



2018 Year-in-Review: Publishing Industry Trends

Featuring (in order of appearance)

- **Ariana Tobin, ProPublica**
- **B.J. Mendelson, author, *Privacy***
- **Michiel Kolman, International Publishers Association**
- **Michele Cobb, Audio Publishers Association**

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KENNEALLY: What if one day the news just stopped? If all the reports of horror and disasters and political and business corruption streaming endlessly from Washington and London and Hollywood and Moscow and Damascus somehow became trapped and were no longer to reach any of us, would you be relieved?

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book, looking back at the last twelve months of our programs. In this edition of our three-part review for 2018, we hear how technology is shaping content creation, for better and for worse.

In the human body, fatigue can lead to physical weaknesses as well as to mental decline. Fatigue makes us angry and fickle, it lowers our capacity for good judgment, and it can leave us vulnerable to making poor or improper decisions. News fatigue may be having similar effects on the body politic, argues Ariana Tobin, an engagement reporter at Pro Publica, an independent, non-profit newsroom that produce investigative journalism on a range of topics including government and politics, business and the environment.

As 2018 opened, Ariana Tobin foresaw a day when the news audience would choose to turn away from the firehose of news pouring out at them.

TOBIN: I think it may have already started happening, honestly. I used to work in audience analytics. I had a job where every day my responsibility was to take a look at what was happening on terms of page views, where audiences were coming from, what they were clicking on, what topics they gravitated toward. Honestly, sometimes things surprise you, but really if you take any look at the numbers, you can already see it happening. We know that people are getting tired. We know certain stories surface. We know that last January certain stories were gaining more traction than they were in August. I would be very, very, very curious to see analytics across newsrooms from The New York Times to The Washington Post to Breitbart. I think that as journalists, that's



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part of our responsibility to our audiences, to figure out how the news is resonating, whether what we are producing is actually making it into the hands of the people who could use it.

KENNEALLY: So what's the answer, Ariana Tobin, there, at Pro Publica? Is it slowing down the amount of reporting? Are you trying to throttle down the work you're doing?

TOBIN: At Pro Publica it's a little bit different because we rarely post more than one or two stories a day. In general, the model of our newsroom is just fundamentally different than a lot of others in that we really only publish things that are new because that's our larger business model. It's not to say that we're exempt from those questions because of course we are, and I'm not saying every single story on our website – not every single story that I've written on our website – is a valuable piece of investigative journalism. But I think that where I was coming from.

I've been thinking about more the industry at large, some of the other places that I've worked, places that are more of a function of volume, where you're making the decision to send out a push notification. For us, here at Pro Publica, and, I think, for journalists in many other kinds of organizations, depending on what their mission is, what the expectation of their particular set of readers is, is just to stop and actually ask the question, what would someone gain from clicking on this? To actually have to articulate that value proposition, of this is the role that the story's going to play in someone's life, this is the value that they're going to take away from it. However, they come to this story, here's the thing that it could do for them at that moment in time.

KENNEALLY: Revelations over Cambridge Analytica's "data harvesting" exploded in the spring. The company had collected information on the personal interests of as many as 50 million Americans from Facebook's open online platform – information later used to shape advertising and messaging in the 2016 US presidential campaign.

Data hoarding has made good business for Facebook, Google and Twitter – as well as for a host of opportunistic data brokers and data dealers. Their financial gain is often your privacy lost, says author B.J. Mendelson. In his 2018 book, *Privacy*, Mendelson makes the case that your personal life is up for sale.

MENDELSON: The tech companies have done a wonderful job, fortunately for them, unfortunately for us, of painting themselves in this almost utopian kind of brush of being cuddly and friendly and promoting all these wonderful things. But the bottom line has always been since 1994, your data equals a whole lot of money, and they'll do whatever it takes to get as much of it as they can.



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What I tell people is if you hook up to the internet, you can kiss your privacy goodbye. Anything you do after you're connected, regardless of the device, someone somewhere is able to capture and collect that data. So this mythology of we have this information that's been anonymized – it's never been true. It takes very little work to actually find out who you are from the data that's "been anonymized." So again, it's just about putting a smiley, cuddly face on something that is a really shady business practice.

KENNEALLY: The other thing that the businesses have done is to make it our responsibility, BJ. They tell us that we can opt out, we can make some. Making it the consumers' responsibility, in your view, just isn't fair.

MENDELSON: No. I compare it to putting a Band-Aid on a bullet wound. More often than not – just recently with the Cambridge Analytica thing, Facebook was blaming its users for downloading the app and utilizing it. That, to me, is just insane. Because if you look at the privacy settings they do give you, while you have some control, it doesn't cut off about 99% of the flood of information that's being collected about you. There are the things like keystrokes and microphone data and things of that nature that Facebook doesn't want you to know that it collects. You can't even begin to cover that up using the privacy settings.

KENNEALLY: Let's get this one out of the way. Should I tape up the camera and the microphone on my laptop or on my phone?

MENDELSON: Yeah, absolutely. (laughter) I always tell people if you don't want to do tape, use a Post-it note. It's by far the easiest thing you could do right now to protect your data. Because if you have a camera that's connected to the internet, it's not that it will be accessed, but it can be accessed. So if you want to minimize that threat, then all you have to do is cover it up.

KENNEALLY: Well, anyone who's listening, BJ, might roll their eyes about this, but we should tell them that none other than James Comey, when he was still at the FBI, made the very same recommendation.

After an interval of more than a quarter of a century, the International Publishers Association Congress returned to India in 2018. In 1992, IPA members had arrived in a nation with a developing economy that relied heavily on foreign aid. In 2018, India numbers among the G-20 gathering of wealthiest nations in the world and boasts the planet's fastest-growing economy.

As much as India has transformed over the last 25 years, so has publishing. National barriers to the flow of information have largely fallen, while the ubiquity of mobile



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devices places a virtual global library in nearly every human hand. Yet the core concerns of IPA endure. In an age of fake news, censorship and piracy, says IPA President Michiel Kolman, publishers can be stewards of truth and quality.

KOLMAN: Well, we live in a world, I would say, of alternative facts, so trust in reliable, high-quality information is now even more important than ever before. And it's the publishers around the world that have risen to this challenge and are publishing what I would call trustworthy information, as they have been doing for ages. That's true for science publishers, for trade publishers, or educational publishers. It only illustrates the importance of publishing today.

KENNEALLY: Can you point to any specific examples around the world? Because you do plenty of traveling for IPA. Where are publishers making a difference in this age of information uncertainty?

KOLMAN: I would say there are two important areas here. The first one is securing that the information is trustworthy and of high quality, and the second is that the users can find the right information, especially today when there is an overwhelming amount of information available.

I think publishers are also investing heavily so that you can find the right information and that it's presented in the right way. For instance, if you're a doctor in an emergency room, you have to find exactly the right information to make the key decisions, and publishers are doing that. They're deploying artificial intelligence, for instance, so that crucial information [can be found] for crucial decisions.

We also see this in the area of educational publishing, so a publisher there providing reliable teaching material that they can significantly support the learning outcomes of students. We can even teach students how to navigate in the new world where informational uncertainty is simply a fact so that they are better prepared for the future to come.

KENNEALLY: At a gala evening in the New York Historical Society's palatial headquarters in June, the Audio Publishers Association announced the winners of the 2018 Audie Awards, the Oscars of spoken-word entertainment. Neil Gaiman won an Audie for narration by author. Other winners included Bruce Springsteen, Trevor Noah, and Ann Leckie.

No wonder, really, that the publishing world has rolled out the red carpet for audiobooks. Revenue from audiobook sales has more than doubled since 2012, yielding



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a welcome digitally-driven boost to publishers' bottom lines in an otherwise tight book market.

Audio Publishers Association executive director Michele Cobb, APA executive director, explained why the steady decline in demand for recordings on compact discs hasn't led to the business losses seen in music and video.

COBB: CDs are having kind of a slow slide down. They're still a big part of what people do, and there are still a lot of people that like to listen on them. But digital is where the growth is. As you mentioned, the smartphone – we've all got one, we've all got audiobooks on them, and we're starting to see a lot of activity around the smart speaker, like your Google Home device. A lot of people are listening in the evenings, listening to children's stories, listening to audiobooks. This was the holiday for the smart speaker. So we're expecting to see a lot of growth in that particular area.

KENNEALLY: It's interesting you mention the smart speaker, because I can imagine children get involved there, too. If they want to hear a story, they can just ask Alexa to do it.

COBB: Absolutely. Edison Research does a survey about smart speakers, and they showed that one of the top three activities from 7:00 to 9:00 PM was listening to children's stories.

KENNEALLY: One of the great books of the year has also been awarded the top audiobook of the year from the APA, and that is *Lincoln in the Bardo*. This was a production of Random House Audio, which has quite a reputation going into the market, and it was a dazzling, record-breaking cast of 166 voices, including celebrities like Nick Offerman, David Sedaris, and George Saunders himself, the author, as well as a variety of other narrators. Is that kind of really Broadway-level production becoming more common?

COBB: We are seeing more of these full cast productions. I was on stage at the moment where they received that Audie Award, and the stage was literally flooded by the number of people who had worked on the production as a narrator, as an editor. So, it was great to have all that energy and excitement around this full cast production. We loved it.

KENNEALLY: In digital publishing, the virtual is very often the perfect substitute for the physical. But as much as the industry has changes, some things just can't be digitized – actors, certainly. And authors, too.



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I'm Christopher Kenneally, looking back at 2018 for Copyright Clearance Center's Beyond the Book. Our co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing.

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