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# Are predictions of newspapers' impending demise exaggerated?



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The widespread view that newspapers, even in Australia, are suffering major declines is flawed, reflecting in part a North American and Eurocentric view of the press. Australian newspapers are faring better than many in the developed countries. Quality newspapers, with their clearly defined and targeted markets, are outperforming their tabloid counterparts. A fair assessment of newspaper performance needs to consider not only the circulation figures, but also readership and newspapers' online reach. The latter is significant, as unlike the US and the UK, the main newspaper publishers Fairfax and News Limited dominate the online news field. Regardless of quantitative measures, newspapers have unique properties that will probably ensure newsprint's survival in the digital era.

## Introduction

In a much quoted article “Who killed the Newspaper”, *The Economist* (2006) pronounced newspapers to be an “endangered species”. It predicted that during early 2043 the last exhausted reader will toss aside the last crumpled edition. (According to *The Economist* this date was calculated by Philip Meyer in *The Vanishing Newspaper* [2005]. Meyer’s “prediction” is discussed towards the end of this paper). Such pessimism about newspapers’ future is widespread. Discussion about their decline, or imminent death, assumes it is a global phenomenon. Jack Shafer, editor of Slate, writes “the newspaper business has been on a slow, unstoppable train ride to hell for many decades ... the Web has only accelerated its descent” (2006). The *Guardian’s* Roy Greenslade proclaims, “Newsprint is headed for the graveyard ... the trend is clear. Over the next quarter century, newsprint will go on declining. And, by the way, that’s the real ‘good news’” (2008).

Australian media and journalism academics have joined the chorus. Journal articles, books and conference papers since 2005 echo Greenslade’s pessimism. For example, “The newspaper is perhaps in its death throes losing both its advertisers and audience to the internet” (Bolton, 2006:1). “The imminent demise of the newspaper industry has long been posited ... more recent evidence appears to add weight to these claims” (Errington & Miragliotta, 2007:19); and Margaret Simons, part-time lecturer at Swinburne University of Technology, even has a category “Death of Newspapers” on *Content Makers*, her blog on the online news site *Crikey*.

This paper will argue that the future of newspapers is more nuanced than these pessimists afford. Often their focus is on crises in the UK and the US, which reflects “a curiously North American and Eurocentric view of the press” (Franklin, 2008:631), and crises in the US, especially, dominate the debate. Newspaper circulation in the US has been decreasing for years, and declines have become steeper due to the recession and changes in the industry itself (Fitzgerald, 2009). What is overlooked is that circulation data show that globally newspapers are increasing, not declining. In countries experiencing declines in newspaper circulation, readership is being extended via online reach.

There is wide variation in performance of different newspaper sectors in different countries. In South Africa, for example, broadsheets have experienced a general decline but there has been a tabloid revolution with papers such as the *Daily Sun* seeing huge increases because they have targeted the black working class, an audience untapped by the post-apartheid mainstream press. Wasserman says this illustrates the need to look at newspapers “within their historical, social and material contexts, which are constantly changing and shifting” (2008:787). This paper focuses on the Australian media landscape, although some global trends and recent developments – such as the proposals to charge readers to view content online – will also be discussed.

## The different measures

In order to determine newspaper trends in Australia, it is useful to distinguish between metropolitan, regional and community newspapers; Monday to Friday dailies, Saturday editions and Sunday newspapers; and also between “quality” metropolitan newspapers

and their tabloid counterparts. Before these various sectors are discussed, the different measures of performance need clarification.

Quantitative measures of newspaper circulation have been the key performance yardstick – the higher the circulation, the easier it is for a newspaper to sell space to advertisers – and such data is based on the number of actual newspapers sold. In Australia, the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), an independent, not-for-profit organization, provides a verified account of average net paid circulation figures. Due to the surge in online readership in recent years, since 2008 the ABC has been including audits of website traffic, with cross-media audience data seen as a better indicator of newspaper reach than print circulation alone. However, as the Australian Press Council (APC) (2008) points out, it is difficult to determine whether those visiting newspaper websites are supplementing their print experience, or are additional readers that would indicate increase in “circulation” or reach. Indeed, a recent study (Newspaper National Network, 2008) found that among web-savvy people in the US there was a high degree of overlap in use of print and online versions of newspapers. These “crossover” users go to newspaper websites to supplement, not replace, their print readership: 96 per cent went there for “breaking news” and weather updates, 85 per cent to find articles seen previously in print.

Circulation data only show a newspaper has been purchased, not whether it has been read or how many people have read it, and do not take into account *free* community newspapers, which have burgeoned in recent years. Kirkpatrick argues that any view of newspapers’ performance that “limits itself to circulation figures of paid newspapers does not present the whole picture” (2000:102). This is why advertisers also consider readership percentages – the number of people who read (not buy) a paper. To obtain such figures Roy Morgan Research (RMR) conducts regular surveys to determine how many people on average read a particular newspaper. This data is seldom mentioned in the literature, but when they are, it is cynically, as in Kirkpatrick’s remark: “Newspapers are increasingly promoting their readership as opposed to circulation” (1999:17). However, according to the APC, the common view of newspaper executives is that “it is the number of eyes that see what is in the paper, whether news content or advertisements, that is the real pointer to the health of newspapers” (2006). And the State of News Media 2005 Report in the United States explains:

Readership not only provides an apples-to-apples comparison for selling advertising against competing media like television and radio, *but it may be a more meaningful measure*. There is evidence that more people are reading the newspaper at work or coffee shops ... and that the demographic groups newspapers have a harder time reaching, like women and young people, are well represented among occasional readers of this kind (*italics author*, Project for Excellence in Journalism & Edmonds, 2005).

Advertisers in the US do not use readership measurement, although a decade ago Fitzgerald reported that “a growing number of advertisers and publishers believe circulation doesn’t count as much anymore” and regarded readership as a more accurate vehicle for measuring a newspaper’s audience (1999:33). In contrast, readership measurement has been the standard measure and “the currency for setting rates and buying advertising” in Canada for over two decades (Fitzgerald, 2004:55).

## Reliability of measures

While any *fair* assessment needs to consider circulation, online reach and readership, no measure is foolproof. With the measurement of website traffic, there have been claims of inflated internet audience (through, for example, changing the position and refresh rates). There have also been discrepancies between circulation and readership data. For example, in 2007 the *Weekend AFR* increased its circulation by 3.33 per cent, but readership dropped 13.87 per cent. RMR's small sample sizes may be unable to measure the senior business executive audience of the *AFR*, but the discrepancies could be due to incentives publishers use to drive circulation (promotions, competitions and giveaways). Obviously these may not increase readership, as people may buy multiple copies of a paper to take advantage of those incentives. Simons reports that when she queried Gary Morgan regarding the increasing anomalies between RMR survey figures and audited circulation, he replied, "I would just ignore circulation figures. They are rubbish." Simons suggests that both the ABC and RMR data may be unreliable: "Perhaps they are both bodgy [sic]" (2008a).

As well as these anomalies, newspapers are often accused of putting a positive spin, particularly on circulation data. A study of nine Australian metropolitan newspapers (published between 1997 and 2000) found 52 stories on newspaper circulation. Of these, 41 carried positive headlines "even though per capita circulation of newspapers continues to steadily fall". When *The Age's* weekday sales fell by 5.05 per cent in 1999, the paper "played down circulation figures, instead turning to less precise estimates of 'readership' in order to claim growth" (Putnis, 2001:99-100). (Note: publishers and advertisers often regard readership as a more meaningful measure; "per capita circulation" is also problematic for reasons addressed shortly.)

Simons usually accuses newspapers of spin when circulation figures are released: "Soon we will doubtless be subjected to the usual hype and spin on the figures by the various mastheads" and "when it comes to spinning circulation figures, newspapers know only too well how to tell tales" (2007a). However, Simons and *Crikey* have also been accused of their own spin or bias. For example, Simons' sceptical response to a report in *The Australian* (regarding the findings of research by the industry body The Newspaper Works) was criticised by several blog commenters, including "KB", whose remark on engagement is worth noting:

It would seem fishy if an online 'news' site was not pooh-poohing research on newspapers. *Crikey* goes down this path often ... all a little self-serving doncha (sic) think? Circulation is still strong across the board for Australian newspapers, and given that it's a conscious decision to buy a paper, and then read its contents, newspaper readers are way in front in the engaged stakes, particularly compared to the online space (Simons, 2008b).

## Charting trends

Although audience measurement is complex and no measure is foolproof, many scholars and commentators ignore this and reach definitive conclusions about the performance of newspapers usually based on declining circulations. There are also several common errors made in many discussions of the future of newspapers. One is that rather than using raw circulation data scholars often rely on figures in relation

to population (usually sales per 1000 people), ostensibly to account for population growth. However, Herman (2008) says per capita figures are useful as data for readership, not circulation, and even then are problematic because readership has increased, particularly with the growth of café society since the early 1990s.

A second factor seldom considered is the differences in performance between various sectors of newspapers and the tendency is to refer to newspapers as a whole. For example, Young (2008) states “newspapers have had problems for a long time. Sales have been in decline since the 1970s”; Peters (2006:23) notes circulation numbers have been “shrinking” and Tiffen mentions the “falling circulation of newspapers ... with the rise of the internet” (2009:384). Yet, as this paper will show, some sectors have decreased; others have increased. Lastly, though researchers often consider trends for short periods up to five years, a longer period is needed to determine circulation decline. Indeed, a brief historical overview is essential in this debate, as it reveals that – contrary to popular belief – declines occurred in some categories of newspapers well *before* the popular use of the internet.

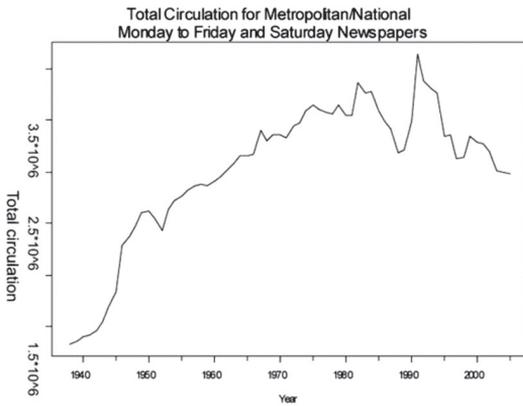
## Metropolitan papers

Most of the circulation declines for metropolitan papers occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, coinciding with the decrease in the use of public transport where people read newspapers and the rise of the television evening newscast (Goot 1979). However, Curren cautions:

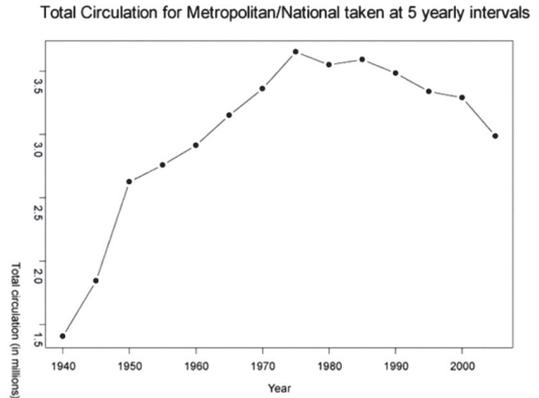
It cannot be concluded *ipso facto* that, because the development of television viewing has coincided with the fall in newspaper consumption, television is the causal factor in the decline. The decline may reflect an expansion in the range of recreational opportunities, an expansion that only coincides with the growth of television. For that matter, the decline may reflect deterioration in the quality of the press or any number of other variables (1970:115).

Following a peak circulation period during the decade 1975 to 1985, the most significant decline occurred between 1988 and 1992 when *all* evening dailies closed. Kirkpatrick (2000) calculated a 31 per cent drop between 1980 and 1995, and a 43 per cent decline for “circulation” per 1000 people. In recent years, the declines of metropolitan newspapers “*have levelled out*” (original emphasis APC, 2006), and compared to the US and the UK – where according to Jackson (2009:27) some newspaper companies have “entered the ‘death spiral’ of crushing debt, dwindling circulations and shrinking ad revenue” – newspaper circulation has become reasonably stable. Interestingly, since the 1950s, until recently, the circulation of Sunday metropolitan papers has risen steadily. Kirkpatrick calculated a 10.24 per cent increase between 1990 and 2005 (in Ewart, 2007:17). In addition, Saturday editions have generally fared better than Monday to Friday editions. This shift to weekend reading may be due to changing lifestyles (people have less time to read during the week) and because “weekend editions are bigger, have more sections and are therefore a more attractive purchase proposition” (APC, 2006).

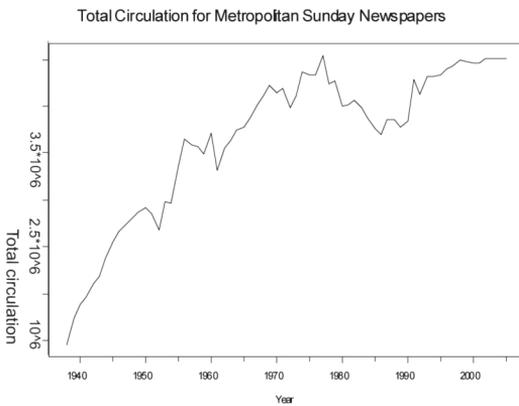
### Circulation for Australian metropolitan Monday-Friday & Saturday newspapers 1940-2005



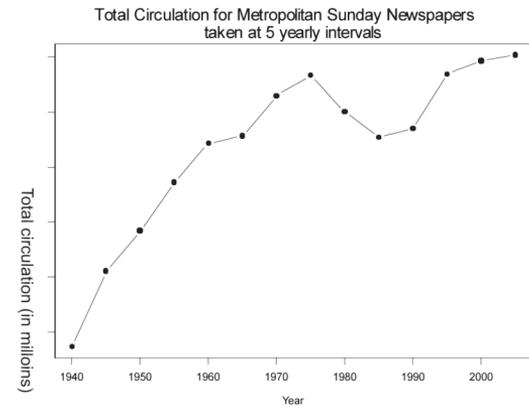
(APC 2006)



### Circulation of Australian Sunday newspapers 1940-2005



(APC 2006)



While we are yet to see the full impact of the collapse of world financial markets, the APC (2008) asserts that based on recent figures the prophecies “of the imminent end of newspapers from the doomsayers have not been accurate for Australia”:

Between 2006 and 2008 the Monday to Saturday circulation figures show that the “quality press”, *The Australian*, *The Financial Review*, *The Age*, and *The Sydney Morning Herald* are holding their own. On the other hand, metropolitan tabloids are suffering Monday to Saturday circulation declines of about 3 per cent. What should we make of that? Is it really a flight to quality? ... Sunday newspapers generally are suffering worryingly large circulation declines... What could be the reason? Is it a reflection, like the claims made for the decline in tabloid sales, on the product’s quality? (APC, 2008).

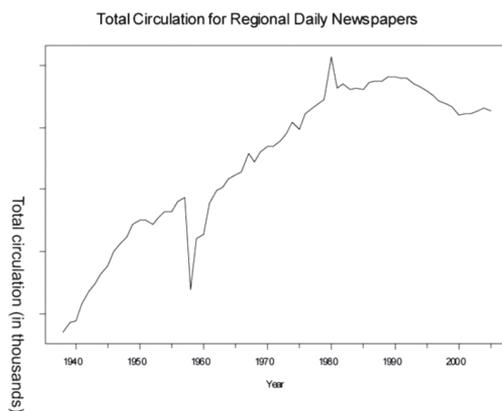
These trends reflect the difficulty of catering for broad audiences, and indicate that national specialist publications may be in a stronger position than state-based dailies. In spite of the growth of papers with clearly defined and targeted markets, *Crikey* reported, “the latest newspaper audited circulation figures were dreadful”, although “Pete from Sydney” quickly refuted: “Dreadful? Slight overstatement doncha think? Circ has suffered some minor falls, however readership figures are generally solid. You’re just a little hysterical about your ‘newspapers bite the dust’ reports” (Dyer, 2008).

In addition to circulation, RMR data indicates that between 2007 and 2008 readership of metropolitan and national dailies increased, particularly in the four “quality” papers – *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Australian Financial Review* – in both weekday and Saturday editions. Many of the tabloids show slight decreases, particularly in Sunday editions continuing the ongoing decline that began in 2003, which parallels the recent declines in Sunday circulations (APC, 2008.)

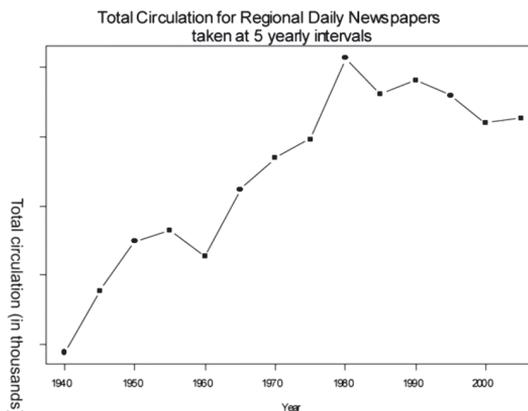
## Regional papers

Regional papers have followed a similar pattern to metropolitan papers, reaching a peak between 1975 and 1985. Between 1990 and 2000, a 17.19 per cent slump in circulation occurred, which Kirkpatrick (2000) attributes to the pace of change in society, the gradual impact of television, and the advent of free newspapers. Recent figures show that regional newspapers are holding circulation levels pretty well, with the usual startling exceptions, often as a clear consequence of changes of editors (APC, 2008). Data from Roy Morgan show readership is declining, with a drop of four per cent between 2006 and 2008, which the APC (2008) suggests may be due to population decreases in rural areas, but also the impact of the shift of classified advertisements to the Internet. However, the readership of individual mastheads varies considerably, with *The Illawarra Mercury* having dramatic declines since 2005, whereas *The Geelong Advertiser* increased its readership in both 2007 and 2008.

### Circulation of Australian Regional Dailies 1940–2005



(APC 2006)



## Community newspapers

In contrast to regional and metropolitan papers, the numbers of community newspapers (mostly free weeklies) have burgeoned. They increased by 17.1 per cent between 1995 and 2002 (Lewis 2004), and the Fairfax community newspapers increased 10.6 per cent between 2001 and 2006 (APC, 2006). (These are increases in copies distributed, not sold, though RMR figures indicate that readers per copy are about 1.25 (APC, 2007).) Such increases may be dismissed as inconsequential, because as Griffin notes these papers are regarded as being “at the bottom of the journalistic food chain, a slave to advertising, a pimp to consumerism and unworthy to be mentioned in the same breath as even the more lowly of regional dailies” (2003:105–106). Griffin, however, suggests that – as well as providing local news and promoting community-mindedness – even a free suburban newspaper can “maintain a localised version of the fourth estate tradition” (2003:116).

## Free dailies

Australia also has free dailies – sometimes known as free daily commuter newspaper – which are a relatively recent phenomenon whose growth has been spectacular, but often ignored in the debate of newspapers’ future. The first free daily, *Metro*, was introduced in Sweden in 1995, and by 2008 there were 238 titles in 58 countries, with a circulation of over 44 million copies (Bakker, 2007). Australia has two free dailies (published by News Ltd), which are aimed at the 18–39 year-old demographic: *The Manly Daily* with a weekly readership of about 154,000 and *mX* distributed to commuters in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane with a daily readership of about 752,000. According to Bakker (2007), the free newspaper is remarkable as a new business model and because its readership is younger than that of the traditional newspaper. In contrast to television and online which suffer fragmentation, Bakker contends that newspapers can deliver “a substantial and attentive audience within a fixed time span, something online is hardly capable of” (2008:14).

## Online reach

In addition to circulation and readership of print newspapers, there is also online reach. Between 2006 and 2008, the websites of metropolitan and some regional and rural newspapers have enjoyed “spectacular traffic growth”, and the number of unique browsers accessing the sites of metropolitan daily newspapers has doubled (APC, 2008). The leading news sites were *smh.com.au*, *ninemsm.com.au*, *news.com.au*, *theage.com.au*, *heraldsun.com.au*, *theaustralian.com* and *dailytelegraph.com.au* (APC, 2008), which – with the exception of *ninemsm.com.au* – are sites of Fairfax and News Limited. (Note: in the US and the UK the main newspaper companies do not have leading news websites: the leaders in the US are CNN, CNBC and Yahoo; in the UK the BBC).

Van Heekeren, North and Simpson (2006) attribute the domination of Fairfax and News Limited to “the twin benefits of having content on tap and established reputations”. Broadband penetration is crucial to newspapers’ online reach, and the Australian government’s new fibre-to-the-premises (FTTP) penetration should not only increase news consumption, but also benefit advertisers. In his address to

the Sydney Institute, former Fairfax CEO David Kirk (2008), explained that while narrowband was detrimental for newspapers as it allowed the building of online classified sites, fast broadband will allow the development of video advertising formats which will compete with free to air and pay TV.

## World trends

Australian newspapers may be relatively robust, but what about the rest of the world? In 1997, the World Association of Newspapers (WAN, 1997) reported that regardless of the criteria used to measure their performance (advertising levels, circulation, time spent reading) newspapers were in decline and had been for decades. However, a significant turnaround began in 2002, and between 2002 and 2007 there was an increase of 9.4 per cent of paid newspaper circulation, with circulation rising or stabilising in three-quarters of the world (WAN, 2008). This trend has continued in spite of the global financial crisis.

WAN (2009) reports that in 2008, worldwide newspaper circulation grew 1.3 per cent, with increases of 6.9 per cent in Africa, 1.8 per cent in South America and 2.9 per cent in Asia, although there have been decreases of 1.8 per cent in Europe and 3.7 percent in the US. (Recent figures for daily US newspapers for the six-months up to September 2009 hit double digits for the first time, with an 11 per cent decline [Fitzgerald, 2009] ). When free dailies are included, worldwide circulation rose 1.62 per cent in 2008 and 13 per cent over five years. (Bakker [2008] contends that the impact of the internet on the traditional newspaper market has been overstated, as a more influential factor may be the growth of free dailies).

Based on these trends, Franklin argues:

The precocious pessimism and unwarranted hyperbole of those who wish to proclaim the imminent demise of the newspaper is clearly unsustainable. It articulates a curious North America and Eurocentric view of the press which seems blinkered to the explosion of new titles and readerships in most other parts of the world; the future of newspapers is more nuanced than some observers imagine ... these data offer a sobering corrective to the pessimists' case; the global newspaper business is booming (2008:631-632).

Hallin and Mancini suggest that "most of the literature on the media is highly ethnocentric" in that it refers often to the experience of those countries with the most developed traditions of media research such as the UK or US, yet is written in general terms as though this experience is universal (2004:2). In regards to newspapers, such ethnocentrism and pessimism has repercussions, with WAN (2008) arguing that reports of newspapers' imminent demise are "damaging". Nesbitt (2008) points out that "reading customers are not deserting newspapers at anything approaching the rate of advertising customers", and the role of media buyers at advertising agencies has been questioned for driving advertising to the internet despite "high and solid numbers of consumers for newspapers" and the unreliable and small numbers for websites (Claussen, 2007:5). One could also question the role of scholars: have they also (unwittingly) influenced this migration of advertising?

## Advertising

In spite of the global growth in newspaper circulation, revenues from newspaper advertising were down 5 per cent in 2008. In the UK they fell 12 per cent, and the 17.7 per cent decline in the US was the worst ever recorded (WAN, 2009). In contrast, the combined advertising revenues for Fairfax, APN, West Australian Newspapers and News Limited (about 95 per cent of Australia's press industry) dropped \$4 billion in 2008, down only 0.6 per cent from the previous year – a further indicator that Australia is not suffering the same structural declines as the UK and the US. While the declines reflect in part the impact of the global financial recession, it is clear that advertising revenues from online editions of newspapers do not make up for the value lost, particularly of the classified ads to the internet, although in Australia there are indications that the migration of classifieds is now complete (Jackson, 2009; APC, 2008; Sinclair, 2009b).

With the decline in print advertising, publishers have been debating whether to charge for content online, but this debate is now over with News Corporation chairman Rupert Murdoch announcing in May 2009 they would be charging for some mastheads' online content within the year. This will not mean a pay wall around some of the newspapers' most valuable content as many commentators have assumed. New product concepts are currently being formulated and Day (2009a:31) intimates they will be hybrid sites with open-access for breaking news, but payment for "services and specialised information". However, while the world was "playing a game of Waiting for Rupert" (Day, 2009b), the New York newspaper *Newsday* began charging for full access to its website in late October 2009.

## Like no other medium

The history of media reveals that when new mediums are introduced there are "wildly inaccurate predictions" of the imminent demise of traditional media (Barnett in Ponsford, 2008). In the 19th century, there were predictions that the telephone would wipe out the courier industry, and the rise of television in the 1950s brought speculation this would see the end of both cinema and radio. While radio became no longer a central focus, it found another focal point for news and entertainment: the automobile, and while cinema going declined until the 80s, it stabilised and recently has increased. When new modes of communication arrive, traditional media usually adapt and become integral to the new media scene because they serve a need that no other media can serve (Powers, 2007; Barnett in Ponsford, 2008). Barnett (2006) points out that "rumours of the print apocalypse have abounded since at least the early 1990s", but believes they (as cinema did) will find their plateau. Paper is, after all, a unique medium.

Info-enthusiasts have thrust nothing under the hammer with quite so much enthusiasm as the paper document. Ideas of pure information traversing digital networks lead ... to outbursts of "endism", and in particular, to prophecies about the departure of paper ... digital champions misunderstand (or miss entirely) the remarkable resourcefulness of paper documents (Brown & Duguid, 2002:174-5).

Conley and Lamble (2006) argue that newspapers will continue to play a major role because their format is better suited for grouping stories, as well as providing analysis and background to stories. As well as differences in format, there are differences in technology that are worth considering. Powers (2007) suggests that because a paper is disconnected from the digital grid, this makes it easier to concentrate, it frees up the brain to think. He quotes an observation by *Providence Journal* columnist Mark Patinkin:

In a time of distractibility, a paper ... keeps you focused. When we go online, we may start with a news story, but then go chaotically from e-mail to stocks to Google to shopping and then back to news. But sit with a newspaper, and you are no longer sidetracked. You're focused on just the day's events. There's no "you have mail" chime to interrupt you. It's a rare sane moment in the day (Powers, 2007:10).

To Powers (2007), a newspaper is "an island of peace in the digital chaos", and rather than "everything all the time", the newspaper's slogan could be "just this one thing".

## Conclusion

Regarding Meyer's prediction mentioned in this paper's introduction, it turns out that commentators (including academics) have been taking the wrong meaning from *The Vanishing Newspaper*. Meyer used trend data to plot a line of daily US newspaper readership figures from 1967-2002, and noted that if one extended that line "it shows us running out of daily readers late in the first quarter of 2043" (2005:16). Meyer said recently he had been taken too literally – as if newspaper publishers would churn out papers until there is one reader left – because "straight-line trends do not continue indefinitely. Nature throws us curves". However, Meyer believes newspapers need to narrow their focus to that area least vulnerable to substitution by other sources, for which they are "the trusted source". In this information age there is a demand for evidence-based journalism, something Meyer claims bloggers are not good at originating, and in order to keep the resources for doing quality journalism, newspapers need to "jettison the frivolous items in the content buffet" (2008:32, 35).

The proclamation that newspapers are facing death is not supported by the facts. Newspaper audience measurement is complex and a fair assessment must take into account all measures (circulation, readership and digital reach) and all newspapers (paid and free). With Australia faring better than the UK and the US, the deep pessimism pervading the academe is unwarranted. While many regional and tabloid metropolitan newspapers are suffering slight circulation declines, the "quality" newspapers are holding up, with *The Australian* even showing increases. There is also the ongoing growth of free newspapers, especially the community papers that carry over-the-back-fence news and local advertising. Although the internet has provided an opportunity for newspapers to expand their reach and increase advertising revenue, this has not compensated for the loss of revenue of classified advertisements, and newspapers will need to find models to charge for online access.

In order to survive some newspapers will need to find new ways of addressing declining readership and circulation, and if this means a "flight to quality" or else a trip to the graveyard, this can only be good news. It is time to drop the time-bound

label “new” to describe blogs and online news. Not only are they not “new”, but also such media are now integral to mainstream media. It is also time to drop the adjective “old” for media such as the newspaper. Things that are old eventually disintegrate or die. It is unlikely that will be the fate of print newspapers. While the future may see more readers accessing news online, many Australians – and they are not all oldies – still have a profound attachment to reading news on paper. This is unlikely to vanish.

The implications for journalism educators in Australia are clear. In discussions about the future of newspapers, not only should the different *sectors* be considered, but a historical perspective is also essential to avoid being caught up in the “fashion” or “fad” of the day such as the enthusiasm for so-called “new media”. This has led to a dismissive attitude towards traditional media, even though – regardless of the growth of blogs and alternative news sites – mainstream newspapers remain the dominant and most credible source of news. They alone have the resources to scrutinise the volume of information coming in daily from the Internet, the courts, the parliaments and the community, and more importantly can sustain the in-depth investigation to expose and break stories on government or corporate corruption.

The uniqueness of each medium (including newspapers) needs to be acknowledged and taught to students. Educators need to be careful not to abandon the study of newspapers because they perceive them as dying. How many journalism educators suggest students read news printed on paper, in addition to accessing it online? What about papers not accessible for free online – such as *The Australian Financial Review* (especially the Friday edition with its Review section)? In Australia, newspaper organisations are still the major employers of graduates, particularly in rural areas; hence educators need to be cognisant of the fact that print is still the best “classroom” for future journalists, regardless of whether they finish up working in that medium, or broadcast, or online or in a converged environment. And most importantly, statements such as “newspaper circulation is declining” or “newspapers are dying” are meaningless generalisations. These kinds of generalisations are lazy journalism.

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