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Call for Papers: Special Issue - The Institutional Press in the Digital Age

Special Issue Editors

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Motivation for the Special Issue

“The influence of the liberty of the press does not affect political opinions alone, but it extends to all the opinions of men, and it modifies customs as well as laws.” (De Tocqueville, 1864, p. 230)

Over the last 20 years, ongoing waves of digitalization have decimated the traditional business model of the news and fundamentally changed how the news, or more formally, the ‘institutional press’, works. Indeed, ever since reserved frequencies were gifted to television broadcasters in the 1950s, on the condition that they inform the public of current events, the subsidy underpinning newspapers and other forms of institutional media has slowly eroded. Like many other industries, the internet has accelerated this phenomenon. Not only has the hyper-targeted advertising facilitated by social media and other platforms functionally eroded the subsidy model to its breaking point (Anderson et al., 2015; Angelucci & Cagé, 2019; Gentzkow, 2014; Seamans & Zhu, 2013); but the costless transmission of data facilitated by the internet has increased geographic scope of dominant players (e.g. The New York Times), permitting them to reach beyond their original markets and squeeze content producers across the globe (Brock, 2013; George & Waldfogel, 2006). Against this backdrop, it is hard to overstate the importance of this “crisis of the institutional press” (Reese, 2020). The news provides our primary means

for understanding the world around us. Societies desperately need a well-functioning institutional press to tackle the many societal, economic, and environmental challenges we all face.

The first day of core MIS undergraduate or MS/MBA classes usually begins with one of four motivating examples: the decline of incumbent sellers (e.g. Blockbuster Video, malls, taxis) in favor of digital platforms (e.g. Netflix, Amazon, Uber), the increasing irrelevance of diseconomies of scale and the rise of digital monopolies (e.g. Google, Microsoft), the rise of social media and user generated content (viz. Web 2.0 and 3.0), or the decline of the newspaper industry. Yet, as these classes continue to discuss the opportunities firms have in the digital age (seamlessly changing prices, directly engaging with consumers via social media), and teach students to implement advanced analytics to more effectively mine business value from data, the decline of institutional media often fades into the background.

This phenomenon-driven special issue is motivated by the view that our students, colleagues, and society urgently need a better understanding of the causes and consequences of the changing nature of news in the digital era and potential solutions going forward. The special issue takes an interdisciplinary perspective, bringing together insights from across the broader information, managerial, and organizational sciences.

This failure to discuss the implications of the decline of institutional news media is troubling. Not only has the Fourth Estate historically served to counterbalance institutions with a monopoly on force and morality (e.g., the state and church), it has been a cornerstone of democratic republics for centuries. In 17th Century England, the philosopher John Locke railed against the Licensing and Press Act of 1662, claiming that “gagging a man, for fear he should talk heresy or sedition, has no other ground than such as will make chains necessary.” In the United States, James Madison declared the free press as “the only effectual guardian of every other right.” In the balance, Western Marxists criticized the singular power of institutional media, seeing it as an instrument for ideological control (Marcuse, 1964).

These claims are not idle musings. News media outlets have been shown to influence many societal outcomes, from government agendas (Edwards & Wood, 1999; Walgrave et al., 2008), to public opinion (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989), to voting behavior (Druckman, 2005). The Fourth Estate mediates the attention granted to social movements (Andrews & Caren, 2010) and can influence the strategic management of organizations (Bednar, 2012; Bednar et al., 2013). Institutional media can also prompt changes in corporate governance (Dyck et al., 2008): it can shape the valuation of firms at IPO (Pollock et al., 2008), influence firm founding (Greenwood & Gopal, 2015), confer legitimacy on industries (Zilber, 2006), and even elevate de novo technological innovations in the public consciousness (Miranda et al., 2022; Wang & Swanson, 2008).

Yet, seismic changes have assaulted the free press as we understand it. The late 20th century witnessed an increasing concentration in ownership of news outlets, leading to elevated reliance on advertising revenue that biased content (Gilens & Hertzman, 2000; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 2000). The recent history of the institutional press is interwoven with the history of digital technology. Initially, the World Wide Web served largely as a vehicle for the dissemination of news produced by professional news organizations, extending their reach (George & Waldfogel, 2006; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). In time, the ensuing competition for reader attention shifted

the gatekeeping function previously served by professional news organizations to portals – or online content curators (Hargittai, 2000). Contemporary media coverage became more selective (Oliver & Maney, 2000) and influenced by market actors (Ahern & Sosyura, 2014; Bail, 2012). With the advent of social media, user-generated content further usurped the gatekeeping role of professional news organizations, specifically that of their journalists whose work was governed by professional norms and practices (Reese, 2020). Moreover, public subsidy for the Fourth Estate was undermined by social media (Seamans & Zhu, 2014), accelerating the control of dominant players like the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal on public discourse (George & Waldfogel, 2006). In turn, this hollowed the local publishing industry, subverting attention to local political issues (i.e. nationalizing politics (Trussler, 2021)) and increasing economic agents' willingness to contravene state and federal law (Matherly & Greenwood, 2022). At the same time, social media has afforded citizen journalists the ability to counter-balance the biases of professional news organizations. For example, the interests of the populace were pitted against those of media organizations with the legislative proposal of the Stop Online Piracy bill (Miranda et al., 2016).

Even more recently, society has witnessed a demonstrable shift towards the “post-truth era,” in which populist, tribalist, and anti- “mainstream media” rhetoric proliferates. Indeed, scholarship suggests that such rhetoric serves to further undermine public confidence in the institutional press, pushing large portions of the populace towards alternate media that eschew journalistic norms and evidence-based reporting (Reese, 2020). While the blockchain has been heralded as a way of remaking the institutional press in the digital era (Ivancsics, 2019), we have little systematic understanding of its efficacy. All the while, the process of news construction and dissemination is being disrupted by algorithms, machine learning, and artificial intelligence (Diakopoulos, 2019). The long-term implications of these AI tools (e.g., Reuters' Lynx Insights) on the institutional press are unknown (Kobie, 2018). Indeed, we are witnessing intersections of the evolutionary paths of technology and the institutional press in ways that are fundamentally changing the “freedom of the press” and the complex network that includes journalists, software engineers, relational databases, and social media platforms which form it; along with prevailing norms, values, and institutional logics of a particular sociotechnical moment (Ananny, 2018).

Research has only begun to address these changes. A cursory evaluation of premiere information systems and management outlets reveals a dearth of research which directly engages with the changing nature of the institutional press (Aral & Dhillon, 2021; Clemons et al., 2002; Greenwood & Gopal, 2015; Kitchens et al., 2020; Seamans & Zhu, 2014; Venkatesan et al., 2021). The purpose of this Special Issue is to address this gap in scholarship head on and to inform stakeholders such as media managers, social planners, legislators, trade associations, regulators, and journalists about how changes in institutional media are affecting society at the intersection of business, technology, and public policy. To this end, we invite scholarship that helps academia and society (1) comprehend the major changes taking place within the institutional press, why those changes are occurring, and what the consequences of those changes are; and (2) work together toward a more positive future for the institutional press.

Few problems of today epitomize the intersection of the technological and the institutional (Barley & Orlikowski, 2023) as the modern day Fourth Estate. To encourage the necessary scholarship on the challenges and opportunities facing it, we have

assembled an interdisciplinary research team of scholars across diverse theoretical and methodological paradigms.

We encourage an equally diverse breadth of scholars to submit their work to this special issue.

Potential Topics

The fundamental challenge that spurred this Special Issue is, “How do we reimagine the institutional press in the Digital Era?” More aspiringly, “How can scholars turn these challenges into opportunities for society as a whole?”

Potential topics for this Special Issue include, but are not limited to:

- The changing nature of the press, news media as an institution, and the consequences of those changes. Topics include, re-envisioning the “institutional” nature of the evolving institutional press; spillovers from: the changing nature of governance, digital threats and / or violence against journalists, the decline of local news, the endangering of the local watchdog, and online / offline credibility; as well as strategic consequences including changing content, pricing, promotion, platform, etc.
- The functioning of, and implications for, non-traditional digital era news sources. A non-exhaustive list includes advocacy (e.g., Ushahidi) or investigation networks (e.g., the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists), investment research firms (e.g., Hindenburg), emergent digital news organizations (e.g., ProPublica), and others that produce data to inform the news.
- What constitutes news in the digital era? Topics include content characteristics, (i.e., genres such as world news, politics, economy, tech, lifestyle/entertainment); temporal and spatial characteristics of the production and dissemination of news; and psychological reactions, (i.e., behaviors and emotions relating to media sensationalism, increasing personalization, and the identifiable bias of media).
- The interaction of social and institutional media. Topics include social media platforms and practices that legitimize or delegitimize institutional media; partnerships between legacy and de novo media producers; political institutions and the press (e.g. Fairness and Mayflower doctrines); the (de)institutionalizing role of humor and satire; and the consequences of generative AI use for the institutional press.
- The role of professional standards and gatekeeping in today’s news media ecosystem and mechanisms to support them.
- Sociotechnical approaches to understanding the intersections and dependencies between technologies, institutional forces, values, and norms in relation to freedom of the press as both a practical and ideological institution.
- Designing and assessing IT artifacts (e.g., generative AI, algorithms and computational methods, blockchain) towards an aspirational institutional press that promotes journalistic norms and reclaims the role of media as a guardian of other socio-economic institutions.

- The news as a dynamic construct across time and space, and the consequent implications for content generation and consumption.
- The news as a societal information system. What are the design guidelines or best practices for such a societal information system that supports news creation processes as a social construction? Can/should we consider the news as an algorithmic artifact with less human-in-the-loop – as an engagement/revenue optimization-oriented algorithmic construction?

In exploring these topics, we urge submitters to foreground the institutional press in their analyses, considering the implications of the changing nature of the institutional press through digitization, the changing relationship between the institutional press and economic institutions, the role institutional media plays as a watchdog for society at large (e.g., the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists uncovering of the Panama and Paradise Papers, WikiLeaks, citizen journalism), and jurisdictional differences across the globe (i.e., China, The United States, Europe).

We discourage submissions on topics as well. The primary reasons for this discouragement are that these topics have either (1) already received significant attention or (2) do not foreground the institutional press. These include, but are not limited to:

- algorithmic detection and the management of fake news
- social media echo chambers
- experiments assessing the efficacy of generative AI in advertising

If in doubt about the suitability of your research to the special issue, please connect with the editors. We also encourage participation in the information workshop at the 2024 Academy of Management Annual Meeting in Chicago (and subsequent online workshops).

Process and Timeline (subject to change)

All papers must be submitted in the Special Issue category through MISQ's ScholarOne submission site located at <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/misq> except for the extended abstracts. The optional extended abstracts must be submitted via email to MISQ.SI.Fourth.Estate@gmail.com.

All submissions must adhere to MISQ submission instructions (see <https://misq.umn.edu/instructions/>).

Optional Two-page Abstract Submission: Due April 30, 2024

Authors are strongly encouraged to submit abstracts for editors to evaluate fit for the special issue. Submit extended abstracts at MISQ.SI.Fourth.Estate@gmail.com. Editors will offer feedback on abstracts by May 30, 2024, encouraging authors of promising abstracts to submit a five-page extended abstract for workshops at AOM in August of 2024. These five-page extended abstracts will not be formally reviewed prior to the workshop – they are simply meant to facilitate a constructive discussion at the event. The five-page extended abstracts will only be shared with the guest SEs and AEs. At the

workshop, participants will have time to present their research to workshop attendees. Note that author teams not invited to attend the workshop may still submit a full paper to MISQ by December 1 deadline.

Full Paper Submission: Due December 1, 2024

ScholarOne will be open for submissions to the special issue from November 1, 2024, to December 1, 2024. No extensions for the timeline will be granted.

The editorial team will screen all submitted manuscripts. Only manuscripts deemed to have a reasonable chance of acceptance in an accelerated review process will remain under consideration. Manuscripts that pass the initial screening will undergo no more than three rounds of review. Manuscripts not accepted by the end of the third round will be rejected. The Senior Editors will make the final decisions based on the Associate Editor report and review feedback.

Authors must adhere to a strict schedule for submission and revision of manuscripts. Authors may submit rejected papers as regular submissions to MIS Quarterly only if the special issue rejection letter recommends such an action. The Senior Editors will recommend submission as a regular MISQ article only in special circumstances, such as when a formally reviewed manuscript had a strong likelihood of acceptance but either was deemed to be a poor fit with the theme of the special issue or required revisions that were unlikely to be accomplished within the special issue's accelerated review schedule.

Revision Plan Meeting: Summer 2025

Authors of papers that go past the first round must commit to attending a virtual meeting with the special issue editors to discuss revision plans in early summer of 2025.

Key Dates

- Optional abstract submission due: April 30, 2024
- Optional abstract feedback via email: May 30, 2024
- Invited five-page abstract for AOM Workshop due: August 5, 2024
- Paper Development Workshop at AOM: August 9-17, 2024
- First-round submissions due: December 1, 2024
- First-round decisions expected: March 15, 2025
- Revision Plan Meeting with SI Editors: May 30, 2025 (tentatively)
- Second-round revisions due: July 15, 2025
- Second-round decisions expected: October 15, 2025
- Third- and final revisions submissions due: February 15, 2026
- Final decisions expected: May 15, 2026

Associate Editors (alphabetical order)

Manuscripts submitted to the special issue will be assigned to a suitable Associate Editor, chosen from among the existing MISQ Editorial Board or from the additional special issue Associate Editors listed below.

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