

Study asks 'Are foreign correspondents redundant?'

December 9 2010



Photograph by Gary Bridgman, southsideartgallery.com

Economic pressures and digital technology are undermining the role of the foreign correspondent, according to a new Oxford University study. Among its recommendations, it says news organizations need to ‘rethink their international agenda’ in a rapidly evolving new era.

The 114-page study ‘*Are foreign correspondents redundant?*’ is by Richard Sambrook, a Visiting Fellow at Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ), who stepped down as BBC’s Director of Global News earlier this year. It is part of a RISJ series called Challenges, which presents findings, analysis and recommendations on media issues.

The study sets out the role that foreign correspondents based abroad have played for more than a 100 years. The central message is that this role has to adapt as foreign news has undergone a transformation and

continues to evolve.

Richard Sambrook comments in the summary: "All news organizations are undergoing turbulent change and must ask where the risks and the opportunities are. And against this background, where does the primary public interest rest in bearing witness?"

The study is based on Sambrook's interviews with a range of news organizations across the world, as well as his own experience as a news manager with 30 years in BBC journalism. The starting point for the study is 'the model of a foreign correspondent working from a fixed overseas bureau', a model created in the late 19th century when a limited number of organisations had sufficient resources to gather and distribute news. After exploring how this model is faring in today's globalized, digitized world, it concludes: "We are now entering a new era where they may no longer be central to how we learn about the world."

The study suggests that the international news agenda should rethink its values to reflect the values of multicultural societies. It says: "The notion of 'foreign' is more complex. International and domestic news agendas have merged to a significant degree."

More organisations are relying on local staff, with advantages and risks attached. It recommends news organizations to think about how they can adapt as the value in the foreign reporting shifts to the extremes of breaking news and in-depth specialist reporting.

The study remarks that in Asia, with the prospect of economic growth, news organizations may be set for an era of expansion. In the developing world too, journalistic capacity is being built up 'with long-term consequences for the global flow of information and the character of public debate,' it adds.

The study urges news organizations to change their structure from vertically integrated news operations to a more open and networked approach with new partnerships with locally based services and social media sites.

Of social media, the study finds that it is 'leading, supplementing and complementing' what professional news organisations offer. It points out that although [social media](#) offers fresh material that can be sourced by journalists, it also competes for public attention. "This challenges the capacities of news organisations to sort, verify and contextualise a torrent of digital information," says the study. "Traditional news outlets must innovate in the digital sphere or risk being outflanked."

Other challenges highlighted include: finding new economic models which can sustain international operations; and training and recruiting to 'provide the expertise and cultural flexibility needed in the 21st century'.

Richard Sambrook said: "The ways we learn about the world are undergoing a wrenching change with consequences not just for news organizations but for all of us trying to understand our place in an increasingly interconnected, interdependent world."

Provided by Oxford University

Citation: Study asks 'Are foreign correspondents redundant?' (2010, December 9) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-12-foreign-correspondents-redundant.html>

| |
|--|
| <p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p> |
|--|