TMC2017

Transformative Media Conference-Report

Something truly transformative happened at TMC2017. A group of 132 editors and publishers began calling themselves a movement to take back journalism.

The 2016 election provided a wake-up call for journalists everywhere. We learned that over [68% of Americans](http://www.gallup.com/poll/195542/americans-trust-mass-media-sinks-new-low.aspx) have little or no trust in news media. An [increasing number of Americans](http://www.gallup.com/poll/195542/americans-trust-mass-media-sinks-new-low.aspx) are turning to Facebook and other social media for their news, with 18% getting their news exclusively from these sites. Taking advantage of that fact, immoral entrepreneurs used social media to spread sensational lies masquerading as news in order to grab ad revenue. The epidemic of “fake news” only decreased Americans’ trust in the news system.

The focus on “fake news” is warranted, but it misses a more substantial problem. Fake news sites could flourish only because people had already turned away from mass media providers. Just as the electorate turned to Trump over Clinton, audiences turned to fake news in part because they just did not feel heard by the establishment.

Trump voters did not see enough stories about wage stagnation, high health care costs, and the many kinds of debt they now carry. Black male voters did not see enough stories about themselves as protagonists in their own lives rather than victims. Immigrants did not see enough stories about the struggles of refugees to come to America and to integrate once here.

We know why the news ecosystem has failed the American public. The radical shift brought about by the digital revolution has led to the loss of [over half of all newsroom jobs](http://www.niemanlab.org/2015/07/newsonomics-the-halving-of-americas-daily-newsrooms/). The rise of Facebook as the primary marketing and distribution arm for digital media has led many of the largest remaining news organizations to [feed the Facebook algorithm](https://mondaynote.com/news-publishers-facebook-problem-6752f1c35037) rather than to engage directly with their communities.

It’s time to take news media back to the people we serve. It’s high time for news media to center communities.

In order to bring journalism back to communities and to rebuild public trust, we must become advocates for those communities. Communities must see journalists as being on their side, sharing their values, finding out the truth about what matters most to their lives and the lives of their families.

In short, we need a movement to return our news system to its roots in community media.

The communities of today are not merely geographic. We always have communities focused around areas of interest and that’s even more true today. When we talk about community-based news media, we should broaden

My thinking has shifted from a focus on progressive media per se to a focus on a values-driven community-based  media, which I believe will share most of the values we think of as progressive.

The disconnect in this country is coming largely because people don't feel heard, and I think that has something to do with the fact that there is no longer news serving communities (vs. algorithms). To me, there is a synergy between TMC members, most of whom serve communities of practice (feminists, environmentalists, etc) and media that truly serve demographic  (i.e. Latino) or geographic communities.

The recent TMC conference brought together 35 editors from outlets serving latinos and african americans with TMC outlets, and there was an immediate shared understanding around a values-driven journalism.

I do think if we can build infrastructure around that we might get somewhere.

The irony about the Nation issue is that they push partnerships, and yet as far as I can tell didn't talk meaningfully with any of their colleagues before putting out this issue. I have been talking with Mark, but that's about it.

The Media Consortium held the Transformative Media Conference March 1-4 in Washington DC. We welcomed 132 registrants from independent and community media, as well as leaders from our sister associations AAN, NFCB, ACM and NAM; foundation program officers; policy experts; and TMC partners.

Attendees represented outlets from all over the United States (and beyond); all kinds of platforms from digital video and podcasts to cable TV and print; and a covering a wide range of topics, from national outlets covering education, feminism and politics to local outlets covering issues specific to their communities.

Our focus this year was on the need to transform the news ecosystem. Spurred by the failure of mass media during the 2016 election, we invited participants to create a new media system that is mission-based and values-driven--one that puts communities (rather than journalists or politicians) at its center.