Making the News

*Making the News* provides a rare, cross-national perspective on key features of journalism and newsmaking cultures and the changing media landscape in contemporary Europe.

Focusing on the key trends, practices and issues in contemporary journalism and news cultures, Paschal Preston maps the major contours of change. Adopting a multi-level approach, he examines individual as well as the broader industrial, organisational, institutional and cultural factors shaping journalism practices over the past two decades.

Moving beyond the tendency to focus on journalism trends and newsmaking practices within a single country, *Making the News* draws on unique, cross-national research examining current journalism practices and related newsmaking cultures in eleven West, Central and East European countries. The study included in-depth interviews with almost hundred senior journalists and subsequent workshop discussions with other interest groups.

*Making the News* links reviews and discussions of the existing literature to original research engaging with the views and experiences of journalists working at the ‘coal face’ of contemporary newsmaking practices, to provide an original study and useful student text.

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Journalism and news cultures in Europe

Paschal Preston
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Most books rely on the work and contributions of many persons in addition to the person named on the cover. That is especially the case here. Many sections of the text are informed by the work of partners in a multi-country research project: ‘Media and Ethics of the European Public Sphere From the Treaty of Rome to the “War on Terror”’ (eMEDIATE). The project was funded by the EU’s Sixth Framework research programme (Priority 7: Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge-Based Society, Project number CIT2-CT-2004–506027).

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Chapter 1

Journalism in a state of flux?
Explanatory perspectives

A subject so complex as journalism can be treated with advantage from very different standpoints.

(Carl Bücher, 1901: 215)

The Anglo-US model – hegemonic or in crisis?

To declare that journalism and newsmaking are in a state of flux and subject to deep, multi-dimensional changes in the first decade of the twenty-first century may be an understatement. We don’t merely refer to the multiple innovations in the production and distribution of news enabled by the Internet and a whole cluster of other radical technological developments. Nor only to the growing array of news media ‘products’ and formats available on our television and computer screens, mobile handsets or other devices, all promising up-to-the-second, mobile and ambient news services in keeping with our brave ‘new’, ‘knowledge-based’ or ‘networked’ society. Nor are we only thinking of the more recent buzz around user-generated content, audience engagement in the co-production of news or even the evolution of a new species, citizen-journalists, threatening the privileged status if not the survival of the old professional sort. Certainly, these constitute important and much-studied aspects of the state of flux in newsmaking today. But they are also accompanied by other significant, if ‘old’, concerns to do with the qualitative aspects of news culture. We refer to concerns about the substantive or quality aspects of news culture, including journalism’s changing roles and responsibilities towards its public – modern journalism’s presumed raison d’être or ‘god term’ (Carey, 2007).

Here, we observe a growing sense that the Anglo-US model of journalistic values and newsmaking practices has become a universal standard for the remainder of the world. This appears to be particularly the case since the shift to a new world order marked by the end of the Cold War, the rise of WTO-based regulatory regimes for media and the USA’s dominant role as the biggest ‘bully’ (Colin Powell) in the world’s military playground. From a soap-box built from bits of chaos theory, one academic specialist proclaims that the old Anglo-US
model has been renewed and is now performing in a manner that transcends criticism, thanks to new digital technologies and a ‘more reflexive’ cohort of journalists (McNair, 2006). Indeed, whilst there may be ‘many ways of doing – or not doing – news’ we note a growing perception that ‘there is now only one approved mega-model’, usually referred to as ‘the Anglo-Saxon model’ (Lloyd, 2004: 29). But even as ‘the ideals of neutral professionalism’ based on Anglo-American media history are widely proclaimed and accepted by journalists around the world, some research specialists find that this frequently occurs ‘even where the actual practice … departs radically’ from such norms (Hallin and Paphathanassopoulos, 2002: 176).

Equally significant, however, are the signs that this, apparently hegemonic, model is now experiencing a crisis in its homelands. For, just as the Anglo-US model of journalism is elevated to the dominant (if not universal) global standard, ‘it is itself becoming the object of increasing internal criticism and questioning by some leading practitioners and researchers in its countries of origin’ (Preston, 2006a: 3). In the USA, for example, academics and public intellectuals express serious concerns about the quality and political independence of the news media, especially in the context of the political regimes focused on war on terror and attendant restrictions on human rights and civil rights since 2001. There is a strong sense that the mainstream news media – not merely the populist neo-conservative outlets but also standard-bearers such as the New York Times – have failed to match the standards of independent and critical journalism they frequently presume for themselves or prescribe for others (Friel and Falk, 2007). In the USA and elsewhere, we also observe major concerns about a significant and long-term decline of public confidence in the news media institutions (Gronke and Cook, 2007).

Turning to the other side of the Atlantic, the past few years have witnessed intensive soul-searching on the part of (at least, some) senior journalists and media professionals concerning the role, operations and powers of the media in Britain. This is only partly related to the various consequences and fallout arising from a now-infamous early morning radio broadcast by a BBC journalist in 2003. The scope of the expressed concern extends way beyond public service broadcasting to address private sector news organisations, including the old print media. In recent years, senior working journalists as well as academics have proclaimed the need for a fundamental review of the British model of journalism (e.g. Lloyd, 2004; Rusbridger, 2005). For example, a senior editor on the Financial Times has argued the need for a major rethink and ‘renewal of the values and tasks of free media’ and that ‘a real debate on what media do to our politics and civil society’ is urgently required (Lloyd, 2004: 1). Others (e.g. O’Neill, 2002) have even called for more extensive forms of regulation of the print media in Britain. Such moves and proposals signal a somewhat unprecedented crisis given the proud and long-standing attachments to the ideals and self-image of an autonomous press in Britain – a tradition that dates back to the writings of David Hume in the eighteenth century. Such developments in its first
country of origin, suggest that the Anglo-US model of journalism is in something of a pickle, if not facing a serious crisis.

For such reasons, then, we may take it that journalism and newsmaking are in a deep, multi-dimensional state of flux today. The prime task of this book is to map the key features and contours of such recent trends and to examine the major influences and explanatory perspectives which help us understand the sources and meaning of these developments.

This book is concerned with describing and explaining the key trends and issues in journalism and news culture in the early twenty-first century. It seeks to identify the contours and trends of multi-dimensional change now unfolding in journalism and newsmaking processes as well as the most compelling explanations of these trends – the alternative or optimal ways of understanding their sources and implications. To this end, the book provides a distinctive multi-layered approach to the influences on newsmaking and news culture. It also draws on a unique, cross-national research project examining the relevant research and current trends in news and journalism cultures in 11 European countries over the past 20 years or so. It adopts a multi-level approach to news culture and journalism practices in an effort to provide a rounded, interdisciplinary account of the trends in this field. In so doing, it seeks to bridge the frequently encountered divide between journalism studies on the one hand, and media or political communication studies, on the other hand.

The book’s agenda and its distinctive approach

At this point, it may be helpful to signal and summarise a number of distinctive features concerning the conceptual framework, research approach and resources that inform the following chapters. First, this book is framed around a distinctive multi-dimensional approach to understanding the influences on news culture and newsmaking processes. It explicitly recognises that the large and growing body of research on journalism and newsmaking is based on many different theoretical and methodological approaches. In this light, we have sought to develop a coherent, practical, yet reasonably comprehensive classification or pedagogic schema. The chosen typology aims to embrace the major concepts and explanatory perspectives on newsmaking. It is framed around five clusters of concepts associated with different explanatory perspectives or schools of research, each offering distinct but complementary ways of understanding the influences on journalism and news culture. This multi-dimensional approach is also interdisciplinary in scope as it embraces research and concepts related to both journalism studies on the one hand, and the media and (political) communication studies field, on the other.

Second, this book has a distinct approach towards mapping the implications for journalism and news culture of digital technologies, new media and broader socio-technical developments variously referred to as the knowledge economy, network society or information age. These comprise a major set of issues, not
least because digital technologies are multiple in form, and have a pervasive application potential, for example they are used extensively in both ‘old’ and ‘new’ news media (as explained in Chapter 2 and later). Thus, to understand the implications of the Internet for news culture and journalism, we need to address relevant trends and factors in both the old or mature media (newspapers, radio and television) as well as in online media and to consider the balance between continuities and changes on a number of fronts. It also means we must address the Internet as one significant node or sub-set of a wider cluster of new information and communication technologies (ICTs). The latter, in turn, may be viewed as a historically rare, major new technology system with a pervasive applications potential.

In negotiating this complex and challenging domain of inquiry, this book provides a distinctive approach centred on balancing contending viewpoints around a number of core issues. One involves recognising the specific features and significance of the Internet and other new ICTs whilst at the same time avoiding techno-centric approaches (or the seductions of the ‘technological sublime’) in analyses of newsmaking trends. Since quality journalism is not determined or tightly linked to technical factors, a second distinctive feature of our approach is to interrogate both the commonalities as well as differences between newsmaking and journalism culture in both new media and old media formats. A further and related feature of our approach in this regard is to address the balance between changes and continuities in the journalism and newsmaking landscape over the past 10–20 years. Here, we seek to introduce a nuanced understanding and distinction between technology-centred and information (e.g. information society or knowledge economy) perspectives on the wider structural changes now impacting on the newsmaking environment. The latter include, for example, the expanding role of various media services and ‘soft communication’ functions within our contemporary societal, economic and political systems.

Third, the book is informed by a relatively rare, cross-national study involving primary and secondary research in 11 countries, as described below. Finally, we may note that this book also seeks to engage with questions concerning the transnationalisation or ‘globalisation’ of news cultures today. In our cross-national study we sought to examine the forms (or extent) of any convergences in newsmaking practices and journalistic cultures across national cultural boundaries in Europe. Here the EU area may be taken as a ‘leading-edge’ site or test case for deepening trans-national economic and political integration at the world-region level. We examine whether and how these developments are being matched by a shared media culture or an emergent post-national public sphere across the EU region.

Thus, this text helps to address the growing interest in trans-national or cross-national studies of journalism and media cultures as it is based on a structured multi-country study that is relatively rare. The relevant international research and teaching literature indicates that cross-national and comparative studies of journalism and media cultures are becoming increasingly important, even urgent
(e.g. Livingstone, 2003; Josephi, 2005). Many recent reviews of the relevant literature have argued that cross-national and comparative research on media and journalism, especially that which is systematic, theoretically informed and tailor-made, is now an urgent priority (e.g. Livingstone, 2003; Hanitzsch, 2005; Josephi, 2005).

Of course cross-national and comparative studies are much easier to prescribe than they are to perform or realise in practice. In part, this is because such studies pose many major practical, epistemological, and value-laden challenges for the researcher, resulting in a continuing paucity of texts based on purpose-built, multi-country research (Hanitzsch, 2005: 2). Besides, many of the recent cross-national or comparative studies of journalistic ethics and editorial cultures often comprise surveys of the declared principles of ethical codes, with little attention to their actual implementation or operational contexts (Himelboim and Limor, 2005). This book draws on primary research among journalists charged with interpreting and implementing the professional norms and codes in specific organisational, media sectors and national contexts. It also seeks to combine the primary research data with focused reviews of the specialised research literature produced in different national settings.

Fourth, as noted above, the book is informed by a carefully structured, cross-national study comprising two main aspects. One involves the findings from primary research, including in-depth interviews with 95 senior journalists in 11 countries in the West, Central and East European regions and from some subsequent workshop discussions with other interest groups. Co-ordinated by the present author, the primary research covered the following ‘new’ and ‘old’ EU member states: Britain, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Serbia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Our interviewees comprised experienced journalists or editors working in print and electronic media in these 11 countries. The semi-structured interviews also sought to address differences between different media, such as TV and press or private and public sector news organisations. The key questions framing our in-depth interviews, fieldwork and secondary research are indicated in Box 1.1.

In addition, this primary research was complemented by secondary research embracing a number of additional countries. This includes systematic reviews of the relevant international research on journalism trends and news influences, including the national literature in the countries covered by the primary research. The book’s substantive chapters engage with the prevailing international research literature as well as drawing on key findings from primary research. In addition, some chapters are also informed by the proceedings of a series of seminar and roundtable discussions with media professionals, politicians and a range of key media user-organisations (representing social interests and non-governmental organisations) centred on discussions of the preliminary results of the research.
Box 1.1 Key questions framing the interviews and secondary research

1 What are the main features of journalism, its professional values, newsmaking practices and editorial cultures in contemporary Europe?

2 What have been the main trends of change in journalism and its news cultures over the past 15–20 years, including the key institutional, organisational and technological factors shaping these changes?

3 What are the key trends of change in journalists’ relationship with their audiences and what are the key factors influencing such changes?

4 To what extent is there any singular European journalism culture or how can we best map a number of competing models (typologies or regionalisations) of journalism in EU countries?

5 To what extent is there an emergent (or growing) common European ‘public sphere’, especially when it comes to the news and the agenda of political issues related to the European Union area?

Five clusters of influences on newsmaking

Our five-fold explanatory frame: clusters of influences on news

As noted, this book is framed around a distinct multi-dimensional approach to understanding the diverse influences on news culture and newsmaking processes. The chosen typology comprises five explanatory perspectives or research traditions which offer distinct but complementary sets of concepts and ways of understanding the influences on journalism and news culture. In brief, our approach is based on our reading and reviews of the relevant international literature which reveal a number of competing but complementary explanatory perspectives (or levels of analysis) for understanding the influences on journalism and news culture. In designing our typology we have benefited from the prior schema of other authors who have sought to frame and summarise the relevant research into a number of categories. Particularly helpful in this regard have been the classifications proposed earlier by: Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980/2003; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Reese, 2001a; Schudson, 2000; Whitney et al., 2004. Here, we identify and combine the major explanatory perspectives and related set of concepts into a five-fold typology. The resulting classification was deemed the most coherent and practical for presenting the research literature and our own research findings. Each of these five explanatory perspectives and clusters of concepts may be treated as highly complementary and even ‘leaky’ (see Figure 1.1).
Individual level influences and professional values

Our first explanatory perspective and cluster of concepts focuses on the individual level. This covers research focused on the personal characteristics, background and values of working journalists. It considers the role of professional values and codes of ethics, including journalists’ own definitions and self-understandings of their professional roles and norms as influences on newsmaking practices. This first set of potential influences on newsmaking is probably the most familiar, partly because it resonates closely with journalists’ traditional self-understandings of their profession. It fits with the modes of explanation or models of ‘common sense’ reasoning favoured by the wider institutions and culture in most, if not all, contemporary capitalist societies.

This strand of research includes many studies that seek to describe the individual characteristics of journalists as an occupational group. Such research has been the most common approach to conducting research on professional issues (Whitney et al., 2004). This is despite the paradox that the concept of objectivity implies that individual characteristics of journalists should have little if any influence on the output of their work. The research also includes many studies of journalists’ beliefs and values, which have been undertaken on the assumption that such individual factors provide an adequate basis for explaining a perceived political bias in news content.

There are several reasons why individual level explanatory models are so popular. First, such perspectives closely match journalists’ self-understanding of their professional roles and autonomy. This is manifest, for example, in the popular genre of journalists’ biographies, and it links to a continuing tendency to frame journalism as linked to the literary domains of knowledge work. Second, the marketing and promotional campaigns of news and other media
organisations have a growing, if long-established, tendency to emphasise the role of individual journalists, especially celebrity or ‘star’ reporters. Third, such perspectives are readily accepted because they are pervasive features of the wider institutional, discursive and cultural setting in contemporary societies.

**Media industry routines: institutional practices and norms**

Our second analytic approach is focused on media industry routines, the typical and taken-for-granted (but patterned) institutional practices and norms that frame and shape daily newsmaking. This cluster comprises concepts and insights on the routines of newsmaking and professional journalistic practices, usually based on sociological and ethnographic studies of newsrooms and their relations with certain external institutions, especially related to news sourcing. The concept of routines refers to the patterned sets of institutional practices and norms which frame or guide how individuals work and function within the complex settings that characterise industrial, urban and capitalist social formations. It embraces the shared procedures, rules and norms that are ongoing and highly structured, but often naturalised and taken-for-granted. However, these also comprise essential conditions for the performance of collaborative work in a modern society marked by large-scale organisations as well as deep social and technical divisions of labour.

Here, newsmaking is seen as a complex and time-pressured process requiring the coordinated and patterned activities of large numbers of individual workers to produce the news on a daily or hourly basis, within a specific configuration of time, space, norms, technologies and other resources. The practices, autonomy and influence of individual newsmakers are viewed as situated or conditioned (both constrained and enabled) by the operations of sector-specific or occupational procedures, rules, practices and norms. Here, the primary explanation of news culture shifts away from the dispositions, beliefs or personal characteristics of individual newsmakers and towards the operations and features of industrial routines and other institutional factors. These include the configurations and allocation of human and technical resources, time-based factors, patterns of relations with sources, professional norms, and news values.

Such institutional approaches to newsmaking routines recognise that individual journalists do not work alone in making the news, and they do not apply rules that they invented themselves. Concepts such as routines tend to emphasise the conditioning influences of prevailing procedures, norms and practices in the media industry. This explanatory approach suggests that individuals do not possess complete freedom to act on their beliefs and attitudes. Rather, they must operate within specific configurations of material, normative, social and technological resources to perform their roles in the newsmaking process. These may be perceived as constraints, but they can also be viewed as enabling. Indeed, they concern the very social roles or pre-conditions that enable professional newsmakers to have relatively privileged access to the production of news culture.
Both the institutional and the organisational (our third) perspectives tend to emphasise that newsmaking is a social process. Like most modern media or cultural production, it involves the collective and coordinated efforts of many different persons, skills, roles and functions. Because of the inherently ephemeral nature of the news ‘product’, its increasingly short life-cycle, and its informational role, news production requires a more complex and highly geared organisational structure compared to other segments of the media sector. Furthermore, most journalists are not ‘their own master’ in the sense of being self-employed, or owning and controlling the tools, technical instruments or other resources required to perform their newsmaking roles. Rather, they tend to be direct employees or freelance agents of the capitalist enterprises (firms) and other media organisations that comprise the newsmaking industry.

‘Crucial containers’: organisational influences on news

The third category concerns those newsmaking processes and influencing factors operating at the level of specific media organisations (e.g. print and television, public and private media organisations). Here the news organisation is viewed as a crucial container or context that serves to socialise, situate or otherwise steer journalists and their newsmaking practices in important respects. In essence, explanatory perspectives focused on the organisational influences on newsmaking tend to emphasise how the immediate working environment operates as a ‘crucial’ conditioning context shaping the production of news (e.g. Lloyd, 2004).

While news organisations may share and contribute to certain common (industry-wide) newsmaking routines, norms and procedures, they also tend to define and implement them in highly specific ways. Such specificities are linked to the distinctive sets of strategic goals, values, and policies of each news organisation. The overall direction of the organisation’s goals and structures are decided by its owners and higher-level executives, since most industrial organisations are marked by a hierarchical structure of power and influence, however formal or informal its manifestation. Like other social groups, news organisations are also marked by conflicts over goals and values, especially between journalistic norms and criteria (such as news quality) and those related to managerial or economic performance (such as profit or revenue maximisation).

Thus, the organisational perspective examines the influences on newsmaking arising from the goals, policies, hierarchies of status and power structures, conflicts and practices of the formal organisations in which the work of most journalists is situated. These factors include firm-specific, departmental- or medium-specific editorial policies and their attendant sets of newsmaking routines, norms, and procedures (e.g. ‘house-style’) which inform the daily working practices of most journalists.

For example, Warren Breed’s (1955) seminal study, Social Control in the Newsroom, alerts us to the ways internal organisational power may be expressed less by formal policies or channels than by informal mechanisms, such as the
dynamics of small groups, peer group pressures, and other factors mobilising loyalties to the team spirit. The insight that organisational power may be exercised informally and only periodically, implicitly rather than overtly, poses many challenges. It suggests that journalists learn and internalise the subtle rules and anticipate the boundaries of organisational policies and values. As a result, organisational power and influence may be difficult to research when it is expressed in forms of self-censorship that are more effective than direct censorship. Clearly, these issues pose difficulties for research since empirical work focused on the visible, formal expressions of organisational power may be missing out on the real story – that centred around the informal exercise of power, such as self-censorship. For example, even if journalists rigorously follow professional ethical codes to avoid or declare all conflicts of interest, this may not be matched by more powerful organisational actors, such as owners and top-level executives, when it comes to external corporate or financial interests or other inter-elite linkages.

There are many links or spillover concepts shared by the explanatory approaches highlighting the organisational and institutional influences on news-making. While institutional researchers may refer to ‘media routines’ to indicate patterned procedures and norms that tend to be largely shared across the news industry, we should note that these may converge or collide with the professional standards and norms of journalism, one specific occupation within the media sector. In terms of this occupational dimension, journalists’ professional norms may be seen as comprising two basic types: technical norms that largely deal with the operations and efficient performance of news gathering, writing and editing; and ethical norms that concern the journalists’ obligations to the professed ideals of responsibility, impartiality, accuracy, fair play, and objectivity (Breed, 1955).

For some, the development of professional journalism ‘establishes norms of conduct for journalists’ that reduce the need for news organisations to put in place elaborate rules and regulations for staff (Soloski, 1989: 213). In addition, such professional norms may facilitate news organisations in the selection and recruitment of journalists, and enable them to employ experienced workers by minimising the need for expensive and time-consuming training. Yet, shared professional norms do not eliminate the challenges completely, for two reasons. First, these norms can provide journalists with a certain autonomy or power base that can resist heavy-handed interference by management. Second, if professional norms yield much power or freedom then news organisations may respond by developing new procedures to further limit the professional autonomy of their journalists (ibid.).

**Political economy factors and influences on newsmaking**

Our fourth and fifth explanatory perspectives focus on broader, macro-level influences and conceptual issues. Political economy approaches to communication, media and newsmaking tend to engage with state-based and economy-based
influences in an integrated or holistic manner. They draw on strands of modern social thought, dating back to Smith, Ricardo, Marx, Mill, Cairnes, Polanyi and others, which engage with questions concerning the production, organisation and distribution of goods, wealth and power in society. This approach tends to define the scope and characteristics of the ‘economy’ and ‘market’ (as well as their relation to the state and political factors) in ways that are significantly different to the influential modern discipline of ‘economics’. Beyond such high-level characteristics, however, we find many different definitions of the precise meaning and scope of political economy influences, with abundant variations in the news and communication studies fields.

For some, the political economy perspective on newsmaking and its outcomes tends to focus on ‘the structure of the state and the economy, and to the economic foundations of the news organization’; at the same time, it is attentive to the various ‘constitutional regimes’ and ‘institutional forms’ that frame the operations of the media whilst recognising that ‘both state and market’ may limit free expression (Schudson, 2000: 171, 181). Golding and Murdock suggest that ‘critical political economy’ differs from mainstream economics in four main respects: first, ‘it is holistic’; second, ‘it is historical’; third, it is ‘concerned with the balance between capitalist enterprise and public intervention’; and finally it goes beyond the technical issues of efficiency ‘to engage with basic moral questions of justice, equity and public good’ (Golding and Murdock, 2000: 72–73).

Thus, political economy research tends to address the high-level or ‘macro’ influences on news and questions concerning the role and responsibilities of the media to ‘the public’ – often defined in terms of citizenship rather than consumers. This agenda includes the normative issues related to the autonomy of the media, the independence of its editorial and journalistic work, and its watchdog role vis-à-vis the other major institutions and powers in society. The political economy perspective sheds light on the systemic and highly patterned ways in which news media and newsmaking may be influenced by their relationships to the key institutions and seats of power (political, economic, military, discursive or other forms) in the wider society. Thus, the issues of media ownership and control patterns, their relation to the definition and making of the news agenda, the role and influence of advertising and other economic interests have all been part of the political economy research agenda. So too have the evolving characteristics of the public sphere, and the pressures on journalism and political communication arising from deepening commercialisation. This strand of research has also paid much attention to the specific roles and operations of different media sub-sectors, especially that of public service broadcasting.

Just as we observe particularly strong conceptual overlaps between research highlighting the media routines and organisational layers of influences on newsmaking, the same applies to the political economy and cultural layers. In its narrow sense, political economy research addresses how material resources such as wealth and property, as well as symbolic resources are organised, controlled, and distributed by market and
state institutions. Applied to the fields of communication and newsmaking, this approach spills over to questions of the sources and nature of power in the complex of economic, political and ideological relations within the advanced capitalist societies in which news and newsmaking is situated. At this point, it overlaps with the holistic conceptual frames and analyses favoured by cultural studies approaches to media and newsmaking. In sum, we observe considerable conceptual overlaps 'between the "ideological" level and the political economic work' influenced by the British cultural studies tradition (Whitney et al., 2004: 400; Gitlin, 2004: 309).

'The cultural air we breathe': cultural, ideological or symbolic power

In an earlier review of the various filtering processes or influences on newsmaking, Richard Hoggart (1976) identified one as 'the cultural air we breathe'. He invoked this pithy phrase to embrace those influences related to 'the whole ideological atmosphere of our society', which in turn tells us how 'some things can be said and others had best not be said' (Glasgow Media Group, 1976; cited in Eldridge, 1995: 8).

The image of 'the cultural air we breathe' looks beyond the newsroom to evoke the surrounding atmosphere of prevailing ideas, ideologies and discourses that permeate journalists' working environment and news content, including its language, forms and 'feel' in a given societal context. This has certain links to the structure of feeling concept proposed by Raymond Williams, another pioneer of the British cultural studies approach to media. The latter is defined as 'the culture of a period … the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization' and where 'the arts of a period' including their 'characteristic approaches, and tones in argument' are of major importance (Williams, 1961: 64–65). Even if the structure of feeling is not held by all members of any society, it is shared by 'very deep and very wide' segments 'precisely because it is on it that communication depends', even though it is not learned in any formal way (ibid.: 65). In this sense, news now contributes one, albeit rapidly changing, dimension of 'the arts' and ideas of a particular community or (modern) time period. Viewing the forms and patterns of communication as lying at the centre of the fabric of society, Williams observed that it was impossible to discuss communication or culture in society without addressing the issues of power. Williams noted that 'there is the power of established institutions and there is increasingly the power of money' with the latter imposing certain patterns of communication that are becoming very influential in society (Williams, 1989; cited in Eldridge and Eldridge, 1994: 99).

This fifth perspective tends to approach news influences in terms of whether and how the symbolic content and meanings in the news media may be linked to the broader patterns of social and cultural power. It is concerned with the content, framing, and forms or language of the news stories that are told. It is also concerned with the tendencies for some stories and experiences to remain untold as a result of the unequal structures of discursive or ideological power.
The latter type of analysis is often based on critical theories of ideology that view power in society as highly concentrated or unequally distributed among social and other interests. For example, it may examine how unequal power relations in society can be exerted through the typical operations of media to systematically reproduce certain sets of ideas and values and thereby help to engineer mass consent to the established social order. Thus, the news media may contribute to the process of hegemony, which concerns ‘the maintenance of domination through means other than violence of direct state control’ (Barnhurst, 2005: 241; see also Glasgow Media Group, 1976; Gitlin, 1980). Such explanatory perspectives tend to interrogate several key assumptions underpinning liberal and neo-liberal theories. This includes approaches to news based on various pluralist models whereby power is seen as widely distributed in modern capitalist societies – or at least balanced by its circulation among competing institutions or interests, and so avoiding any significant patterns of concentration.

We might view the cultural and ideological influences as moving beyond organisational and institutional factors towards deeper and wider layers of shaping forces within which the news is ‘constructed’ by the situated interactions of human actors. This fifth explanatory perspective is concerned with certain broad sets of values, assumptions, beliefs or ‘cultural givens’ within which everyday interaction is located, although these usually fall outside the gaze of studies focused on organisational or institutional factors. It draws attention to how journalism may be influenced by the ‘unquestioned and generally unnoticed background assumptions’ through which news in any society ‘is gathered and within which it is framed’ (Schudson, 2000: 192). Much like the air we breathe, such cultural givens are usually invisible, taken-for-granted elements in any given setting. Yet, they form essential components of meaning-making processes in community life and human interaction. These cultural givens ‘cannot be extrapolated from features of social organisation’ at any given moment of study; rather, they are usually uncovered by ‘detailed historical analysis’ or, we might add, by cross-cultural studies (ibid.: 189). While the general ‘cultural air’ may be partly shaped by the societal or political economy setting of its ruling groups and institutions, it also forms a key conditioning context in which such institutions become established. Thus, cultural influences also possess their own specificity (ibid.: 192; Gitlin, 2004: 309).

**The interplay of influences: convergences and spillovers**

Even if journalists are frequently depicted, especially in media representations, ‘as independent, morally virtuous, and acting in the name of the public good’ (Berkowitz and Limor, 2003: 784) that is only one of many factors shaping news culture or guiding their daily working lives. As we will see, there are significant sets of research indicating how the daily practices of journalists and other newsworkers are deeply embedded in multiple layers or (often conflicting) sets of powerful influences. Some of these are more immediately manifest or visible, for example in the case of tensions between journalists’ professional ideals or ethical
values on the one hand, and the profit-motivated concerns related to the business and financial pressures operating within increasingly commercial news organisations on the other. Other domains of the research also point to less visible or silent forms of power and influence shaping news cultures, including some which may appear as somewhat remote from the newsroom setting. Other examples include influences that are regarded as somehow natural, universal or beneficial features of the contemporary newsmaking environment. We will explore these issues in the following chapters, but the key point to note for now is that the various layers of influences are best seen as deeply interrelated when it comes to a rounded understanding of the daily practices of making the news.

Although this typology (and book) may appear to isolate the research perspectives highlighting each of these five different layers of influence in separate chapters, it must be understood that this is for pedagogic and expositional purposes only. In the daily work practices of journalism and newsmaking, these layers of influence are always operating simultaneously, even if some are more directly manifest or visible than others. In essence, all these layers of influence may be viewed as highly interactive and dialectically related – and often operating in tension – when it comes to the multiple actions, selections, treatments of events or other decisions undertaken in the daily work routines of newsmakers. Thus, although Chapters 3 through 7 will separately focus on one or other of these five sets of influence on news, we must note at the outset that these shaping factors are best understood as operating simultaneously in daily newsmaking practice.

Furthermore, it is important to note that many of the prior studies of newsmaking processes also tend to recognise or engage with the role and influence of two or more of these influences, if only implicitly. Thus, the reader should not regard these five sets of influences on news culture as discrete or mutually exclusive. Indeed, we expect that the reader will discern that these categories are not watertight capsules of knowledge, but should be understood as marked by multiple leakages or spillovers. Whilst many important studies of the newsmaking process tend to focus on one particular category of influences, this may well be justified by the need for selectivity when designing and undertaking any single study, especially if empirically based. But, even if they highlight only one particular set of factors, many researchers may also recognise the potential role and influence of other factors even if these fall outside the gaze or scope of any particular study. In like manner, we expect that the reader will critically engage with the claims and counterclaims advanced by the research on the five categories of influences as summarised above – and in so doing, arrive at their own understanding of the most compelling combinations of factors and influences which best explain the contemporary newsmaking process and news culture.

**Outline of chapters**

The following chapter (Chapter 2) provides a brief overview of the evolution of organised newsmaking and journalism. It also sets out the conceptual framework
for understanding the strategic implications of new digital technologies and the changing role of information and knowledge services in the contemporary period.

Chapters 3 through 7 draw on our research findings to examine the key trends and issues in journalism and newsmaking, focusing on each of the five explanatory approaches and clusters of potential influences on newsmaking in turn. These chapters will be directly informed by the unique research resource described earlier. In each case, the chapter’s theme and key sub-topics will be examined and discussed in light of: (i) examples of classic or seminal studies in international research literature related to each explanatory perspective and its core concepts; (ii) reviews of the more recent research literature addressing the trends and forms of unfolding changes, including those related to digital technologies and knowledge economy developments, as well as reviews of relevant literature from the 11 countries studied; and (iii) our primary research findings, especially those arising from our in-depth interviews with working journalists in those countries. Where relevant, we will also consider issues that emerged from subsequent discussions at workshops with non-media professionals and consultations with other key actors.

Chapter 8 considers key aspects of the changing character and role of the audience and its relation to newsmaking practices, including its increasingly multicultural composition. Chapter 9 examines the forms and extent to which we are witnessing a common European news culture and the patterns of coverage of common topics and issues. The final chapter will seek to identify the key issues and trends whilst also noting some implications.
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