

Western societies are reluctant to regulate journalism because of the civic and social function journalists say they play. Indeed, we have extended constitutional protection to this curious profession, assuming its business imperatives somehow stay separate from its "watchdog" role. Even if we accept the dangers inherent in IT journalism, we will find it difficult to regulate solutions.

How does a society manage decisions about the allocation of resources, determine a sense of will, or broker resolutions? What happens if the emerging transnational elites give up and withdraw from civic participation in individual societies?

Now, lest this sound entirely pessimistic, let me acknowledge that there are countervailing influences and logics and end that way because it might lead us to consider the points of leverage if we choose to pursue the issues I have raised.

It is reasonable to assume that as the technology of information transfer becomes more and more user friendly, it will be far less painful to extract and consume. The cost of access should drop. Visual media literacy increased exponentially over the past 20 years. So should digital competence over the next.

Paralysis of choice is an issue -- though the economics of one stop shopping and general information are difficult, the logic of the need for them is not. Given the proper choice, one that is economic, relatively painless, and relatively compact, most people are still likely to delegate to others the bother of assembling an inclusive menu of information they need.

At the most basic level, journalism has always been driven by consumers' need for reasonable and consistent threat assessment -- roughly the questions all journalists try to answer are: "is it safe to leave your home? is your country safe? is your world safe?" or put another way "what do I need to know about what might effect me as I go about my life today?" Most people understand there are risks out there they need to assess.

The cynicism and suspicion of journalism is growing, not in small measure due to a dawning understanding that it is too commercially oriented, that there are too many different varieties of journalists and too variable a level of credibility.

Elite pressure is building against journalism and for the reasons I indicated earlier, elites will find it in their self-interest to help resolve some of these emerging issues because of their need for information they can trust. They will likely first move to satisfy themselves that their own preferred vehicles meet that test but they will come to understand that they lose when government is driven by masses of voters who are dealing with inadequate and differing information. They will also understand that unless they share information experience with those voters, they will be blindsided.