



The rise of boutique media: Authority, trust and emotion in post-industrial news production

Karin Wahl-Jorgensen
Cardiff University
AANZCA 2025

Introducing boutique media: Overview

Turning the tides

1. Why boutique media?
2. The reconfiguration of journalistic authority: Epistemic and affective authority
3. Examples of boutique media
 - News influencers
 - Podcasts
 - Newsletters/Substack
4. ...And: Local news entrepreneurs
5. Conclusions and directions for future research



1. Why "boutique media"?

- "Post-industrial" journalism (Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 2014)
 - Existing media organisations losing revenue and market share
 - Need to rethink industry as a whole, and individual news organisations
 - Need to take advantage of new working methods and processes
 - Restructuring every organizational aspect of news production
- "Creative destruction" in news industry (Schlesinger & Doyle, 2015)



1. Why “boutique media”?

- The rise of new types of actors in the news ecosystem
- “Pioneer media” (Hepp & Loosen, 2021)
- “Beyond journalism (Deuze & Witschge, 2020)
- “News startups” (Carlson & Usher, 2016)
- “News entrepreneurs” (Vos & Singer, 2016; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023; 2024)



1. Why “boutique media”?

- Role of social media: Personal branding
- “Boutique media”:
 - Smaller
 - Often specialised
 - Dependent on the vision, charisma and persona of individual creator(s)
 - Premised on affective bond with audience



TRUST ME



**I'M A
JOURNALIST**

The emergence of “boutique media”

- Change in journalistic authority:
 - Before: Epistemic authority (Carlson, 2017)
 - Journalists’ professional knowledge and skills
 - Prestige of mainstream news organisations
 - Now: Affective authority
 - Trust based on journalists’ persona
 - Perceptions of authenticity
 - Establishing emotional connection with audiences
 - Performances of ordinariness and authenticity (Abidin, 2018, p. 15, Arriagada & Bishop, 2021)



For Example!

Examples of boutique
media

- News influencers
- Podcasts
- Newsletters/Substack
- Local news entrepreneurs

Examples of boutique media: News influencers

- News influencers: Individuals who gain a significant following on social media (X, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram), and produce news-related content (Newman et al., 2024; 2025; Pew Research Center, 2024).
- 4 in 10 adults under 30 in the US now get news from such influencers
- Increasingly occupy spaces once reserved for journalists working for mainstream news organisations
- Diverse in backgrounds: Ranging from established journalists to celebrities, politicians and popular culture content creators



Examples of boutique media: News influencers

- Well-known journalists leaving news organisations to build independent channels for control and income.
- Types of news influencers:
 - (1) Commentary (mostly male, partisan and entertainment-oriented)
 - (2) Investigation (new skills but lack of large-scale resources)
 - (3) Explanation (accessible news for younger audiences)
 - (4) Specialism (e.g., sports, internet culture, literature)
- *Source: Reuters Institute News Influencer Report, 2025*

Examples of boutique media: Podcasts

- Significant growth area amid contraction of news industry
- 2024: More than 500m podcast listeners globally
- Intimate form of broadcasting - more human and emotional reporting style (Lindgren, 2022; 2023)
- “Celebrified” journalism dependent on personal brand of host (Morlandstø & Mathisen, 2022)
- Based on deliberative construction of community (Modell, 2025)



Australian Podcast Ranker

Top Podcasts | October 2025



Rank	Change	Podcast	Publisher	Sales representation	Monthly listeners	Monthly downloads	New episodes
1	-	Hamish & Andy	LiSTNR (SCA)	LiSTNR (SCA)	881,262	1,662,510	5
2	-	ABC News Top Stories	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	783,353	2,271,971	373
3	-	Mamamia Out Loud	Mamamia	Mamamia	622,695	1,699,150	32
4	-	Shameless	Shameless Media	Shameless Media	532,029	933,921	10
5	-	Sky News Australia Update	News Corp Australia	News Corp / NOVA Entertainment	482,980	828,385	92
6	-	Conversations	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	412,919	2,884,656	26
7	-	Life Uncut	ARN / iHeart	ARN / iHeart	401,216	880,435	19
8	-	ABC News Daily	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	370,577	1,057,145	22
9	-	Squiz Today	Squiz Media	Squiz Media	360,059	734,887	38
10	+2	The Imperfects	LiSTNR (SCA)	LiSTNR (SCA)	329,217	586,202	5

Examples of boutique media: Newsletters/Substack

- Growth of newsletters as a way for established and small-scale media organizations to connect with audiences and gain revenue stream
- E.g., Substack: Started in 2017
 - October 2025: 5 million paid subscriptions (out of 35 million active subscriptions on the platform).
- Substack hosts variety of content producers across news genres
- Well known for specialist content, e.g., cultural and lifestyle journalism (Meneses & Gomez-Escalonilla, 2025)
- Other newsletter platforms: Patreon, Ghost, Medium



Examples of boutique media: Newsletters/Substack

- Limited scholarly work BUT extensive trade coverage
- Allowing writers to harness “personal brand” to build their own community of subscribers (Andringa, 2022)
- Affordances of substack enable:
- Reciprocal exchanges between writers and readers
- Distinctive models (Andringa, 2022)
 - Functional: Epistemic authority
 - Relational: Establishing close relationships with audience



Local news entrepreneurs as boutique media producers

- Crisis in journalism: Opened up space for local news entrepreneurs
- More than 400 outlets in the UK
- Most established since 2010:
- Small in geographical reach, collectively reach significant proportions of the population (14.9m in the UK)
- Financially precarious, often operated by just one individual; existence under continuous threat (e.g. van Kerkhoven & Bakker, 2014)



NEWS EVENTS ARMLEY BRAMLEY BURLEY CALVERLEY FARNLEY FARSLEY KIRKSTALL PUDSEY RODLEY WORTLEY

TRENDING NOW Swinnow dad launches messaging app to help non-verbal people text through symbols



Latest News

Member Sign in | Become a Member - no adverts |

NEWS SPORT MEMBERSHIP & SUBSCRIPTIONS NOTICES ADVERTISE ABOUT SPONSORED CONTENT



Black, Asian and ethnic minority history set to be added to new school curriculum

Friday, October 1, 2021

Wales is set to become the first country in the UK to introduce the teaching of Black, Asian and minority ethnic histories and experiences into the school curriculum.



Family pays tribute to cyclist, 76, killed in collision

Thursday, September 30, 2021

The family of a cyclist who was killed in a collision in Bedwas over the weekend have paid tribute to their "beloved husband, father and grandfather".

Search ...

Follow us:



Find out how the communities of Caerphilly County Borough get their names



VIEW

ALL



£25m Coastal Protection Scheme proposed for East Cardiff

10/09/2021



Tremorfa Pantry tries for Tombola World Record!

10/09/2021



Willows High School celebrated for helping others in the community

05/09/2021

Home / News



Council / Watchdog investigating complaint over handling of councillor's referral

23 minutes ago



Community / 'Public service was his life' - tributes paid to ex-councillor 'Slim Jim'

Brian Smith has written an obituary for Jim Irvine, who passed away last month

1 hour ago



Also in the news / COPE visit, assistive equipment amnesty, ferry disruption and more...

1 hour ago



Arts / Evelyn Glennie leads list of Mareel autumn shows



Information on COVID-19

GARRIOCK BROS. Ltd.
PLANT HIRE & TOOL CENTRE
Gremista Industrial Estate, Lerwick
Tel 01595 695 969
GET READY FOR AUTUMN AND WINTER



3. Studying local journalism entrepreneurs

- Research supported by British Academy and the Economic and Social Research Council
- 57 in-depth interviews with members of the Independent Community News Network
- Interviews carried out between July and September 2020 (with follow-ups in 2022, 2023 and 2024)
- Focus: How entrepreneurs establish their authority

-
- Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2024). Local knowledge and epistemic authority in community journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 12(1), 48-62
 - Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2023). Origin stories of local journalism entrepreneurs. *Journalism*, 24(10), 2118-2135.

The authority of local journalism entrepreneurs

- Establishment and maintenance of authority relies on:
 - Knowledge of the local context (epistemic authority)
 - Relationships of co-presence with the community (affective authority)
- Strong affective attachment to material spaces – and relationships and networks built within them
- Importance of a “sense of place” (Hess, 2013)
- Local journalists “come from and remain part of their local communities” (Meadows, 2013)





The authority of local news entrepreneurs

- I “just fancied doing something on my own. A bit like somebody being in a band who fancies a solo album” (Michael Casey, *Your Thurrock*)
 - And it turned out to be actually one of those life changing things...During my lunch breaks, I would walk around the city, and I thought what a beautiful place, it was just gorgeous with fields and trees. And I thought, this is where I want my children to go to school because we had two young children in quite a short space of time. And then I went home and told my wife one day, you know it's great I found this school, you really ought to think about moving to Wells. And so, we did, and we've lived here ever since. [...] (Andy Vallis, *Wells Voice*)
 - “You're part of the community that you're writing about, so you kind of know the issues as they come up, and you know what's important to people and that's what needs highlighting” (Kathy Bailes, *Isle of Thanet News*)
 - Importance of “sustained reciprocity” through relationships maintained over time (Lewis, Holton & Coddington, 2014)
-

The authority of local journalism entrepreneurs

- We also have a big market here every Thursday. I have a stall at the market, and I stand in the middle of the market, selling papers and you wouldn't believe the amount of leads that people bring up to me, that come and have a chat with me. I always like to make myself really accessible, I think that's absolutely key (Paul Henderson, *South Molton News*)



Conclusion: Understanding boutique media

- Shift from thinking about media as large-scale, corporate organisations
 - Methodological implications
- More personal, intimate and audience-oriented
- Importance of affective authority
- Boutique media require significant emotional labour on the part of journalists
- Small scale facilitates agility, innovation and fluidity
- But: Significant issues of financial sustainability, precarity and professionalism



Future research on boutique media

Forms

- Newsletters/blog posts (and other emergent/neglected genres/platforms)
- News micro-influencers (Park et al., 2021)
- Blurring boundaries: News-related content



Future research on boutique media

Practices and experiences

- Crafting an emotional appeal
- Business models
- Precarity among boutique media producers
- Boutique media ethics
 - Fact-checking
 - Professional standards
 - Use of AI
 - Sponsored content





Diolch am wrando
Thank you for listening