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How new technologies are changing the way traditional media cover the news

- 'Live' crosses to news events

Internationally, television news has exploited new technology so we have the ability to cross "live" to any part of the world, no matter how remote. Battles between warring nations can be flashed into living rooms. Consequently, nations seek to exploit the coverage to gain an advantage. There have been occasions where media have accused combatants of staging events for cameras. Alternatively, they have excluded cameras to conceal their actions.

Domestically, 'live links' through terrestrial paths have allowed news to cover live, breaking events from the scene. Immediacy has become the most important goal of television news organizations. Critics say, with some justification, this is often at the expense of considered, reflective coverage. Certainly, the 'live' nature of news reporting is exploited by newsmakers such as politicians.

- Access to cheap satellite links

Access to cheap satellite paths now means that broadcasters can canvass the world for opinion. For a couple of thousand dollars, any network in Australia can speak at length with a newsmaker in, for example, London or New York. This adds another dimension to debates and issues hitherto the domain of radio or newspapers. The practice also ensures any debate about major issues in this country is informed by the broader international experience.

- Increasing use of the Internet

Use of the Internet for the distribution of images is in its infancy. It (along with video phone technology) has been used very successfully in the transfer of images (not in real time) from war zones and other remote locations, most notably in the recent military action in Iraq. But it is looking like it could replace the traditional satellite technology in the distribution of all information. Data lines will feed directly into caches and, ultimately, 'live' to air.

The impact, as in all technological developments, will be not only on the capacity to get pictures to 'air' more quickly from more remote locations, but also to reduce the cost of getting information from such locations that cost becomes less of an issue or no issue in story selection. Thus, even small broadcasters will have the capacity to stand beside the big players – BBC World, CNN etc – in the coverage of news from remote, expensive locations. This will produce diversity in coverage, often, by the way, forcing the mainstream to include the perspective of the cultures of others, including the protagonists, in their output. The entry of Al Jazeera into the reporting of the Middle East is a good example. And more small broadcasters are coming onto the scene each year.

- Video Journalism

In Australia, SBS has pioneered the use of small personal, video cameras that now come close to or meet broadcast specifications. The technology has allowed us to introduce video journalism – one person with a camera and a notebook computer with editing facilities – who can travel the world, unnoticed. SBS is able to report from parts of the world where we couldn't afford to go previously and where a full camera crew and reporter are either refused entry or have such a profile that individuals are intimidated and unwilling to speak with them.

- The demise of film in favour of tape

Film required processing and cumbersome editing. All networks in Australia used to have cut offs of between

two and three hours before "air" when it was no longer possible to cover stories for that night's news. Now with tape, links and satellites we shoot right up to "air" time and go "live" as it happens. That's all happened in the past 20 years.

How mainstream media are going to be transformed by new media

- Work Practices and Multi-skilling

Broadcasters are becoming multimedia professionals, becoming more multi-skilled, creating and delivering content to many different media... outlets... platforms... devices... whatever jargon you prefer. This process is already well under way in SBS. News journalists working in a traditional TV newsroom were tasked to supply additional text for the web. The same journalists are now reading five minute news bulletins specifically produced for the SBS World News website.

- The Growth of an Active Audience

The web has created a discriminating, choice-hungry generation of media consumers who are used to "browsing" media, not devoting large amounts of time to passive viewing or reading. There will always be a huge demand for couch-potato television ("just sit back and be entertained") but for a growing proportion of the time, audiences expect to do more than channel surf. There has been a huge increase in the use of SMS messaging stretching beyond person-to-person communication with its incorporation in TV shows for audience 'votes' or feedback. Delivering this level of choice and control to viewers, in a cost effective way, is perhaps the biggest challenge for traditional broadcasters.