

Blurred Boundaries Role in the Emergence and Existence of Lifestyle Journalism

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Abstract

With the emergence of lifestyle journalism in the news room, the boundaries between news topics are blurring. Lifestyle journalism shifts traditional news into a new realm of news coverage, and becomes evaluative of products or topics, rather than the traditional inform-the-public model. This is referred to as the shift from hard news to soft news. The journalist takes on a different role than ever before, because of this shift in news coverage. In addition, this shift is fueled by the emergence of multi-media. Through outlets like Twitter and comment sections, the journalists now have a direct conversation with the audience, and this affects their angles and news coverage. As time continues, the boundaries blur further into the grey area, and it is important to understand this blurring to prepare for the future of journalism. Through the thesis project, which included creating lifestyle content YouTube videos, relevant to Appalachian State University Students, I learned valuable lessons regarding the field of lifestyle journalism. The main lessons or takeaways from the project included how to effectively tag the content, in order to reach the specific audience I was targeting and gain return visitors or readers. In addition, listening to my audience, in order to hone in on a tight niche within lifestyle journalism was crucial. Keeping an open conversation with the audience is important when creating a niche news source.

Introduction

Lifestyle journalism is content created in the human interest realm of journalism (From, 2010). It is a customer-and consumer-driven field of journalism that garnered the definition of *soft news* (Kristensen, et al., 2012). This branch of journalism is defined by Hanush, in his book, as “a distinct journalistic field that primarily addresses its audiences as consumers, providing them with factual information and advice, often in entertaining ways, about goods and services they can use in their daily lives” (Hanusch, 2013). However, in his work with Hanitzsch, lifestyle journalism is defined as, “the journalistic coverage of the expressive values and practices that help create and signify a specific identity within the realm of consumption and everyday life” (Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2013). “The current rise of lifestyle journalism can be related to at least three interrelated major social developments: individualization, value change, as well as mediatization of every day life” (Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2013). This shift means that there is a lack of time lines required in the topics (Kristensen, et al., 2012). Deadlines for publications still require time lines, but the actual topics themselves do not require posting at or in a specific time (Kristensen, et al., 2012). They interest the general public two weeks ago, today and will interest them in the future.

How this niche of journalism affects the field, as a whole, is the question at hand, and to fully address and answer this question, one must look into the blurring of traditional news boundaries within lifestyle journalism. The shift from hard to soft news created a new realm of news reporting where different stories and topics fall into multiple different areas of journalism (Kristensen, et al., 2012). In lifestyle journalism, where the story lands is based on the angle taken, by the publisher (Kristensen, et al., 2012). This change in clear borders between subsets of

journalism provides a lens to look at lifestyle journalism through and tackle the question of lifestyle journalism's effect on the broad field of journalism (Kristensen, et al., 2012).

To tackle the question of lifestyle journalism's effect on the field, the analysis of lifestyle journalism's blurring of traditional news boundaries should focus on the components of lifestyle journalism that contribute to the blurring of traditional news boundaries. Lifestyle journalism blurs the boundaries between multiple existing sub-sections of journalism and encompasses a wide variety of topics that can be categorized into different genres of journalism based on the specific angle taken when writing the piece. This paper will argue that lifestyle journalism is blurring the boundaries of traditional journalism through its shift from hard to soft news, its shift regarding the role of the journalism and the emergence of multimedia.

The Shift from Hard to Soft News

Lifestyle journalism created a shift in traditional journalism's news reporting. "Increasingly, it seems, newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the Internet are preoccupied with what is generally referred to as soft news, rather than the hard, political news which many commentators and scholars would like to see journalists producing" (Hanusch, 2013). In traditional news coverage, what was reported was referred to as hard news. Hard news is also known as breaking news, and breaking news contains time constraints, where the information being reported has to be covered and reported in a specific time frame (Kristensen, et al., 2012). The demand was to provide timely news to the public (Kristensen, et al., 2012). When lifestyle journalism emerged on the scene, with it emerged what is known as soft news. With this shift in news, the demand and time constraints of traditional news changed (Kristensen, et al., 2012). Instead of

breaking news that needs to be known immediately, the topics covered in lifestyle journalism are not required at a specific time (Kristensen, et al., 2012).

A majority of this lifestyle content focuses on audiences as consumers (Hanusch, 2013). “It focuses mainly on the private domain and less on the public sphere, and its content deals with subjects usually classified as ‘soft news’, including fashion and beauty; living, gardening and decorating; cookery, food and cuisine; travel and leisure; health, fitness and wellness; music, arts and entertainment; children, parent parenting and partnership; career; as well as human interest in general” (Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2013). This news provides factual information and advice to the audiences about goods and services that can be used in their day to day life, and the news sources try to report the news in an entertaining way (Hanusch, 2013). Coverage of news in lifestyle journalism is covered in a way that is tailored to the specific target group of the publication (Kristensen, et al., 2012). The stories lead the audience or reader to “the good life,” and the angle taken in a story can provide or produce a brand for the publication (Kristensen, et al., 2012). Various news sources cover specific topics in different ways, and an example of this is fashion (Kristensen, et al., 2012). Some papers will place fashion under lifestyle news, while some will place it under culture or consumption news (Kristensen, et al., 2012). There are many different names for lifestyle journalism, such as living, food, fashion, consumer and service, and this is because of the blurring lines (Fürsich, 2012). It is hard to distinguish what exactly is what, and if there are different niches within the niche itself, because of how ambiguous lifestyle journalism is (Fürsich, 2012). It all boils down to what the angle of the story and the angle of the paper is.

In society today, the readers have what are called reading positions they take when it comes to news coverage (From, 2010). Uni asserts that there are four reading positions, and

those specific reading positions relate to the “expectations and experiences of different media and their habits of using different media” (From, 2010). In basic terms, a reading position is the lens through which the reader looks at news coverage (From, 2010). These lenses let the reader only see the news coverage they are interested in (From, 2010). These reading positions attract readers to specific topics and drives them away from other topics (From, 2010). Basically, someone may hold a reading position geared to food, and therefore, they will not be interested in fashion (From, 2010). The first reading position is news grazing (From, 2010). These readers want insightful and reflective information presented in journalism (From, 2010). The readers tend to engage in cultural and political discussions regularly and want to learn more regarding the issues facing the nation and world (From, 2010). (Political) confirmation is the second reading position, and these informants “seek political and/or cultural confirmation. The informants with this dominant reading position often subscribe to a daily newspaper that explicitly serves to provide confirmation of political attitudes as well as taste and quality” (From, 2010).

The third reading position is searching for relevant stuff (From, 2010). These readers pick and choose the content they want to read, based on their interests (From, 2010). This position is very “directional” in the sense of journalism on culture (From, 2010). When one is the fourth reading position, snacking the news, one runs through the available media until something interesting is found (From, 2010). In this case, the reader uses a variety of sources to find news, and does not have a direction, but rather consults many different sources of lifestyle journalism to find something of interest (From, 2010). Lifestyle journalism has shifted the field of journalism “away from the traditional hard news tradition to more consumer-driven formats that blur the boundaries between information and entertainment” (Kristensen, et al., 2012).

The Shift in the Role of the Journalist

The field or niche of journalism that is lifestyle journalism is not regarded seriously to many (Fürsich, 2012). Elfriede Fürsich asserts that, “lifestyle journalism has been relegated to the back burner of journalism studies” (Fürsich, 2012). The reason for this is because of the commercial ties the niche contains (Fürsich, 2012). With the shift away from traditional hard news to a more consumer-driven market, lifestyle journalism blurred and blurs the boundaries between information and entertainment” (Fürsich, 2012). Just as different stories can fit into many different areas today, many different people can fit into the world of journalism; specifically lifestyle journalism (Brennen, 2009). Anyone with a smartphone or laptop can create content, and therefore, focusing on who is actually a journalist is important in maintaining credibility, especially in a niche like lifestyle journalism, where many do not take the niche itself seriously (Brennen, 2009).

Unlike traditional journalism, lifestyle journalism is not there to simply inform the audience (Fürsich, 2012). Instead, it reviews and criticizes products, topics, etc (Fürsich, 2012). Instead of being the watchdog against the government and other traditional woes, lifestyle journalism serves as a “judgment of taste,” which creates an important cultural aspect of lifestyle journalism (Fürsich, 2012). This culture is defined as “taste cultures,” and serves as “cultural intermediaries,” according to Bourdieu. In addition, because of the relation to market-driven journalism, “the materialization of infotainment news and lifestyle journalism exemplifies [the] trend toward a blending of information with advice and guidance as well as with entertainment and relaxation” (Hanusch, 2013). “Elfriede Fürsich identifies three constituting dimensions of the fire

of lifestyle journalism: providing advice, a review function, and commercialisation” (Hanusch, 2013). Lifestyle journalism plays an “active role in promoting consumption” (Fürsich, 2012).

In addition, networking via social media is a new situation and shift in role for journalists today, and is brought forward through multi-media. “Networked journalism relies on interactivity such as blogging and social networking “not just as add ons, but as an essential part of news production and distribution itself” (Usher, 2013). Social media helps networks of people and journalists come together around a specific niche or community (Usher, 2013). This connection with the audience allows journalists to “craft their coverage” in partnership with the community and readers (Usher, 2013). Through outlets such as Twitter, the journalist can engage in conversations with readers and tailor coverage to their interests (Usher, 2013). Comment sections on blogs also allow the reader to play a huge role in news coverage and angles taken in lifestyle journalism coverage (Usher, 2013).

The Emergence of Multimedia

With the emergence of lifestyle journalism came the emergence of multimedia’s place in journalism. Much of society’s information and news, today, is synthesized through media. The media market is increasingly visually oriented, and with this reality, journalism has shifted to more human-interest stories. With mediatization occurring consistently, its effects on lifestyle journalism’s cultural implications can be understood more deeply (From, 2010). From works “with a definition of mediatization as the processes related to ‘to changes associated with communication media and their development’” (From, 2010). Technological advances and innovations allow news outlets to increase their news coverage vastly, each day (Hanusch, 2013). With the emergence of more digital media every day, more and more people are shifting their cultural activities

and understanding to the media outlets that provide news on the issues (From, 2010). The issues that people want news on depends on their reading position, but general issues include, politics, sports, fashion, etc. This is seen through virtual exhibitions online that simulate actual museums (From, 2010). It is a human interest to see the museum, but instead of having to travel to that museum to see the exhibit you want, lifestyle journalism provides an accessible and digital opportunity to view the cultural experience (From, 2010). This shift in our society's culture via lifestyle journalism ties directly into consumption and consumerism (From, 2010). Society is very instant gratification oriented, and therefore, multimedia allows instant news whenever and wherever the reader wants it.

Lifestyle journalism brought a rise in human-interest stories and infotainment with it, along with “empowering potential outside of hard news discourse” (Fürsich, 2012). Lifestyle news outlets provide their audiences with news they can use (Hanusch, 2013). In Unni's analysis she asserts that while cultural, lifestyle and consumer journalism address different principles, the lines between the three are blurred when it comes to reception (From, 2010). They all appear interrelated when it comes to this aspect of journalism. As far as the cultural aspect of this facet of lifestyle journalism, people, because of globalized or internationally connected culture, can receive information on the lifestyle news they want in a second online (From, 2010). An example used by Unni is Bruce Springsteen. “People who are interested in Bruce Springsteen can get reviews, news and debate anywhere in the (western) world, and the media, the artist and the music industry benefit in terms of economy and branding from such a wide circulation” (From, 2010).

With multiple media outlets providing information regarding lifestyle news, the situation of story angles providing a brand for publications comes to the foreground of discussion, again.

With so many papers, magazines and various other publications covering the same material, distinction is essential to obtain returning visitors to the publication (Kristensen, et al., 2012). It is not a world of black and white definitions of what fits where anymore in journalism. Stories and topics fit into many different areas these days (Kristensen, et al., 2012).

A huge influence and “new media” that has aided the rise of lifestyle journalism is blogs. “Blogs are generally included in the category ‘new media,’ a term which, although in use since the 1960s, acquired high currency in the mid-1990s” (Rocamora, 2013). Blogs are referred to what is known as a hyper-textual space (Rocamora, 2013). This refers to linking to other written texts and images within a blog post (Rocamora, 2013). Blogs serve as almost a timeline, and are connected through this hypertextuality (Rocamora, 2013). “Time as articulated in the blogosphere, a new time of interconnected points, time as “a fluid, networked entity” (Rocamora, 2013).

Conclusion

Lifestyle journalism is a contentious topic in contemporary journalism (Hanusch, 2013). What is seen as fluff and even invasion of privacy to many, is an important component of the news field and should be regarded in a way where one understands the implications it has on society and culture, as a whole. While soft news by definition, the influence lifestyle journalism has on society is very important to understand. There is no need for specific time frames when the news has to be out, and there is no “breaking the news first” (Kristensen, et al., 2012). Instead, there is breaking into a new angle of the topic in the time that you figure it out (Kristensen, et al., 2012). The angle is said to be even more important than the actual topic in lifestyle journalism, and these angles on topics can lead to a brand for a publication (Kristensen, et al., 2012).

Lifestyle journalism has come to the forefront of society, and since its emergence, the face of journalism has changed drastically. Depending on where you are and who you are, what interests you and how you look at news will vary (From, 2010). This can be seen easily through lifestyle journalism. Depending on the interests one has in their lives, and the personality and way they were raised/where they grew up, they will look and search for news through different reading position (From, 2010).

The emergence of multi-media has reshaped journalism, and in particular lifestyle journalism (From, 2010). Now you can go to a museum without actually having to go to the museum (From, 2010). The globalized aspect of the world's culture has aided a large shift in lifestyle journalism, where things are accessible now more than ever (From, 2010). If you need a piece of information, and you want to know it, you can choose a directional source and find that piece of information in a second (From, 2010).

Since the same piece of information can have different angles (Kristensen, et al., 2012), one can look up the piece of information, and instead of getting the basic fact, they can read and watch reviews and critiques on such things that interest them or cater to their opinions (Fürsich, 2012). Different people want different outlooks and opinions on topics, and in the realm of lifestyle journalism, the journalist are serving as watchdogs of taste, instead of watch dogs of the government (Fürsich, 2012). Reviews, critiques, and endless information is at our fingertips these days, and it allows people the ability to hone in and only find the information that suits them and their needs/wants out of news (Fürsich, 2012).

Case Study One: Sponsorships

Sponsorships are a contentious topic and issue in lifestyle journalism, because for many, being paid to review or speak about something lessens the audience's trust in the content creator's comments. A huge hub for lifestyle journalism sponsorships is the video platform, YouTube. When a YouTuber garners a rather large following, they begin to receive gifts from companies to test or try out. Some companies send the products with the hope the content creator will like them enough to speak about them on their channel, while other companies will ask for and pay YouTubers to promote their products in a video on their channel. This is called a sponsored video.

When there is a sponsorship, notice of the sponsorship is usually placed in the disclaimer found in the description box of the video. This is to let the audience know the journalist is being compensated for their time, in hopes that there will not be issues or controversy in the comment section. However, some YouTubers create a surplus of sponsored videos, while regular non-sponsored videos are few and far between on their channel. Sponsored content is easily spotted by audiences on YouTube, and many times, viewers will call out or confront the content creator in the comment section, when sponsorships flood the channel. Sponsored content is often seen as unauthentic and untrustworthy to audiences, because if the content creator is being paid to talk about the product, do they really like it, or is it the money talking?

Sponsorships can infuriate audiences and can make them feel as though the YouTuber is selling out. A specific example of this frustration is Alison Henry or AlisonLovesJB on YouTube. Alison Henry went on a YouTube hiatus for around 6 months, but in that time, she was still putting out videos sponsored by and partnered with Maybelline. During this time period, Alison's

audience became frustrated with her and questioned her integrity and respect for her audience that got her to where she was.

Alison Henry continually told her audience that she would make a video explaining why there was a lack of original videos, and why only sponsored videos were being published. However, the days and weeks passed and the video never came. Soon, her audience became so restless and frustrated that her video's comment sections were nothing but negativity towards her. The audience wanted and demanded an answer and explanation for this behavior.

It all started around ten months ago. Alison Henry's videos became sporadic around this time, and very sponsorship focused. After her video nine months ago, which highlighted the Maybelline blushed nudes palette, there was a three month gap before her next one was posted. This video was an updated everyday makeup routine. In the description box of that video, Alison addressed some negativity she had received over the months regarding her absence. "I did NOT leave because of the hate I was getting on my last two videos, I did NOT leave because I only do Youtube when it's convenient for my wallet, I did NOT leave because I'm lazy and uninterested, and I certainly did NOT leave because I don't care about my subscribers. I left because at the time, it was the right thing to do- and that was based on MY judgement, not anyone else's.. We all need to realize that everyone is dealing with their own demons, so to demonstrate kindness and understanding (EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND) is crucial these days. Never assume anything, and if you do, assume the best out of people" (AlisonLovesJB, 2015, Sept. 17).

This was the first time Alison addressed the issue on a platform other than Snapchat, and she asserted that she was back in her note (AlisonLovesJB, 2015, Sept. 17). However, the trend of limited videos, and a high presence of sponsorships on her channel continued. With the spon-

sored content came more and more negative comments on Alison's videos. "Are you going to do any non-sponsored tutorials anymore? I miss them!" said YouTube member Lotus (AlisonLovesJB, 2015, Dec 18). Other members came to Alison's defense, but were blasted by critics. "+Morten de Nully (deNully) just because you don't post sponsored videos doesn't mean you don't make money. You still make a crap ton of money just being a YouTuber from ads on your videos. You really think the only way for YouTubers to make money is by posting sponsored videos?" said Rayni Haugen (AlisonLovesJB, 2015, Dec 18). Many of the comments on Henry's videos used explicit language. Henry began promising an explanation video for her viewers, so they could better understand the situation.

Finally, on March 21, 2016, Alison posted her explanation video. Her paradigm repair, if you will. A paradigm is "a set of broadly shared assumptions about how to gather and interpret information relevant to a particular sphere of activity... When a group acquires near-universal faith in the validity of a system of representing and applying information, that system attains paradigmatic standing" (Bennett, Gressett, & Haltom, 1975, p. 54). Paradigms are mostly unspoken norms that are learned through experience in a field. They tend to be hegemonic in nature, which means that a member of the field must stay within the boundaries of a paradigm in order to be a respected member of the community (Reese, 1990). When journalists are scrutinized for ethical lapses, they engage in what is known as a paradigm repair as a way of normalizing the situation (Bennett, Gressett, & Haltom, 1985). This paradigm repair allows the journalism field to defend its current practices and its continued existence (Bennett, Gressett, and Haltom, 1985).

Alison Henry's paradigm repair was done via a YouTube video that was 48:11 in length. The video delved into great detail of why and how Alison got to the point she was at. Alison ex-

plained her struggle with her religious faith, and the shunning from her community, because of this doubt. She spoke of the impact this had on her, and the dark place she found herself in during this time. Alison struggled with self harm and dependence on alcohol, and at one point was hospitalized in a psych ward. The day after being released, she was notified that under contract, she was to have a new Maybelline sponsored video up the next day.

She recounts how the last thing she cared about was makeup, in that moment, and it seemed that her feelings and mental health did not matter more than money and a contract (Henry, 2016). The reason she created sponsored content for so long and put no other content out, really, was because of her mental health and prior contract deals (Henry, 2016). Her paradigm repair was that she felt the way her audience felt, which is that sponsorships fail the TARES test of ethical journalism. The TARES test evaluates if the claim is truthful, authentic, provides the receiver with respect, if there is equity between the advertiser and consumer and if the advertisement is socially responsible. Alison Henry states to her audience that she was frustrated, just like they were, that she was caught up in a contract that virtually did not respect or have equity for her and her audience (Henry, 2016). However, she is done apologizing, which is exemplified in her statement, “I’m so done with saying sorry.. I want to be fearless.. I feel like I’ve spent a lot of time apologizing for my past.. and I want a clean slate” (Henry, 2016). Henry announces she is ready for her viewers to see this version of herself; an unsponsored and healthy individual, thus completing her paradigm repair (Henry, 2016).

Case Study #2: Natcessities

At the beginning, Natcessities was Foremost Fashion Online. It was a get the look for less blog I created in my spare time over the summer. When I entered my senior capstone class, our task was to create a mobile niche news source that could be converted into a portfolio. Foremost Fashion Online already had return visitors, or followers as Tumblr calls them, so I decided to build my niche news source off of that. I wanted it to remain fashion-based, but I wanted to expand it to lifestyle journalism. In specific, the blog shifted to a college lifestyle niche, and with that shift came a new name, Natcessities. For the university honors thesis project, I wanted to create a product, rather than a traditional 30 page paper. The product decision took Natcessities one step further. Each week I published a YouTube video involving college lifestyle in the High Country, no later than Wednesday at 5 p.m.

The first few videos were very fashion centric, but as I learned about gaining traffic to my website through Google Analytics, I knew I needed to make sure the content was tailored to a wide college demographic, at Appalachian State University. Fashion remained a part of the website, and most blog posts focus on fashion, but in the thesis videos, the focus shifted to aspects in Boone and the High Country, in general, that attracted many different demographics at ASU. This shift coincides and lines up with lifestyle journalism's blurring of boundaries. So many topics fall under the umbrella of lifestyle journalism, and the angle of the topics is what creates a brand. The angle Natcessities takes is local. Appalachian State University prides itself in being a family, and focusing and reporting on local topics that interest the student body plays into that family dynamic. Video topics spanned from college careers on campus, to discounted activities

throughout the high country, and college study tips for college exams and graduate school entrance exams.

In addition to Natcessities partaking in the blurring of boundaries by expanded topics with distinct angles, in lifestyle journalism, Natcessities placed stake in the emergence of multi-media, in the field. All content was created via YouTube and incorporate human-interest stories. YouTube is a video industry that grows in popularity every day. Content creators on YouTube can now make a living off Ad revenue and sponsorships/partnerships they gain through their management companies and channels. Through YouTube, audiences and viewers can receive information, via video, on just about any topic that they want to, and Natcessities plays a part in this dynamic.

While Natcessities fits into two major components of lifestyle journalism, it does not fit completely into all three major components, with certain criterion lacking in the shift in journalistic role criteria. On YouTube, many channels follow the shift in the journalist role component of lifestyle journalism, and while Natcessities does to an extent, it does not entirely encompass the mechanics behind that aspect of lifestyle journalism. While the videos created on Natcessities take a stance, and do have some sense of reviewing in them, since the sources state their opinions on things, it does not review like the normal lifestyle niche news source would. There aren't product reviews or really criticize anything. Mainly, Natcessities informs college students at Appalachian of local news and topics, which has traditional journalism roots. In addition, Natcessities has a very strong third reading position audience, which means that they pick and choose what they want to read and watch. Therefore, it is important that the content aligns with the audience's interests.

Natcessities is a unique news source that utilizes the modern lifestyle journalism components, but retains certain traditional elements of journalism. Through Google Analytics, Natcessities has grown and marketing of the channel has improved. This is because I am able to see what videos gain the most views and traffic, and I can take that forward and implement those actions in further videos and marketing implementations. Lifestyle journalism allows Natcessities the room to grow, while helping harness the angle of the niche more tightly as time goes on.

Lessons learned through Natcessities

- *Tagging for marketing:* In Natcessities, I had to tag the posts and videos on both Youtube and Tumblr. It is important to tag effectively to reach the right audience, in order to gain steady and return visitors. The difference between likes, reblogs, followers and views now and when I started is large, and this is largely because of effective tagging of posts.
- *Web design themes:* My first layout was not the most reader friendly. It made it hard to read, and therefore, I believe turned people away from the blog. After changing the theme and layout of the blog to one that is both aesthetically and reading friendly, I have gained more traffic and return visitors.
- *Focus and story ideas:* Finding the correct niche was a challenge, because what I initially wanted to focus on was not a niche that needed to be filled. In addition, in the initial focus, story ideas were hard to come by. Once I listened to the community about their interests, I found the right niche and story ideas came to me more easily.
- *Google analytics:* This kind of ties back into the web design, as well. I had a hard time setting up Google Analytics initially, because of the web layout. However, once I found the correct

theme, setting up Google Analytics and utilizing it was easy and effective when learning how to best market my website and content.

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