

Spring 2008 MCID Workshop Series (February 20, 2008)

Robert Cottrell of *The Economist*

The Death of Journalism?: The War Between the New and the Old

WORKSHOP 1 (of 3): THE SUPPLY SIDE

What (if anything) distinguishes a professional journalist from his amateur rivals in an age of blogs and citizen news? What is his economic value, when most information is available for nothing? What is accuracy worth, and to whom? How many newsrooms will exist in five or ten years' time, and how many jobs for dedicated journalists? Who still wants to do such a job, and why?

The workshop began with a discussion on journalism and, more specifically, what those present consider to be unique and fascinating about the profession. A variety of thoughts and ideas were given, including the ability (and some mentioned – responsibility) of journalists to tell “stories,” and particularly to bring important issues to the limelight. An emphasis was placed on “journalism as activism,” à la that which was famously depicted in the film, *All the President's Men*. With this as a starting point, Mr. Cottrell delved into a brief history of the profession and discussed the particularities (and difficulties) of maintaining this type of journalism in this new media/information age in which everything is seemingly moving online. As deputy editor of *Economist.com*, Mr. Cottrell was able to provide great insight into this subject, and was eager to discuss both the pros and cons, from the journalists' point of view, of this evolution of traditional media. This provided a good segue into another lively discussion among the participants about where they get their news, and thus, whether, from an audience standpoint, traditional media is fast becoming a thing of the past. Surprisingly, or rather encouragingly (for Mr. Cottrell), it looks as though it is too early to sound the death knell as most participants nevertheless still get their news from traditional sources such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* (albeit primarily in their online formats). While blogs were mentioned, many more mentioned they preferred listening to radio (such as NPR) and/or reading magazines (such as *The New Yorker* and *The Economist*). Mr. Cottrell thought it was somewhat encouraging for the “traditional media” that no one in the group used their cell phones to read and/or digest news. Despite the speed at which media is evolving, traditional media then still does not lag too far behind, if at all.

This very topic will be taken up in the second workshop titled “The Demand Side,” on **Wednesday, March 26th at 6:00 PM in Room 609 (GPIA Conference Room)**.

For the second workshop, Mr. Cottrell asked the participants to complete several “homework” assignments:

1. On February 20, 2008, the following article was displayed on the front page (below the fold) of the print edition of the *New York Times*, “[Slowdown Hits Towns at Outskirts of Texas Boom](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/20/us/20exurb.html?pagewanted=all).” In 30 seconds or less, using any media format (text, audio, visual, etc.), convey the point of this article (online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/20/us/20exurb.html?pagewanted=all>).
2. Make five suggestions on how to improve the Economist website: <http://www.economist.com>.
3. Think of the top five stories that you would have liked to see, or that were of most interest to you from Tuesday, March 25th.