
WELCOME TO 4GJ: HOW A NEW ERA OF MEDIA WILL IMPROVE JOURNALISM AND SAVE HUMANITY

Article summary by Molly Bingham

There is a heated discussion underway about media and the future of journalism, most of it revolving around new business models and delivery systems. But, that is the wrong discussion. These are critically important aspects of media's future, but they fail to take into consideration the larger shift that is underway in our society and how media must adapt. I wrote this article to do two things: first, lay out how we are entering a new era in media, the Fourth Generation of Journalism, 4GJ; second, to frame the discussion about the role media can - and must - play in today's world. Below is a summary of the key arguments in the article. The full article is available by request, at www.transformingthemediamedia.com

The world is changing – and fast. Technology has enabled human interaction and the sharing of information across borders, cultures, religions and languages on previously unimagined levels. We inhabit a densely packed planet and are on track to double our current global population by 2050. And all of us have the same basic needs – food to eat, clean water to drink and access to energy. These resources are all limited and they are all sources of potential conflict. It is now clear that we are truly one, interdependent, interconnected, global community. Transnational issues – rising sea levels, pandemic flu, terrorism, our access to food and water – confront each individual and humanity as a whole, requiring us to collaborate to successfully address them.

Media is changing, too. But its future is still unclear. We are entering a new era of media -- the Fourth Generation of Journalism -- and we should take advantage of this period of dramatic change to consider what media can become.

We can look at the three previous generations of journalism by both the technology that defined them and by the changing role media played in society. The first generation came with the advent of the printing press. It was embodied by the emergence of pamphleteering, where activists shared their views with their community in an effort to effect social change.

The media's second and third generations were defined by the eras of radio and then television, during which its reach and impact grew. In the 19th and 20th centuries wealthy individuals purchased newspapers, recognizing media as a tool capable of furthering their own social and political agendas. During the third generation corporations have bought local and regional media companies becoming massive media enterprises. These corporations' loyalty is primarily, and understandably, to their shareholders and growing profits. The fourth generation, technologically, is the internet. But media's societal role in this new era is still being defined.

Media's growth paralleled the emergence of the nation-state, a concept established to protect citizens' sovereignty. For centuries the world has built its structures and interactions around the belief that our governments would resolve crises by interacting with each other – in peace or in war. Coming of age in that era media naturally developed a default practice of representing events through a local or national prism.

But that era has passed.

Today, the internet and billions of mobile devices make media truly global for the first time. Media's audience - the public - is now the world, and that reality brings new responsibilities and opportunities. Today, the most pressing human concerns are the transnational issues we share across race, religion and nationality. Our media must reflect that reality. It is time for media to shift from putting all events through a national prism because doing so reinforces our differences, pushing us further away from collaboratively resolving the problems that we face. Instead, media must take the stance that it serves all humanity, and report in the human – rather than the national – interest.

Fourth Generation Journalism - 4GJ - is a collection of components which media must consider and change together to successfully serve our single, global community. By making those changes media will help us recognize, understand and manage our shared challenges. 4GJ includes:

- Media must shift to report in the human, not the national interest, this **perspective** shift will reflect media's dedication to our global community.

- Media must encourage the internet to develop its own **iteration**. As technology emerges information must be presented in its most compelling and capable formats, not simply relying on the web to carry old technologies.
- Media must be **accessible**, ensuring that consumers can access quality content designed for their abilities and needs where, when and how they want it.
- **Content** will look and feel different in 4GJ – how it is presented, the stories it tells.
- Media's **relationship** with the public must change to reflect the public's ability to participate, create and comment – not just consume information.
- Each media outlet will need to figure out which **community** they serve and focus on doing it well, reflecting that new topical communities exist in addition to our traditional geographic ones.
- Media's **structure** is profoundly changing and each person will customize the media they choose suiting their needs and whims, and changing them daily as they like.
- New **business models** will emerge, that profit from the production of media, as well as the impact that it helps create in society.
- Media has a new level of **responsibility** and must serve as a public trust – a global public trust.

4GJ encourages taking on the big questions: Who is the public that media now serves? How can it best serve that audience? What are the realities, needs, challenges and opportunities that that audience faces? How will the audience change and grow in the future? Most importantly, how can media change its approach and the critical service it provides to ensure the survival, not of a newspaper, but of the human race?

Media exists to inform and educate people. It can continue to be an institution that highlights the differences that divide us. Or we can transform media. 4GJ seeks to transform it so that media serves the global public. So that it serves humanity. *The full article is available by request, at www.transformingthemediamedia.com*