



Digital Journalism and News and Feature Video Writing in the 21st Century

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Abstract

With the advent of the digital era in the 21st century, the process of news writing and news documentary production has changed significantly. The new media context has made traditional news writing and news documentary production less relevant. This article examined the refreshed knowledge about news writing and news documentary production, to be adapted for the context of Thailand. The document research suggested that a novel news writing and news documentary production style is needed to satisfy news consumers and internet users, and especially to meet the unique characteristic of open and informative online media. Current information technologies have allowed newsrooms and journalists to apply dimensions of speed, depth, and user control to the new news writing style. In addition, journalists should learn how to produce and tell stories through news documentaries and feature videos, to improve their multitasking skills which have become extensively necessary against the backdrop of multimedia journalism in the digital age.

Keywords: 1) News Writing 2) News and Feature Video 3) Digital Journalism 4) Multimedia Journalism

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Introduction

The 21st century has come with the advanced communications technology of interactive platforms for user-generated content. This innovation allows internet users and consumers to easily generate and share content. On the one hand, the new technology has helped facilitate news flows in the world of information, but on the other hand, it has changed the mediascape dramatically, especially regarding news, news topics, news production, and news consumption. The news these days is shifting away from traditional media like newspapers, magazines, televisions, and radios more toward online.

This article studied the current process of news writing and news documentary production. With the drastic change in the media landscape, newsrooms and journalists have to adjust to the new context of work. The article explored fresh knowledge about a new style of news writing and news documentary

production in the age of digital media, where newsrooms and journalists apply the dimensions of speed, depth, and user control to their work while maintaining the code of ethics and professional conduct of mass media.

Using a document research method, this article examined academic articles and journals about the adjustment of newsrooms and journalists worldwide to adapt the knowledge for Thai journalists in the digital era. (Tangkitvanich and Wongkitrungruang, 2011)

Why is Traditional News Writing No Longer Relevant in the Digital Age?

General journalism classes these days may still teach a traditional news writing structure, which consists of the headline, the lead, and the body, where details of the story are contained. There are at least four conventional news writing models, which are 1) inverted pyramid, 2) upright pyramid, 3) combination, and 4) chronological order.



Picture No. 1 News production process of the spirit of the unfinished

Source: Bradshaw, 2009

Although these models are still valid, Paul Bradshaw (Bradshaw, 2017) raised a challenging question of whether the old writing style from the 19th century was still efficient. He argued that it was time to adapt to the new media. According to Bradshaw, news these

days was not just the product of mainstream media organizations, but it resulted from the endless reproduction of information in the spirit of the unfinished (see Picture No. 1), which was a special characteristic of online media. In today's world of information over

flow, organizations or news sources can distribute information by themselves or allow the audience or the public to get access to the information, or even create content, without having to depend on information from mainstream media.

Bradshaw (2017) introduced a model of news diamond (see Picture No. 2) to use as an alternative for the traditional writing models, especially the inverted pyramid, to meet the new lifestyles of news consumers and the unique characteristic of open and informative online media.



Picture No. 2 News diamond writing model

Source: Bradshaw, 2007; 2017

According to Picture No. 2, the essential dimensions of the news diamond writing model are speed, depth, and user control. Journalists and media organizations should take these dimensions into account and use them to create a new style of writing. The news diamond writing model consists of seven steps (Bradshaw, 2007; 2017; Srisaracam (Trans), 2011), which are the followings.

Step 1 Alert: An alert can be sent to journalists through their mobile phone, computer, subscribed application, email, or Facebook or Twitter feed. The purpose of this step is to give a hint or basic information about a breaking story for the journalists to follow up. An alert may also be sent from a newsroom to notify journalists that their news agency can be the first to cover the story, whether to

make it a big story or a smaller story, and that they can add more aspects or information to their coverage on social media posts, mostly Twitter. This could subsequently draw readers to the news agency's website, newspaper, or broadcast.

Step 2 Draft: A draft may be too rough for newspaper print or television or radio broadcast because it does not contain complete information. However, it is suitable for blogs. Journalists can make a draft report on a blog as a backup for the alert. The draft report is similar to a short news report; it gives initial information about names, places, details, and sources and will be updated when more details come in.

The draft report will keep the readers, who have been notified in the Alert step, on

the social media page or website. It will also serve to spread the word and bring in more readers. Journalists also have to work further, maybe interviewing experts or relevant parties for opinions or additional information, to find more details or even new leads for the story.

Step 3 Article/Package: In this stage, online media excels in the dimensions of speed and depth. Although traditional print and broadcast media also combine both dimensions in news reporting, there are still many limitations. For example, with the documentary nature of traditional media, the limitation of time and space for news reporting, and the limitation of snapshot documentation, which prefers a 300-word article or a 3-minute package, traditional media editors have to make an important decision if the story is worth a spot in the news. Meanwhile for online or internet news reporting, the draft will turn into a package, which can be used for print, television or radio broadcasts, and online media. However, the timing for news reporting, such as when to release a story or broadcast the news, can be guided by the mainstream print or broadcast processes.

Step 4 Context: This stage is meant to provide instant and extensive context about the news. It is usually done by hypertext and hyperlink placement. With the hypertextuality attribute of new media, hypertext enables linking to a range of documents, organizations, and explanations to provide background or in-depth information for readers. Adding hypertext words and phrases in news writing is a new style of news production called mutation (Deuze, 2007, pp. 139–152). The hyperlinks may

link to internal archives of the news agency or external sources that provide essential resources.

Step 5 Analysis/Reflection: There is always feedback after the report; it may come in a form of analysis, comments, or opinions. For online, journalists and news organizations may gather reactions taking place in their blogs or forums. At the same time, print and broadcast media may use the discussion or debates from the forums for their production cycles.

Step 6 Interactivity: This step is the investment and preparation of media to promote user interaction. Users will be able to share opinions or provide information to journalists or the media, which is a common feature of today's online media where users can help update or correct news content in real time.

Users are key contributors in the interactivity step. Interactivity can engage users in a way that traditional media cannot. In this step, online tools such as live chats and web boards or internet forums (also known as web forums, message boards, discussion boards, discussion forums, discussion groups, bulletin boards, and online communities) will serve as a place for people in a virtual community to share information, opinions, and experiences. Live chats also allow users and experts to reach newsmakers or journalists directly.

Step 7 Customization: The stage of customization may happen automatically from users choosing information for their own needs. The basic service is subscriptions to email or SMS updates of specific news stories, while the more advanced services include



social recommendation links or database-driven journalism that allow users to drill down into the information. This process integrates multiple technologies such as meta tagging, which provides details about topics or contents of the website, or an interface facilitating the transfer of data between computers.

Distributed Journalism

Apart from the new news writing model, Bradshaw (2012; 2017, pp. 13-56) also introduced the idea of distributed journalism. According to Bradshaw, newsmaking in the 21st century was no longer about journalists and news agencies controlling the dissemination of information; in fact, everybody could be the senders and receivers of information at the same time. Distributed journalism suggested that journalists and news agencies should use online media to distribute the power of news investigation and news gathering and build relationships with the audience, especially by interacting with online communities that were their followers to make use of information on the Internet to find new leads or produce in-depth stories, which could help differentiate their work from that of other journalists or news agencies.

From this point of view, therefore, distributed journalism means journalists or newsroom editors disseminating some information and letting the community of users exchange or help create more stories from that information. In this sense, users on online networks are not just a list of names on a contacts book, but they are a group of

contributors that can share information, opinions, and analysis. Accordingly, journalists should know how to create tools and understand the structure of network systems to create stories from the community.

Bradshaw (2012) categorized the contributors of distributed journalism into two groups, which are tool-monitored contributors and system-facilitated contributors.

Tool-monitored contributors – Journalists can use tools to identify and monitor contributors. There are three types of tool-monitored contributors: the brain, the voice, and the ear.

The brain means experts. Traditionally, journalists usually use informed sources that are their familiar faces, famous people, or experts from official or professional organizations. However, new media has provided access to alternative sources of information journalists may have not thought of before, such as people outside of the official or professional circles, people who have developed their own expertise, or other respectable experts. The brain can be experts who have hands-on experience or well-supported arguments about a particular topic. Journalists may monitor these experts, use their information, quote their words, or even commission them when they need analysis on relevant topics.

The voice means message receivers or audience. This group of contributors is similar to the brain, but they may not have the expertise or personal experience with the topic. New media allows anyone to publish their opinions or even produce their own content. Journalists may identify the voice, bring them into the

news organizations, or use their information while giving proper credit by linking back to their websites. This integration can result in well-rounded and in-depth news stories.

The ear means users or someone who may have better access to information or better knowledge of situations than journalists. The ear may report what they see via their social media accounts regularly. Journalists may monitor these accounts to find newsworthy information, potential informed sources, or potential news contributors. At the same time, journalists must not forget the silent population or people who do not have internet access. These people are still important and journalists should make an effort to give a voice to them too.

System-facilitated contributors – Journalists can use technology systems to facilitate the participation of contributors in new media journalism. Four important types of system-facilitated contributors are the accidental journalist, the value adder, the technician, and the crowd.

The accidental journalist is the person who stumbles upon a newsworthy event or a citizen journalist who witnesses or captures a news story. News organizations may facilitate their collaboration with accidental journalists by providing more information, engaging in media training on newsmaking processes and tools, and encouraging these contributors to see the importance of their news submission.

The value adder means the person who helps recheck, screen, or add information such as comments or useful links to a news story.

The technician understands the nature of social media systems. This is the person who classifies news, stories, and data into groups for presentation across a variety of media. The technician can also create a comparison between an editorial agenda and what people are actually reading. This person also creates a Facebook application or RSS feed.

The crowd was formerly just the audience. But now they are people who also interact with journalists. Crowdsourcing makes users part of the newsgathering process by raising a question or issue among a large group of people in the cyber community.

There are two types of crowdsourcing projects, one involving a diversity of expertise and the other involving relevant experience. Journalists can monitor and make a request for information or conduct an interview through systems like wikis or online forums. Using the new media technology to turn the audience into part of the newsgathering process is one of many strategies that can help distributed journalists report or recheck a news story more efficiently than traditional journalism ever can.

Journalists and News Documentary Production

Newsmaking and news reporting in the digital era usually combine various forms of media. This practice is called multimedia journalism. Journalists can use texts, feature videos, and hyperlinks in a news story to attract the audience and promote social media sharing.

Therefore, if journalists who already excel at writing skills are interested in learning how to produce news documentaries and



feature videos, it can help improve news documentary production and the efficiency of news communication.

With the open characteristics of the Internet, there are many online platforms that allow users to create and publish their own video content. The popular platforms include YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram, and Facebook. These platforms provide an opportunity for video content, if it is good enough, to reach millions of audiences. These platforms also support a more variety of presentation styles than traditional television media does.

Media scholar : Tu (2015) categorized news and news documentary videos in new media into five styles:

1) Traditional, broadcast-style video –

Some newsrooms or news agencies do not produce fresh, new content for digital media; instead, they repeat the content from their traditional television broadcast video on their websites, digital platforms, or other online channels.

2) Raw video – Raw videos are short video clips produced and uploaded by onsite journalists to capture the atmosphere of the situation. These clips are mainly made with mobile phones or other portable devices. Journalists will record footage of events to support their writing content. The clips may be uploaded to social media accounts of the journalists or news agencies to draw the audience's attention or add details about the news.

3) Explainer video – Explainer videos focus on explaining sophisticated content or issues such as healthcare system reform or the

South China Sea disputes. They usually use motion pictures and news value content to answer important questions of society.

4) Interactive media – Interactive media is part of multimedia journalism. Journalists combine writing, video clips, hyperlinks, and other media to tell a story. New York Times and The Guardian, for example, use real footage or interview videos to support a major story rather than present it as a separate story.

5) Short feature video – Short feature videos are usually in-depth reports of interesting, news value stories. These stories will be presented in a form of a documentary feature video with a dramatic tone and great cinematic composition.

News Documentary Production Processes

To make effective and successful storytelling, journalists need to know some principal elements and techniques of news documentary production and understand this type of media.

Tu (2015, pp. 198-208) suggested that a good storytelling video should cover well-rounded aspects of the topic and at the same time exhibit the attributes of creativity, dedication, and passion. To achieve this, news documentary journalists would have to create a storyline that could capture the attention of the audience from the beginning of the story until the end. The story should consist of protagonists, conflicts, details, climax, and resolution.

There are three important steps in news documentary production.

Preproduction – This is a preparation and planning step, which includes 1) finding a topic, 2) doing research into relevant information and details about the protagonists of the topic, 3) choosing what to cover and what to not cover in the storytelling, and 4) determining important questions that the documentary video aims to answer.

Production – This step includes collecting data, filming content, and recording footage for the documentary.

Postproduction – This last step takes place when journalists or news producers have enough stories and footage to edit into a documentary video.

Essential Elements and Techniques

Important elements and techniques in the production of news documentaries are worthiness, topic selection, basic information gathering, access to informed sources or news protagonists, visual thinking, and news documentary writing.

Worthiness – Professional journalists who are familiar with newsworthiness for print media like newspapers need to understand newsworthiness elements of new media if they are creating a news documentary video. Motions and emotions are key factors to successful video storytelling. A news documentary video should include motion pictures, characters of the protagonists, and footage from different camera angles and shooting styles to create emotions and feelings among the audience.

A newsworthy video must be able to stir the audience's emotions such as fear,

excitement, stress, happiness, or hope. The video must capture the emotions and actions of the story. The protagonist of the story must be solid and have a story to tell. The theme of the story must be universal so that the audience can relate. Yet, more important elements are that the protagonist must feel comfortable with the camera and be a natural storyteller, the motion footage has to match with the storytelling, and the narrative should unknowingly immerse the audience into the story (Tu, 2015, pp. 244-245).

Hence, the video should not focus mainly on interview footage. If the protagonist of the video is not a truly important person, it is very likely that the audience will not want to watch it. The audience usually prefers to see a person's behavior in motion. A chef, for example, should be cooking while telling his story instead of just sitting and giving an interview about cooking.

In addition, the video must not be just a wallpaper that does not provide any information, emotions, or actions or does not help with the development of the story. Some of the examples are pointless inserts of walkway footage, footage of a person typing on a keyboard, or footage of a scientist looking at a light switch in a laboratory. Some journalists may even add random background music to rouse the audience without considering the actual mood and tone of the characters or events in the video.

Topic selection – An important problem in news documentary or feature video production is how to select a topic for the story. Finding a newsworthy story to report



is challenging. Journalists also need to have an extensive understanding of the motion pictures to use with the storytelling.

In journalism, news/documentaries present facts, not fiction, so their content must be authentic. In this regard, journalists usually find topics for news or documentaries from two main sources:

The first source is general news reporting. It can be hot news, current affairs, or any topic that is in the interest of the public. Journalists can pick a topic from present or past news reports, such as election results, court ruling results, sporting events, or university commencement.

The second source is the journalist's own curiosity or the audience's request. Some journalists may see a newsworthy story from statistics, such as how a decrease in the number of HIV infection cases reflects the performance of the healthcare protection system or why the number of HIV infection cases in Bangkok is higher than in northern and southern Thailand for the first time in 20 years.

Journalists may use the statistical data as a new lead and start to gather more information by talking to experts, doing research, and finding a protagonist to record footage for the coverage.

However, if the topic is too abstract or too broad, the news documentary may turn out vague and confusing. General topics like health, science, politics, and economy may be too big and difficult to create into a well-rounded and inclusive documentary, especially for inexperienced journalists. Therefore, journalists may have to focus on

a particular aspect of the topic. For example, topics like Thailand's healthcare system, the Middle East's conflicts, or a life of a working-class family are still too wide. Instead, journalists may choose to address smaller, specific issues such as the cost of Thailand's universal health coverage scheme and the government spending, how social media helps the social movements in the Middle East, or a story of unemployed parents trying to get dinner for their children.

Information gathering – This step is similar to that of traditional media. After having decided on the topic, journalists will start doing initial research from Google or relevant websites. However, information from these online sources must be treated only as basic information. Such information should not be used as the main idea of the story because it is mostly from old reports of others. Thus, to find a refreshing story, journalists should try to seek information from fresh sources or real people.

Access to informed sources – Producing a news documentary video is very challenging in comparison to other forms of media. It is because a news documentary needs a protagonist who can do the storytelling naturally. Journalists will not be able to turn their creativity into reality unless they have a competent protagonist. Accordingly, finding informed sources that can be the protagonists is the key to producing a successful news documentary. Journalists should work to earn trust from informed sources so that they agree to be filmed and become the protagonists and storytellers of the documentary.

After getting the protagonists for the story, journalists need to keep in mind that making a news documentary video is different from making an interview for newspaper writing. There are at least three things to be cautious about when working with the protagonists.

First, there must not be too many protagonists in a story. Using too many protagonists can confuse the audience for they may not be able to remember all the protagonists in a short amount of time, especially given the audience's tendency to click away if they find the video not interesting.

Second, journalists must work with integrity and empathy, treating those informed sources as respectable people, not just the objects of the camera, while always protecting their privacy and rights. For example, if a child appears in the video or is the protagonist of the story, journalists must be careful about children's rights and always ask for prior permission from their parents or guardians to protect the child and prevent future problems. Yet, journalists also have to make sure that the filmed footage gives natural yet dramatic vibes, both in the elements of pictures and words.

Finally, journalists should ask questions that help the informed sources to open up. However, there must not be too many questions and the questions should not be too big or too broad. They should be important questions that hit right on the topic. Since it is impossible to address all aspects of the story, journalists have to choose just one aspect to present, but they can still keep the footage or content to use in the future when

there are relevant issues.

Visual thinking – Journalists who are experts in writing skills may not know how to tell a story with pictures and footage at all. Therefore, they may start by learning about video composition, how to find the main idea for storytelling, and how to think visually.

Important sections of the motion pictures should be the footage from the site of the events, which can work best to tell the story. It can be video interviews of people at the scene which show the real situations.

While an interview is an important source of information for print media, there are more factors to consider when it comes to making an interview for a news documentary. Journalists will have to check the quality of lighting, setting, surrounding noise, as well as the attitude of the interviewees. Moreover, in the postproduction process, journalists may edit the video by adding footage of past events or statistical infographics, and they have to be able to explain why and how that information complements the storytelling.

For footage filming, either interviews or motion pictures, there are two main types of footage. The first one is called a-roll, which is a full interview with pictures and sound. This type of footage should use a technique of close-up shooting instead of zooming because the zoom technique may result in shaken footage. Yet, it also depends on the situation and experience of the journalists.

Importantly, an interview should be natural, so it should be a casual conversation that is not too formal. The interviewer has to be a good listener, focusing more on listening



than asking. The interviewer should not ask too many questions. Those questions should be relevant and serve to keep the conversation flowing. They also should be open-ended questions that require the interviewee to elaborate on their answers. Journalists also have to find a way to get back to the same question if the interviewee still does not give the answer.

The second type of footage is called b-roll, which is supplemental footage that journalists can use in the editing process to complete the video. For example, in an interview about birds, journalists may also film footage of birds and the surrounding atmosphere to use in the editing process. This footage can also be called an insert, which should contain both the motion and emotion elements.

News documentary writing

General news writing usually uses an inverted pyramid story structure, where the most important and interesting information is presented first. However, this writing model does not work well with a documentary video. Normally, a news documentary video does not open the story with the most important information. Instead, it has to gradually introduce and build up the story until it reaches the climax, to keep the audience hooked through the end. Accordingly, creating a news documentary video is a challenging task for a storyteller, particularly for online media, because the audiences have a great variety of choices and they can be distracted easily.

Tu (2015, p. 215) suggested that a news documentary video should consist of a protagonist, the conflicts, and the resolution.

The video should be able to capture topics and show the development of the protagonist more deeply than short news. According to Tu, the story should contain three important parts:

First, the protagonists set off on the journey. The focus is on the protagonists of the story. This part helps establish the background and provides basic information for the audience. Even though there may be many interviewees, the video producer needs to choose only a few protagonists. The goal of the story can be small or big, but it should be consistent with the story of the protagonists. This is also an important part that gives the context of the storytelling.

Second, the antagonist is introduced. This part introduces a turning point or conflict in the story, such as the struggle of the protagonists or the tension they are facing. The antagonist can be a person, an idea, or a policy.

The climax of the story should be in this part. It is hardest for a long story to be able to capture the attention of the audience from the beginning until the end, especially for online audiences who are ready to click away from the content anytime. However, if journalists can create a captivating climax, it will help keep the audience through the end of the story.

Revealing the climax also means showing the success or failure of the protagonists as well as showing emotional themes, such as hope, injustice, family, community protection, or other themes that the audience will be able to relate.

Finally, the climax is resolved, revealing if the protagonist has achieved

the goal or not. This is the shortest part of the storytelling. It shows the outcome from the second part, pointing out how the experience of the protagonist has changed over time.

Conclusion and Discussion

This article studied the news production process of the digital era. In the information technology context of the 21st century, newsrooms, news writing, news production, and news documentary production have changed so dramatically that the traditional practice has become less relevant. The article explored fresh knowledge about a new style of news writing and news documentary production against the backdrop of rapidly-advancing digital media. Newsrooms and journalists have to apply the dimensions of speed, depth, and user control—with users as news contributors—while maintaining the code of ethics and professional conduct of mass media.

Using a document research method, this article examined international academic articles and journals about the adjustment of newsrooms and journalists worldwide to adapt the knowledge for Thai journalists. With the drastic change in the media landscape, traditional journalists and news agencies are no longer the only disseminators of news and information. News in the age of online media is not just the product of mainstream media organizations, but it is the continuous reproduction of information in the spirit of the unfinished. In today's world of information overflow, the audience, the public, and every organization have the power to create and

distribute content without having to depend on mainstream media. Accordingly, it is necessary for newsrooms and journalists to adjust to this new context of work. Since traditional news writing models may not be able to meet the modern lifestyle of consumers anymore, a new writing model of news diamond, introduced by Paul Bradshaw (2017), could be a suitable alternative.

Newsmaking and news reporting these days combine various forms of media in a method that is called multimedia journalism. With the open characteristics of the Internet, many online platforms allow users to create and publish their own video content. Thus, journalists who only excel in writing skills may face limitations in their work. Accordingly, journalists should understand key elements and techniques of news documentary production and learn how to tell stories through news documentaries and feature videos, to improve the efficiency of news communication and develop their profession.



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