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Book Review

The Vanishing Newspaper: Saving Journalism in the Information Age, by Philip Meyer. 264 pages.

University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London; 2004.

Print journalism, specifically the newspaper industry has weakened, as technology continues to be a major part of society. Author Philip Meyer, provides a model to have journalism transition successfully into the present technology advanced era.

Now a professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Meyer has long researched the ebbs and flows of the newspaper industry during his career in journalism. Meyer, begins his book presenting a theoretical model focused on journalism being a business that is supported by advertisers, and has a social responsibility. This influence model is known as the Hal Jurgensmeyer model, created in 1978. "The Vanishing Newspaper" reveals the correlation between good journalism from big or small publications, and the quality of business that does or does not derive from it.

Using different graphs to help prove his concerns, Meyer shows how confidence in the press has deteriorated from 1972 to 2002. The theme throughout the book, is how there is an entire generation that is disinterested to invest in the newspaper business, because of the convenience of the internet. In most chapters of the book, Meyer uses his own personal experiences and research as a strength, to explain what has caused the negative effects on newspaper business.

With the newspaper industry struggling financially, Meyer lists different newspapers from around the United States, both large and small, to show what keeps them going or is bringing them down. The arguments made in each of the 12 chapters are considered objectively by Meyer. He makes a point in each chapter to explain what makes newspapers work. He does this through discussing the significance of editors, reporters, ethical choices, advertisements, accuracy, and understanding the audience. Most of Meyer's explanations come from case studies, that he refers to from other journalists, professors, or scientists.

There are hardly any inaccuracies in the text, as Meyer cites all of his sources with footnotes throughout the chapters. The only flaw in accuracy that I was able to notice, was assumptions made about how journalism might be used through technology in the future. The book was written at a point in time where technology was not created to the current level. During chapter seven, "Do Editors Matter?" Meyer never directly answers if he believes that editors matter or not. However in chapter eight, "The Last Line of Defense" he addresses the significance of copy editors to a newspaper.

There is a fair amount of bias throughout the book from Meyer. Now, an 86-year-old, he does seem to have a basic understanding of how technology effects journalism. Although he continually expresses that his background in newspapers, causes him to fear for the way news will be shared if newspapers do eventually disappear. Meyer's bias, is very minimal during the entirety of the book, never affecting the truth behind the theme he is presenting.

Through the writing and information shared, it is obvious that Meyer is extremely knowledgeable about what has led to the downfall of the newspaper industry. He remains effective getting his points across, by using comparisons, visuals, experiences, and statistics to his advantage. There are many points in the book, where he weighs the pros and cons of major

and minor newspapers. For example in chapter nine, "Capacity Measures" Meyer explains that during 9/11 the coverage from major newspapers was more thorough, compared to minor newspapers. This was due to major newspapers having the means to send large numbers of reporters to the scene, resulting in better coverage compared to minor newspapers.

Meyer, places much of his focus on discussing the history of the newspaper industry. He recalls his experiences with USA Today, when they were first introduced in 1980, by a company named Gannett. What was interesting about this, is that USA Today was very close to failing right away, but eventually turned into the major profitable publication that it is today.

Meyer's point of view on the future of journalism, is that new technology is forcing the business into new experimental ways of practicing journalism. Meaning that students, who want to become journalists, need to have a different set of skills coming out of college than in the past, to survive. Meyer repeatedly expresses the significance of newspapers always adjusting, and being successful in places where the publication is mostly trusted. Newspapers may be vanishing, but journalism still remains alive, in the way Meyer foresaw it.