Spinning the Web: The influence of the Internet on the reporting of crime and criminal justice in traditional media

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the influence of the Internet on the reporting of crime and criminal justice in traditional media, focusing on the hitherto unexplored nexus of media, crime and the Internet. The Internet as a medium acknowledges no boundaries or geographical barriers and the implications of such globally unrestricted access are far wider than the mainstream consideration of several legal and ethical ramifications that accompany reportage on an international scale. This research represents a triangulated study, based on results obtained from an analysis of Internet crime sites, a process of elite interviewing of practising journalists and academics and demonstration case studies of three high-profile crimes.

This research suggests the Internet audience wants shorter, more concise crime stories at first point of access, focusing on the main or more sensational aspects, with further background and detail available through links to the requisite multi-media facilities. These multi-media facilities often offer far more graphic detail and specificity than is available in mainstream media, particularly when the latter, constrained by such restrictions as deadlines and space, are compelled to dispense with superfluous detail, with no reader access to further information. In addition, the media theories of agenda-setting and framing undergo a noticeable transition when applied to online reporting.

Crime reports on the Internet now complement the text of their narrative with audio and visual detail, bringing the audience ever closer to the scene of the crime and, in many instances, to the perpetrator and victim, again raising ethical issues and reopening the argument of the public’s right to know versus the individual’s desire for privacy.

In addition, the speed of transmitting information and the ability to update it almost instantaneously must give the Internet a competitive edge in the media focus on attracting an audience and meeting its needs. Yet, despite the widely held consensus that the Internet is free from control, this coverage encounters some degree of gate-keeping.

Exploration of available literature has complemented the study, which demonstrates conclusively the influence of the Internet on such journalistic elements as news values, legal and ethical issues, framing and agenda-setting in crime reporting in traditional media.
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Statement of original authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been submitted previously for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed:………………………………………

Date:………………………………………
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