

How Defining the Semi-Professional Journalist Is Creating Nuance and a Familiar Future for Local Journalism

Authors : Ross Hawkes

Abstract : The rise of hyperlocal journalism and its role in the wider local news ecosystem has been debated across both industry and academic circles, particularly via the lens of structures, models, and platforms. The nuances within this sphere are now allowing for the semi-professional journalist to emerge as a key component of the landscape at the fringes of journalism. By identifying and framing the labour of these individuals against a backdrop of change within the professional local newspaper publishing industry, it is possible to address wider debates around the ways in which participants enter and exist in the space between amateur and professional journalism. Considerations around prior experience and understanding allow us to better shape and nuance the hyperlocal landscape in order to understand the challenges and opportunities facing local news via this emergent form of semi-professional journalistic production. The disruption to local news posed by the changing nature of audiences, long-established methods of production, the rise of digital platforms, and increased competition in the online space has brought questions around the very nature and identity of local news, as well as the uncertain future and precarity which surrounds it. While the hyperlocal sector has long been associated as a potential future direction for local journalism through an alternative approach to reporting and as a mechanism for participants to pass between amateurism towards professionalism, there is now a semi-professional space being occupied in a different way. Those framed as semi-professional journalists are not necessarily transiting through this space at the fringes of the professional industry; instead, they are occupying and claiming the space as an entity within itself. By framing the semi-professional journalist through a lens of prior experience and knowledge of the sector, it is possible to identify how their motivations vary from the traditional metrics of financial gain, personal progression, or a sense of civic or community duty. While such factors may be by-products of their labour, the desire of such reporters to recreate and retain experiences and values from their past as a participant or consumer is the central basis of the framework to define the semi-professional journalist. Through understanding the motivations, aims and factors shaping the semi-professional journalist within the wider journalism and hyperlocal journalism debates and landscape, it will be possible to better frame the role they can play in sustaining the longer term provision of local news and addressing broader issues and factors within the sector.

Keywords : hyperlocal, journalism, local news, semi-professionalism

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