Journalism organizations must place an even greater emphasis on creating quality, accurate and truthful news content that is highly engaging such as what I call experiential news (journalism featuring AR & VR); it's experiential in the sense that users can experience the news as a virtual witness or participant.

With online journalism came the fake news. Is there a way to stop them from proliferating? How to help readers distinguish the "good" from the "bad" news?

Fake news has actually been around for more than a century (e.g., see the so-called Piltdown Man hoax perpetrated by a newspaper more than a century ago to sell newspapers). But the rise of social media and bots (enabled by nefarious uses of AI) made it very easy to produce and distribute seemingly true but actually fake news online... and to do so from a country in one part of the world to deliberately influence an election in another country across the globe. It's propaganda but in a digital form. I think new digital tools can help to identify fake news and this can help. But quality news media also need to make detecting and outing of fake news a part of their regular reporting. This can help readers distinguish the "good" from the "bad" news. Last, news

consumers need to improve their critical news skills and perceive everything they see with a healthy dose of skepticism and try to verify the facts before sharing an item they see that could actually be fake, harmful and even dangerous.

Mastering traditional forms of reporting and writing is not nearly enough for a journalist working in today's online world.

Can the printed newspaper position itself as a safe source of information in this context of fake news?

Yes, this is essential. In fact it would be the basis of a very valuable marketing/branding campaign for quality news media. Quality news media might even form a consortium that makes this their shared brand identity. I'm in fact speaking frequently with a news organization based near my university called NewsCheck and this is a basic part of their core mission: trust in news.

Do you think that social media is more of a vehicle for the promotion of democracy or is it more of a way for proto-authoritarian and populist politicians to promote themselves?

I think it is any and all of the above.

In the age of online journalism, should a journalist acquire other abilities? Which ones? Do you think the profession has changed?

Journalists today should have a core set of abilities. One is to get the facts as reliably (accurately) as possible. Second is to present those facts in as compelling and informative fashion as possible (including via written word, spoken word, images, moving images, immersive media, etc.). That said, just mastering traditional forms of reporting and writing is not nearly enough for a journalist working in today's online world. Facility with digital, online and immersive media is essential alongside traditional media forms.

Do you agree that through online journalism one gets more feedback from readers? If so, how to take advantage and manage this aspect?

I agree that online forms produce much more feedback to journalists and news media industries. But I'm not sure the journalists and news media are paying enough attention to that feedback and responding or adapting to it nearly enough. News media could use algorithmic tools to help process the vast feedback generated today and then factor it into their future news reporting and news story experiences.

What future do you foresee for the traditional and for the new media?

Doing more journalism to engage younger audiences is a key to the future survival of news media, especially for journalism to thrive in the 21st century. My new book, *Journalism in the Age of Virtual Reality*, forthcoming by Columbia University Press, examines this question in detail.