**Making sense of the newspaper crisis: A critical assessment of existing research and an agenda for future work**

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Original citation: Siles, I. & Boczkowski, P.J. (Forthcoming). Making sense of the newspaper crisis: A critical assessment of existing research and an agenda for future work. *New Media & Society*.

OnlineFirst version of the article is available at:
http://nms.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/08/21/1461444812455148.abstract

**Abstract**
This article analyzes recent research on the newspaper crisis. It discusses how authors have examined the sources, manifestations, and implications of this crisis and the proposals to resolve it. In addition, the essay critically examines this body of work by assessing the main spatial and temporal contexts that researchers have studied, the theories and methods that authors employ, and the analytical tropes they have deployed to make sense of the crisis. Building on this assessment of existing research, the article outlines an agenda for future work that fosters an analysis of the process, history, comparative development, and manifold implications of this crisis, and advances various empirical strategies to examine some of its most undertheorized dimensions.

**Keywords:**
Advertising – Audiences – Business models – Crisis – Journalism – Media transition – News consumption – News circulation – Newspapers – Newspaper economics – Online news

# Making sense of the newspaper crisis:

## A critical assessment of existing research and an agenda for future work

Throughout their history, newspapers have accomplished important functions in democratic societies (Anderson, 1991; Habermas, 1989). They have provided valuable knowledge about various affairs that help individuals to make informed political decisions, offered a space of deliberation among citizens, and investigated the concentration of power by various institutions (Schudson, 2008). However, in recent years the newspaper industry in certain countries has experienced significant decreases of revenue from advertising and declining patterns of print newspaper consumption and circulation. These factors, as well as major reductions of newsroom staff and resources, have resulted in the closure of several newspapers around the world. Authors have described the present situation of the industry in various countries as a 'crisis' that threatens the survival of the newspaper in the near future (Blumler, 2010; Cowan and Westphal, 2010; Curran, 2010; McChesney and Pickard, 2011; Meyer, 2009). That 'journalism is in crisis,' Pickard (2011, p. 73) argues, 'no longer invites controversy.'

Crisis is both a rich and a slippery concept. According to Morin, 'Originally, *Krisis* meant decision: it is the decisive moment, in the evolution of an uncertain process that allows a diagnosis. Today, crisis means indecision. It is the moment when - in tandem with a disruption - uncertainties arise' (Morin, 1976, p. 149, authors' translation). This paper has a twofold purpose that builds on these two conceptions of crisis. First, it discusses how authors have analyzed the context of disruption experienced by newspaper organizations in various countries. Thus, we examine the sources, manifestations, and implications of the newspaper crisis in various contexts and the solutions advanced by authors to resolve it. These issues have functioned as key structuring devices in the literature and, therefore, we use them to discuss the main findings from several studies. Second, and drawing on the original meaning of crisis, we turn the present conjunctures about newspapers (and the various ways in which authors have studied them) into an opportunity for diagnosis and critical thinking. To this end, we analyze the temporal and spatial contexts that researchers have studied, the theories and methods authors have employed, and the conceptual tropes deployed to assess the crisis. This analysis reveals that current research has provided valuable knowledge but has also had important limitations.

On the basis of this critical diagnosis, the final section outlines an agenda for future research that seeks to transform these shortcomings into avenues for further analysis and propel our understanding of the crisis forward. This agenda rests on five building blocks: (a) an investigation of the newspaper crisis that focuses on processes in addition to outcomes; (b) an historical contextualization of current developments in the industry; (c) an international, comparative assessment of the situation in disparate, geographic contexts; (d) a thorough analysis of the social, political, and cultural implications of this crisis; and (e) the adoption of multidimensional empirical strategies to help produce the necessary original and systematic data.

## An Industry in Crisis

This section examines recent research on the crisis of newspapers. The discussion presents four main themes that the authors have used to examine the present context of print journalism in various countries: (a) the sources of the crisis, (b) its manifestations, (c) the implications of the crisis, and (d) the solutions proposed to solve it. Empirical research on the newspaper crisis has largely concentrated on the United States. Although we are aware that the newspaper crisis might have unfolded differently in other national contexts, (in places where some newspapers are actually flourishing), this analysis cites many examples that deal with the newspaper industry in the United States. (Subsequent sections elaborate on the significance of this situation and suggest ways to resolve it.)

*The sources of crisis*

To account for the present state of the newspaper industry in various countries, researchers have turned to three main sets of sources: economic, technological, and social. We discuss these factors individually for analytic purposes and not because we think it is possible to isolate them. Concurring with Morin (1976), '[A] crisis is not only all of [its] components, but also their interactions, their combinations, the complementary, competitive and antagonist game of these processes and phenomena' (p. 160, authors' translation). It is precisely the articulation of these interrelated factors that shapes the nature of a crisis.

Authors argue that the crisis of newspapers has resulted significantly from a combination of interrelated economic factors. Overall, authors contend that newspaper organizations have espoused inadequate and outdated business models for the present context (Meyer, 2009; Picard, 2001, 2002). In particular, they argue that newspapers have experienced severe difficulties because of their historical dependence on advertising - notably classified ads - as a source of revenue. In his analysis of advertising expenditures for newspapers in the United States from 1950 to 2000, Picard shows that '[c]lassified advertising's significance jumped dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s [which] made newspapers more dependent upon classified employment, automobile and real estate advertising' (2002, p. 31). However, recent research suggests that 'the newspaper share of total advertising expenditures has declined by about one-third since 1970' (Picard, 2008, p. 706). After examining trends from 1950 to 2005, Picard (2008) claims that these advertising revenues will continue to decline in the future.

Tied to the dependence on advertising is the issue of profitability. Authors contend that the financial condition of newspapers has worsened over the years because of their excessive profit motive (Knee, Greenwald and Seave, 2009; McChesney and Nichols, 2010). In Downie and Kaiser's (2002) view, news organizations in the United States have preferred to focus on profit instead of improving the editorial aspects of newspapers. They argue that, 'Even in the media companies for which news remained the primary product, news coverage often appeared to be a lower priority than their profit margins and stock prices' (Downie and Kaiser, 2002, p. 25). As we elaborate below, authors argue that this has affected not only the economics of newspapers but also their quality.

Researchers have noted that these economic difficulties have increased in the context of the financial crisis that unfolded since 2008. This context has drastically affected the advertising revenues of news organizations (Kaye and Quinn, 2010; Nielsen and Levy, 2010; Schudson, 2010a). According to Nielsen and Levy (2010), 'The global financial crisis of 2008-9 was accompanied by what was in many developed democracies the worst recession in the post-war period. […] [It] led to stagnation in total advertising expenditures, and in a few cases to actual decreases' (p. 5). Researchers suggest that the financial crisis also made it more difficult for news organizations to pay their debts (Kirchhoff, 2009; Knee, et al., 2009; Schudson, 2010b). In Kirchhoff's opinion, 'Some large newspaper companies took on significant debt shortly before the economic downturn hit. […] Many newspapers have traditional, defined-benefit pension plans, which now appear underfunded due to large losses in market investments' (2009, p. 10). For these authors, this situation has constrained the range of options that newspaper organizations have had available to deal with their contemporary crisis.

In conjunction with these economic difficulties, scholars and commentators have emphasized the role of technological change, most notably the Internet, in the decline of newspapers (Compton and Benedetti, 2010; Graham and Smart, 2010; King, 2010; Picard, 2006b). They have discussed three main implications of the rise of the Internet as a news outlet: (a) the alteration of traditional news production practices and values; (b) the transformation of the news consumption ecology; and (c) the reduction of advertising revenues for print newspapers.

Researchers argue that the Internet has significantly changed traditional values and practices in news production (Boczkowski, 2004, 2010; Charon, 2010; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009). This body of work suggests that the adherence to traditional journalistic values associated with print culture has limited newspapers' capacity to innovate and adapt to a changing technological environment. As a result, Nguyen (2008) argues, 'Participation opportunities and user-generated content remain rather scarce' (p. 97). Researchers contend that the transition to the Web has also reconfigured power relations within newsrooms. In a study of a 'digitally transforming newsroom,' Robinson (2011) showed that journalists who knew how to use digital tools and had skills 'to meld physical and virtual worlds baffled some of the print-world employees, who became isolated' (p. 1138).

The rise of the Internet as a news outlet can also be tied to important transformations in news consumption dynamics (Anderson, 2010; Lowrey, 2011; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2010; Schudson, 2010a). Authors argue that the emergence of various new formats and media, such as news aggregators, blogs, and, more recently, social network sites, has changed the ways readers consume the news. For many researchers, this is because new media provide a free source of real-time news that stands in stark contrast to the costly and rapidly outdated information provided by newspapers (Downie and Schudson, 2009). According to del Aguila-Obra and colleagues (2007), '[Web content aggregators] add value by essentially being more convenient, specialized, and more efficient than the other media' (p. 197). In addition, researchers suggest that new initiatives and actors on the Internet have altered the privileged position of newspapers as a news provider by challenging the authority of journalists (Gillmor, 2004; Matheson, 2004; Starr, 2009).

Returning to issues of advertising, scholars contend that the uptake of the Internet as a news outlet has also entailed a reduction of revenues for print newspapers (Kaye and Quinn, 2010; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2010; Schudson, 2010a; Starr, 2009). Some authors claim that both audiences and advertising revenues are increasingly fragmented in the context of the information abundance that characterizes the Internet. Moreover, according to Thurman and Myllylahti (2009), '[R]eaders are reluctant to pay for content online [and] the value of advertising space on the Web is significantly less than in print' (p. 704). Thus, newspapers have experienced difficulties because the shift to the Web has undercut their traditional sources of financial stability and contributed further to the economic problems discussed above.

Finally, the crisis of newspapers in certain countries can also be situated within larger, social transformations. Some authors explain the decline of the print newspaper as the product of the loss of trust in newspapers and in journalism (Henry, 2007; Lewis, 2011; Meyer, 2009). Authors have tied this loss of trust and credibility in newspapers and journalists to the possibilities afforded by new media to access more information and thus to compare news and perspectives (Gillmor, 2004). Another reason for the loss of trust, authors argue, has been the history of fraud and corruption that has characterized newspapers. According to Henry (2007), 'Plagiarism, fabrication, and similar ethical crimes have appeared almost as regular features of contemporary journalism' (2007, p. 28). From this perspective, newspapers have failed to meet the expectations and needs of their readers (Mersey, 2010).

*The manifestations of the crisis*

Research has also concentrated on understanding how this crisis has manifested in newspaper industries around the world. Discussions have centered primarily on the decline of readership, the reduction of staff and resources, and the transformation of newspapers' content. Regarding the first, authors suggest that there have been declining patterns of print newspaper readership, particularly among younger segments of the public in specific parts of the world (Ahlers, 2006; Coleman and McCombs, 2007; Fenton, 2010; Mindich, 2005). Examining the case of Europe, Bakker concludes that 'circulation of paid dailies has decreased by an average 14 percent between 1995 and 2006' (2008, p. 431). In addition, Lauf contends that 'an increasing number of young people do not read newspapers daily any more to inform themselves about current politics' (2001, p. 238). Benson (2010) argues that, between 1960 and 1995, this pattern primarily affected countries such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In contrast, Benson notes that in the developing world and in certain state-subsidized countries, the circulation of newspapers has actually increased.

Another key indicator of the crisis has been the decrease of the workforce in news organizations. To deal with significant declining revenues, research shows an increase in layoffs of full-time personnel and the closure of newspapers in various countries, as well as a reduction of resources for reporting the news (Antheaume, 2010; Charon, 2010; Madigan, 2007). Kirchhoff asserts that, in the United States, 'Daily papers cut their newsrooms by 11% in 2008, the biggest one-year drop since 1978. Daily newsroom staffing is off 17% from the recent, 2001 peak of 56,400' (2009, p. 5). Thus, it is not surprising to find cases like the Detroit *Free Press*, which in 2008 'became the first major daily newspaper to scale back its daily print operation by limiting home delivery to three days a week' (Usher, 2010, p. 912). According to various studies, an important decrease in the journalistic workforce also occurred in Canada, France, and Great Britain (Benson, 2010; Charon, 2010; Freedman, 2010).

Scholars have tied the closure of newspapers and the reduction of staff to shifts in the type of content produced by newspapers (Besley and Roberts, 2010; Compton and Benedetti, 2010; Meyer, 2009; Schrøder and Larsen, 2010; Stepp, 1999). According to Besley and Roberts (2010), for instance, downsizing in newsrooms has significantly affected the coverage of public meetings. They argue that ‘cuts in news staffs likely mean coverage of fewer meetings, simply because fewer journalists exist to cover those meetings. News organizations must continue to discuss whether they can report fully and accurately without attending myriad meetings - or whether reporting “fully” remains possible’ (Besley and Roberts, 2010, p. 32). Starr (2009) suggests that, in the United States, foreign news, coverage of Washington, and news on science and culture have also decreased significantly. Researchers have noted that, because newspaper organizations have fewer means to produce original content, they tend to depend more often on external news sources. A study of the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence Journalism (PEJ) (2010) of the media ecosystem in Baltimore demonstrates that ‘as the press scales back on original reporting and dissemination, reproducing other people’s work becomes a bigger part of the news media system.’ We turn next to the implications of these developments.

*The significance of the crisis*

In addition to the sources and manifestations of the crisis, authors have considered its implications for society at large. Yet, despite the relevance of this topic, comparatively little research has been devoted to it. The significance of the crisis of newspapers has been the subject of much deliberation but little empirical study. Despite the lack of evidence to support claims about its social and political consequences, there is general agreement that the crisis has had negative implications for democracy because it undermines the watchdog role traditionally played by the press and its significance as a vehicle for free speech (Blumler, 2010; Jones, 2009; McChesney and Nichols, 2010; Nielsen and Levy, 2010; Pickard, 2011). For instance, while recognizing its potential for strengthening various social functions historically fulfilled by the press, Schudson (2010a) argues that the Internet has also altered newspapers' educational, investigative, and analytic functions.

Analysts contend that the closure of newspapers and the transformation of their content have had major political implications (Kirchhoff, 2009; Schulhofer-Wohl and Garrido, 2009). In their analysis of the effects of entries and exits of US daily newspapers on political participation, party vote shares, and electoral competitiveness from 1869 to 2004, Gentzkow and colleagues argue that '[t]he effect of newspapers on presidential turnout diminishe[d] after the introduction of radio and television, while the effect on congressional turnout remains similar up to recent years' (2009, p. 4). In a similar manner, Schulhofer-Wohl and Garrido show that the closure of the *Cincinnati Post* had negative repercussions for the number of voters, the number of candidates who ran for office, and the amount of money that was spent on campaigns. Thus, they conclude, 'Even a small newspaper - the *Post* sold about 27,000 copies daily in 2007, compared with 200,000 for the *Enquirer* - can make local politics more vibrant' (Schulhofer-Wohl and Garrido, 2009, p. 2).

Some analysts have suggested that news organizations are abandoning their public service orientation because of financial pressures, a development with potentially vital implications for the health of the democratic process (Beam, Brownlee, Weaver and Di Cicco, 2009; McChesney and Nichols, 2010; Meyer, 2009). Authors contend that, through the reduction and closure of newspapers and the loss of their public service mission, society is losing an important source of knowledge about topics that help citizens to make informed political decisions. This finding takes on greater significance in light of the difficulties that independent news outlets on the Internet (such as 'pure players,' blogs, and citizen journalism projects) have to produce the type of content that is necessary for accomplishing the social functions formerly filled by newspapers (Benson, 2010; Schudson, 2010a). For example, studying the Israeli news ecology, Reich (2008) noted that citizen reporters were limited by a modest use of human sources; a high reliance on single sources; an unwillingness to interact with sources about their versions; and the tendency to engage in *ad hoc* exchanges with sources rather than building a relationship with them. Similarly, Reese and colleagues (2007) examined the interactions between a group of political blogs and traditional journalistic outlets in the United States and concluded that, for the most part, bloggers 'engage the facts and information carried in news accounts, accepting them at face value and using them to form their own arguments' (p. 257). These developments have important implications. According to Starr,

> As of now […] no source in any medium seems willing and able to pay for the general-interest reporting that newspapers are abandoning. One danger of reduced news coverage is to the integrity of government. It is not just a speculative proposition that corruption is more likely to flourish when those in power have less reason to fear exposure. (2009, p. 29)

Thus, in Starr's opinion, the decline of the newspaper has created fertile grounds for a new era of corruption.

*The solutions to the crisis*

The analysis of the sources, manifestations, and implications of the crisis of newspapers has provided valuable knowledge about the state of affairs in the industry of various countries. In light of the grim diagnosis, it is not surprising that analysts have proposed various ways not only to overcome this crisis but also to transform it into a significant opportunity for growth and reinvention. An important distinction must be made between authors who argue for saving newspapers and those who argue for salvaging the democratic functions traditionally fulfilled by newspapers. Whereas some analysts have proposed ways to specifically save the newspaper industry, others have sought to create conditions for attaining the democratic potential of the press, either through newspapers or other actors, media, and initiatives.

As noted above, some authors consider the closure or downsizing of newspapers as important means to find stability in the context of technological mutations and financial difficulties. In this view, newspaper organizations should reduce costs to deal with the crisis. Another proposed set of solutions to the crisis is to develop new, alternative business models that depart from traditional models that are grounded almost exclusively on advertising revenues (Giles, 2010; Kaye and Quinn, 2010; Picard, 2006b; Pickard, Stearns and Aron, 2009). These new models, authors suggest, need to fully take into consideration the changes in both the news production and consumption landscapes triggered by the Internet. Scholars and practitioners have examined various funding models, such as sponsorship from individuals and foundations; microfunding and micropayments (e.g., crowd-sourcing); 'pro-am' projects, that is, collaborations between professional and citizen journalists; family ownerships and trusts; niche content ventures; and partnerships between various institutions (Kaye and Quinn, 2010).

In a similar manner, some authors have advocated the use of public resources for rebuilding journalism (Bollinger, 2010; Cowan and Westphal, 2010; Downie and Schudson, 2009; McChesney and Nichols, 2010). The pertinence of state intervention has been the subject of heated debate, particularly in the United States (Calvert, 2009; Pickard, 2011). Pickard and colleagues (2009) posit both short-term reforms (such as new ownership structures and jobs programs in journalism) and long-term models (such as public media and federally funded initiatives) as potential solutions supported by the state. McChesney and Nichols (2010) argue that, in keeping with the crucial role it played in the creation of the free press, the United States government could help journalism make the transition to a post-corporate digital era by raising funds from certain taxes.

Authors have also stressed the need to fully embrace the Internet and other communication technologies (Jones, 2009; Nguyen, 2008; Usher, 2010; Xiong, 2009). Many analysts see new media as opportunities for news organizations to innovate, incorporate readers into the news creation process, find alternative economic models, and reduce the high production costs associated with print (Gillmor, 2004). Lewis' (2011) analysis of applications to the Knight News Challenge grant-funding contest reveals that finalists and winners have significantly exploited new media's potential for user participation and the distribution of knowledge. For Picard (2006a), 'Owners [of news organizations] must demonstrate new value by demonstrating long-term stability while also creating new products and business models that emphasize their ability to establish connections (and interactivity) with readers using a range of different technologies.' Some authors insist that this would also mean transcending longstanding journalistic values (Fortunati and Sarrica, 2010; Mersey, 2010; Nguyen, 2008). For Usher (2010), '[N]ew introductions must take place - particularly in getting traditional journalists to self-reflexively consider their role in a new media world where traditional newspaper economics no longer apply' (p. 925).

However, other researchers have warned against the assumption that the use of the Internet will inexorably reinvigorate journalism and democracy (Beam, et al., 2009; Schudson, 2010a). Curran maintains that 'the Web cavalry riding to the rescue is too small and without sufficient firepower to offset the decline of traditional journalism' (2010, p. 471). As noted above, some analysts have raised concerns about the relevance and quality of the content that is produced on the Web for enabling conversations that contribute to the democratic process (Starr, 2009). Others have noted the difficulties for news organizations to find viable economic models online (Downie and Schudson, 2009; PEJ, 2011).

Others solutions have focused instead on editorial practices and the quality of newspapers. Authors have foregrounded the value of improving the quality of newspapers and strengthening their public service mission (Downie and Kaiser, 2002; Mensing, 2010; Meyer, 2009). According to Meyer (2009), '[T]rust has economic value, and […] trust is gained through quality content. […] [T]he successful transitions will be by newspapers that use the savings in production and transportation to improve their content' (p. 188). From this perspective, the reduction of staff and the closure of newspapers do not solve the crisis but worsen it,because they have important implications for the quality of the content that news organizations produce.

Authors have considered geographical specialization as a palliative to the difficulties in the newspaper industry across the world (Graham and Smart, 2010; Kurpius, Metzgar and Rowley, 2010; Metzgar, Kurpius and Rowley, 2011). Kay and Quinn (2010) define hyperlocal coverage as 'news reporting that more closely reflects the everyday lives of residents in a particular community' (p. 44). Kurpius and colleagues assert that, 'Unlike its predecessors in the trajectory of journalistic experimentation, hyperlocal journalism appears to hold at least the potential for developing a sustainable model. The low cost of entry and the limited number of entry barriers work in its favor' (2010, p. 372). This type of initiatives is heralded as a partial solution to the loss of trust in newspapers and a means to satisfy the needs of readers in relatively smaller communities (Parasie and Cointet, 2012).

The list of solutions outlined thus far does not exhaust the alternatives that authors advocate to help the industry overcome the crisis. Other suggestions include product and process diversification (Freedman, 2010; Picard, 2006b), improving the education of journalism practitioners (Henry, 2007; Meyer, 2009), developing global standards for protecting the freedom of the press (Bollinger, 2010), and implementing new initiatives such as political observatories and database journalistic projects (Schudson, 2010a, 2010b). For the most part, authors agree that a single solution will not suffice (Macnamara, 2010). As van Tuyll summarizes, most authors argue that solving the crisis will require '[a] reconstruction of the media market away from plain-song-one-size-fits-all journalism into a diversified marketplace that embraces a multiplicity of forms' (2010, p. 481). Authors have thus proposed sets of recommendations that integrate some of the solutions outlined above (Downie and Schudson, 2009).

## Making Sense of the Crisis

The previous section examined *what* the relevant literature has said about the contemporary crisis in the newspaper industry. In this section, we critically analyze *how* this literature has done this by reflecting on the main temporal and spatial contexts that have been studied; the dominant theoretical frameworks and methodological strategies employed by the analysts; and the most common tropes that have characterized research on this phenomenon. By so doing, we seek to identify the main contributions of this body of work and some of its shortcomings.

*Temporal and spatial coordinates*

Most scholarship has examined the state of the journalism industry in one particular country. This research has primarily analyzed the crisis as an outcome of singular causes in national settings. The underlying assumption in these studies is that '[e]very country's media system is unique,' as Schudson (2010a, p. 95) puts it, and should therefore be assessed in its specificity. Many studies have concentrated on the case of the United States (Beam, et al., 2009; Besley and Roberts, 2010; Schudson, 2010a). Research has also been conducted in countries such as Australia (Macnamara, 2010; Young, 2010), China (Xiong, 2009), France (Antheaume, 2010), Germany (Esser and Brüggemann, 2010), the Netherlands (de Waal, Schönbach and Lauf, 2005), Spain (de Mateo, Bergés and Garnatxe, 2010; Larrañaga Rubio, 2009), and the United Kingdom (Fenton, 2010).

In addition, a few investigations have compared the state of the journalism industry in regions such as Europe or groups of various developed countries (Benson, 2010; Benson and Powers, 2011; Picard, 2001; van der Wurff, Bakker and Picard, 2008). For instance, Pickard (2011) explored the solutions implemented by governments in various European nations to argue for the need for public policy in the United States. According to the editors of one of the few volumes that adopt an international perspective to explore current developments in various countries, comparative studies 'highlight the enduring relevance of inherited national differences in audience demand, market structure and media regulation' (Levy and Nielsen, 2010, p. 1).

A small group of scholars have situated current developments in the journalism industry within a larger historical context (Blumler, 2010; Kirchhoff, 2009; McChesney and Nichols, 2010; Picard, 2001, 2008). However, for the most part, research has espoused a present orientation towards the investigation of the crisis.

*Theory and Methods*

Analysts have not adopted a dominant theoretical approach to make sense of the crisis. On the contrary, an interesting feature of the literature is the wide array of theoretical lenses and resources they have used, including the economics of advertising (An, Jin and Simon, 2006; Picard and van Weezel, 2008; van der Wurff, et al., 2008); management theory (Fortunati and Sarrica, 2010; Kurpius, et al., 2010; Picard and van Weezel, 2008); audience and reception studies (Mersey, 2010; Usher, 2010); scholarship on organizational behavior (Gade, 2008); sociological and cultural theory (Compton and Benedetti, 2010; Usher, 2010); new institutional theory (Lowrey, 2011); work on the role of media in the formation of the public sphere (Schudson, 2010a; Schulhofer-Wohl and Garrido, 2009); legal theory (Bollinger, 2010; Calvert, 2009; Nerone, 2009); and, even neuroscience (Fuller, 2010).

Most scholarship has relied on secondary sources and surveys as data sources (Bakker, 2008; Cho, Martin and Lacy, 2006; Picard, 2008). Researchers typically use secondary data of a quantitative kind to examine how the circulation and consumption of newspapers have varied. There have been significantly fewer qualitative analyses of this crisis, including those that assess how industry actors perceive and experience it (Gade, 2008; Usher, 2010). Only a few investigations have produced case studies that include either participant observation or interviews (Besley and Roberts, 2010; Graham and Smart, 2010; Kurpius, et al., 2010). Only a few studies conducted content or textual analysis of newspapers or online outlets to account for the role of news content in explaining variance in the crisis (Meyer, 2009; Rosenberry, 2005; Stepp, 1999; Thurman and Myllylahti, 2009). Furthermore, many studies take important cues from industry accounts (Larrañaga Rubio, 2009; Macnamara, 2010; Young, 2010). Researchers often draw on data provided by existing industry sources (e.g., reports, op-eds, news articles, and statements by news people in different contexts), especially when assessing and illustrating the manifestations and implications of the crisis.

Researchers have seldom implemented mixed-methods studies to examine the crisis or its associated phenomena. Anderson (2010), for instance, analyzed how news are produced and distributed in local news ecologies under crisis through network ethnography and qualitative newsroom analysis. Consistent with the distribution of data sources, researchers have commonly employed statistical analysis to make sense of secondary data (An, et al., 2006; Lauf, 2001; Meyer, 2009; Schulhofer-Wohl and Garrido, 2009). Only a few studies have employed inductive, qualitative approaches for studying the contemporary situation of the newspaper industry (Kurpius, et al., 2010; Thurman and Myllylahti, 2009; Usher, 2010).

*Analytical Tropes*

Researchers have turned to a set of particular tropes to characterize the present context of print journalism. These tropes have helped them to make sense of this context and conceptualize it in a variety of meaningful ways. In particular, authors have typically characterized the current situation of newspapers as a 'crisis,' although few have provided definitions of this concept (Blumler, 2010; McChesney and Pickard, 2011; Schudson, 2010a; Young, 2010). They often advance this discourse to highlight the role of particular factors in the destabilization of the industry. For McChesney and Pickard (2011), 'American journalism is in an *existential crisis*' (p. ix, emphasis added). Authors employ similar notions to characterize journalism as an institution under a process of severe transformation. According to Kaye and Quinn, '[T]he level of industry *turmoil* [has increased] as news organizations slashed staffs and budget to cut costs' (2010, p. 1, emphasis added). Meyer (2009) argues that 'for some [in the journalism industry], the *apocalypse* came sooner than expected' (p. 1, emphasis added). In a similar manner, authors have employed terms such as ‘massive upheaval’ (Kaye and Quinn, 2010, p. 1), ‘chaotic moment’ (Compton and Benedetti, 2010, p. 488) and ‘trouble’ to characterize the present situation of the newspaper industry (Beam, et al., 2009; Bollinger, 2010; Meyer, 2009).

To assess the manifestations and implications of the crisis, authors have turned to tropes that emphasize size reduction in the industry, its gradual decline, and the potential disappearance of the newspaper. Authors who stress issues of size reduction argue that there is a ‘*contraction* of journalistic engagement with the world’ (Bollinger, 2010, p. 5, emphasis added). For Kurpius and colleagues (2010, p. 359), the crisis has resulted in the ‘shrinking’ of the industry. For others, a language of decay is better suited for making sense of the effects of the crisis. Researchers thus speak of the ‘decline’ (Fortunati and Sarrica, 2010, p. 247) or the ‘twilight’ (Giles, 2010, p. 27) of newspapers. Various researchers have privileged a discourse of extinction to characterize what they consider the most crucial potential implication of the crisis. Meyer (2009) thus refers to the newspaper as a ‘vanishing’ entity, and Usher uses the notion of ‘demise’ (2010, p. 913).

Finally, authors have deployed a discourse of ‘salvation’ to discuss the solutions to the newspaper crisis (Bollinger, 2010; Mersey, 2010; Pickard, et al., 2009). For Meyer, ‘There still exists the capacity to *salvage* a transformed, sustainable, socially useful news business’ (2009, p. 3, emphasis added). Conceived in these terms, the crisis of newspapers is often redefined as a process of transition rather than extinction (Ahlers, 2006; Curran, 2010; Kirchhoff, 2009). Cho, Martin and Lacy (2006) contend that ‘contrary to the general impression of daily newspapers as a dying industry in rapid decline […] [data] show an industry in *transition*’ (p. 391, emphasis added). Downie and Schudson (2009, p. 1) describe it as ‘a *transformational moment*’ and propose a set of solutions for the ‘*reconstruction* of journalism’ (emphasis added).

## An Agenda for Future Research

Thus far this article has critically assessed recent literature on the newspaper crisis. In what follows, it outlines an agenda that builds on the existing knowledge and seeks to extend the study of this crisis into novel spaces and in ways that overcome some of the limitations outlined in the previous section. This agenda revolves around five building blocks: (a) adopting a process orientation towards the investigation of the crisis; (b) situating the newspaper crisis within historical contexts; (c) conducting more international, comparative research; (d) examining the social, cultural, and political consequences of the crisis; and (e) implementing empirical strategies that will help produce a greater volume of original data.

The first building block consists of adopting a process orientation toward the investigation of the crisis that expands the focus from 'how things are' to also examine 'how they became that way.' By process, we refer to the series of dynamics, mechanisms, means, and changes that lead to a singular outcome. A process orientation seeks to understand how phenomena and events at different moments are temporally connected (Bateson, 1978). For the most part, studies have examined the crisis as a product, an outcome, or a state of affairs. Yet, a process orientation should make more visible the evolution of the sources, manifestations, and implications of the newspaper crisis in a way that a focus on outcomes cannot. This is because, from a process-driven perspective, the analysis foregrounds the development of certain dynamics over time in addition to the contours of a particular state of affairs.

Adopting a process orientation pushes an examination of several underexplored issues associated with the newspaper crisis. For instance, research has noted that the Internet has transformed news production practices, altered the consumption patterns of audiences, and disrupted the financial stability of newspapers, but has paid comparatively less attention to the mechanisms and dynamics that generate these outcomes over a temporal span. Thus, future studies might investigate how the adoption of previous technologies by newspapers over the past several decades has contributed to the contemporary uptake of the Internet. An investigation of how the content of newspapers has changed over time should lead to a better understanding of how contexts of crisis might have shaped the quality of newspapers and the factors affecting this outcome. Moreover, considering the crisis as a process should create fertile grounds for improving our knowledge of how actors have experienced and responded to recent developments in the industry. By privileging the study of the crisis as an outcome or a state of affairs, research has partially neglected to provide an account of how protagonists of these developments have lived them and how that might matter. To overcome this limitation, studies should examine how actors have experienced the crisis at various stages in its evolution and how they have adopted various mechanisms to cope with it, accept it, or resist it. Similarly, studies might assess the values, meanings, and affect associated with the implementation of various solutions to the crisis by actors of this process of reconstruction at different levels of the industry.

The second building block of the proposed research agenda consists of situating current developments within a historical perspective. Some studies have illustrated the significance of historical research for exploring the present condition of newspapers (Blumler, 2010; Kirchhoff, 2009; McChesney and Nichols, 2010; Nerone, 2009; Picard, 2001, 2008; Pickard, 2011). We advocate a substantive amplification of this direction. The present-centric orientation espoused by accounts of the newspaper crisis has made valuable contributions to make sense of the most significant manifestations of this crisis. However, a dominant focus on the present runs the risk of overlooking the historical antecedents that might have shaped the current crisis in significant ways. In addition, it risks either neglecting or overstating patterns of continuity and discontinuity in previous developments in the industry.

Historical investigation provides an alternative to these shortcomings. Research should examine how the newspaper industry has dealt with crises at other historical junctures and compare the sources, manifestations, and implications of past dynamics. Important factors that have been considered as sources of the contemporary newspaper crisis can be situated within a historical perspective. Doing so would lead to interrogating how advertising expenditures, economic models, relationships between journalists and various technologies, and journalistic practices have evolved over the past decades. The emergence of various technologies as news outlets may be envisioned as a crucial site for historical investigation. The coming of radio and television as competitors in the market for news thus becomes a relevant area of investigation and a key means to understand the present context. Research might also benefit from an examination of the solutions that have been designed and implemented to resolve previous crises in order to estimate the viability of the palliatives advanced to resolve the contemporary situation. More generally, a historical perspective should illuminate the influence of the past in the present and thus reverse the present- and future-centric perspectives of most accounts of the crisis of newspapers.

The third building block centers on conducting more international, comparative research. Most accounts have focused on the state of the journalism industry in single countries, notably the United States. As a result, there is a dearth of comparative studies on the newspaper crisis in various communities, cities, nations, and regions. Analysts have suggested that the industry acquires distinct features in different countries. In his comparison of the state of the newspaper industry in various countries, Benson (2010) concludes that ‘it is simply not accurate to say that there has been a worldwide newspaper readership "crisis"' (p. 189). Lowrey (2011) cites data from the World Association of Newspapers to argue, 'Globally, newspaper circulation in 2008 was down in North America, Europe and Australia, though up in much of the developing world' (p. 64). Thus, it is possible that, rather than a single, homogeneous crisis affecting every national and regional setting in a uniform manner, countries might have experienced particular newspaper *crises* that may have evolved in historically distinct ways and acquired different configurations across various contexts.

Cross-national studies might lead to a better understanding of these crises, their conditions of emergence, their implications, and the most appropriate solutions to resolve them. By comparing the specific ways in which the newspaper industry has evolved in certain cities, countries, and geographic regions, research might help to identify the patterns and sources of similarity and variance in newspaper crises around the world. Future studies should illuminate how factors identified as sources of crisis in one milieu might have had different outcomes or played a dissimilar role in other contexts. Researchers could use the processes that have characterized the evolution of newspaper crises in different contexts as templates for effective comparison. Studies should also examine the singular implications of these crises, at the level of the industry and of society, and the factors that explain their differences. In addition, research could compare contexts that have evidenced important indicators of a crisis with those that have shown stability or growth. Researchers could conduct studies within cities or national settings where the crisis has affected actors differently. For instance, research could contrast over a particular time span singular actors that have developed in critical conditions with others that have not. Studies along this line of inquiry should reveal why certain solutions to newspaper crises have had different degrees of success in various contexts, and how historical factors have shaped present situations. A comparative study between news ecologies in particular cities or regions within a country could add nuance to the notion of 'inherited national differences' (Levy and Nielsen, 2010, p. 1) as an explanation for the crisis.

Fourth, we suggest devoting considerable more energy to the empirical study of the social, cultural, and political implications of the crisis of newspapers than has been the norm to date. Most discussion has concentrated on the implications for the news industry in particular, and the media environment more generally. Although some authors have discussed the consequences of this crisis for society at large, this subject remains comparatively underdeveloped. According to Schudson (2010), this situation has partly resulted from the difficulties involved in measuring the social implications of newspapers for democratic life. In Schudson's view, 'Demonstrating the efficacy of news in democracy […] is not so easy. Nor is it easy to be very specific about what - precisely - contributing to democracy means' (2010a, pp. 102-3). Yet, this task is of crucial importance for scholarship on the role of media in society, particularly in communication and journalism studies.

Research should make sense of the social, cultural, and political implications of the decline of newspapers. To this end, studies might analyze how the closure of newspapers and the reduction of staff have affected politics not only at the municipal level, but also at national and regional scales. Studies should examine whether the crisis has systematically altered the type of content that newspaper organizations of various sorts produce and the implications of this content transformation. Research could investigate the consequences, identified by some scholars, of the increasing reliance on external sources for the fulfillment of newspapers' traditional democratic functions. Researchers could fruitfully subject to empirical investigation Starr's (2009) claim that the closure of newspapers represents a 'new era of corruption.' For example, researchers could analyze whether actors, such as politicians, advertisers, or public relations professionals, have gained more influence on the agenda and the content of news outlets and the potential consequences of this development. Finally, research should continue to investigate whether contemporary news ecologies (marked by singular interaction dynamics between traditional news sources and new actors and initiatives online that produce specific types of content) are contributing to the enhancement of democracy.

Finally, empirical research on the newspaper crisis has had two important limitations. First, there has been a dearth of studies that examine various aspects of the phenomena from qualitative perspectives. Quantitative analyses of patterns of newspaper consumption and circulation have dominated studies. The prevalence of one type of data over others has limited the kind of knowledge needed to further understand the newspaper crisis. Second, studies have relied heavily on industry accounts to conceptualize this crisis and its implications. This fact is illustrated by the data sources that are used to examine the consequences of this crisis and the tropes researchers employ to conceptualize the phenomena under study. Although industry accounts are a fundamental source for making sense of this crisis, without sufficient critical examination, there is an epistemological problem in adopting the definitions and meanings elaborated by these actors. The fifth building block of our research agenda thus consists of two empirical strategies that should help to overcome these methodological limitations. First, we suggest developing mixed-method research designs that integrate different data collection and analysis strategies to make sense of the crisis. For instance, a quantitative analysis of newspaper circulation may be combined with in-depth interviews with journalists and consumers that help to explain the interpretations and meanings associated with declining patterns of newspaper consumption. Ethnographic observations of downsizing and reskilling in newsrooms may be articulated with quantitative content analyses of news outlets to examine the consequences of these strategies for the type of content produced by organizations, and with network analysis to determine how that content circulates. By utilizing various methods, employing multiple data sources, and drawing on a variety of theoretical approaches, mixed-method studies should afford key opportunities for triangulation of various sorts and conducting more robust and comprehensive analyses of the newspaper crisis.

Second, we advocate undertaking what Bourdieu and colleagues called an 'epistemological break' (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, 1991). By this, they referred to the process by which scholars abandon the strength of the prenotions and assumptions mobilized by actors in a certain field and construct their objects of study in a reflexive manner. In addition to an attentive consideration of method (as described above), Bourdieu and his collaborators argued that an epistemological break requires a careful examination of the language deployed to describe an object of study. Following this insight, analysts should elaborate how they conceptually construct key terms they constantly employ in their accounts, such as 'crisis,' 'contraction, and 'transition.' Researchers should also specify the set of assumptions that these concepts imply. According to Bourdieu and his colleagues, analysts should render explicit the fundamental notions that underlie the use of concepts and tropes borrowed from ordinary language in a field and make them amenable to empirical verification. By adopting these two empirical strategies, researchers might be able to produce rigorous and original evidence about current developments in the journalism industry and critically examine the accounts offered by actors.

The research agenda outlined in this paper has sought to extend scholarship on the newspaper crisis through a systematic assessment of the process, history, comparative development, and multiple implications of this crisis, as well as through empirical strategies that can help examine these undertheorized dimensions. To recapitulate central themes in this essay, we conclude by bringing to the foreground the original meaning of the notion of crisis. Couldry (2010) reminds us in his analysis of the consequences of neoliberalism for society and personal expression that the concept of crisis derives 'from the Greek words for decision and judgment, "*krisis*" and "*krinein*"' (p. 150). From this perspective, a crisis not only signals a situation of difficulty and threat, but also provides 'a decision-point […] that is both normative and practical' (Couldry, 2010, p. 135).

The scholarship analyzed in this paper illustrates how authors have envisioned this crisis as a crucial opportunity for redefining the values, norms, and practices of contemporary journalism, that is, for 'reconstructing' and 'salvaging' it. McChesney and Pickard (2011), for instance, point in this direction when they describe journalism and the media system in the United Sates as situated within 'a critical conjuncture.' As a crucial, complementary perspective, this essay seeks to contribute to this process of rethinking and reconstruction by suggesting various ways in which analysts can propel the investigation of the crisis forward. It is our hope that this research agenda articulates singular 'decision points' that could improve the understanding of the crisis through systematic research and critical reflection.

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