



Manchester  
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**aAh!**

# **A Critical project with reflection on my time as an editor on aAh! Magazine.**

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# Letter from the Editor: an Introduction

‘From its inception, the magazine industry has been characterised by change, with that change always producing a better and stronger industry’ (Baird and Click, 1980: 1) and in recent years, there have been some radical shifts in journalism that has meant the field has changed forever. A significant rise in digital technologies has provided new and innovative ways of promoting content and engaging with the target audience but it has also meant that all roles in the publishing process have had to adapt and/or change, particularly that of the editor. Having spent almost a year working as an editor and contributor on Manchester Metropolitan University’s aAh! magazine, I was able to experience the editorial process first-hand as well as discover whether or not the role of the editor is still relevant in a society of contemporary magazine publishing and whether or not the role is outdated and unnecessary. As well as providing an academic analysis of the changing role of the editor, I will provide a reflection of my time working on the magazine with examples of work that I produced and link these to my analysis of the role.

# aAh! Magazine and the Beginning of the Process

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aAh! Magazine is Manchester Metropolitan University's arts and culture magazine. It covers everything from news stories, both global and local, to music/game and theatre reviews. The publication has grown over the years from a small group of students writing book reviews, to a magazine that publishes online daily and produces three print versions every year. All contributions to the magazine are made by students and submissions are encouraged from all across the university, not just those in the arts and humanities department which utilizes interdisciplinary networks and bridges all faculty structures. From September 2019 until the submission of this project and end of my final year at the university, I took on the role of one of the many editors that work on aAh! magazine as well as making several contributions to the online publication. Having always been fascinated by journalism and the publishing world, as well as gaining some experience in my time studying the Multimedia Journalism side of my course, I was particularly fascinated about the role of the editor in a magazine publishing context and if their responsibilities have changed with our society living in such a digitised age.

Taking on the role of an editor meant that in the beginning, I had to decide which area of the magazine I would like to focus on and what I would be the most passionate about in order to make the most out of my experience. Having always had a passion for music, culture and arts I decided to help alongside those areas of the magazine as I felt that would be what I'd excel in most and where I could contribute the most knowledge to.

Despite studying Multimedia Journalism and also writing content for small blogs and so forth in the past, my experience working with a team of journalists and the environment surrounding that was something that was unfamiliar to me so it was important from the offset that I had clear goals for the project in which I would be able to broadcast a wide range of skills at the end.

The first meeting with magazine coordinator Natalie Carragher allowed me to set out my goals for the project and I came to the conclusion that I wanted to create my own content for the magazine through the medium of reviews. In terms of editing, I did not want to limit myself to just one area so decided I would edit wherever I was needed rather than just one particular category. Choosing to edit throughout the different sections of the magazine meant that I was able to gain a broader understanding of the editorial role and the many different experiences that they take on during the editing process.

Despite choosing the music and culture side of the magazine, I did want to produce some work that was different to what I am used to and create content that I haven't had much experience in order to build my portfolio. This would also mean I would not only learn new editing skills but also new skills in terms of creating content.

One of the first steps was to explore the magazine's

website as well as looking through previous print issues in order to familiarise myself with design and the house style of the magazine. Having paid particular attention to the music and culture sections of the website, I began generating ideas of what I wanted to contribute to and improvements I wanted to make in terms of the content that was being posted. Consequently, I set-up t an account with both Trello and WordPress - two main media platforms used by the magazine members to create an efficient and organised editing space for both contributors and editors.

Trello, a collaboration website, allows a group of people to organise their project, comparing itself to a 'white board filled with lists of sticky notes' (What is Trello? - Trello Help, 2017). aAh! uses a Trello board to separate the different sections of the magazine so that editors can add their own briefs and contributors can mark which one's they're working on and what is a work in progress. This was not a tool I was familiar with before joining the magazine, so the first meeting was a chance for me to familiarise myself with the site, gaining new skills in the process.

Morrish and Bradshaw describe taking on the role of the editor as 'a hugely creative process' (Bradshaw and Morrish, 2012) which became clear to me when first working on aAh! as an expectation of the magazine is that the editors also produce their own pieces for the magazine. It is important that, as well as being able to edit others work, editors are able to input their own pieces in order to keep a consistent flow of a wide range of content in the magazine. Being able to manage my own content as well as edit other peoples was something that was challenging at first but soon became much easier to manage once utilised my organisation and time management skills.

The first article I wrote as an editor was a review of the theatre production of Fleabag by Phoebe Waller-Bridge. I used Trello to get the idea for this as it had been listed underneath the entertainment brief section. I had only written music related review articles before, so I felt it was a good first step to create something different. I saw the production and had my review written by the next day, meaning it was able to be published quickly and was still relevant to the audience.

The process I used to create the theatre review was very similar to the one I was used to when creating music-based reviews. Firstly, I did some research surrounding Phoebe Waller-Bridge, the TV show adaptation and the play itself in order to create the introduction. I used the inverted pyramid structure when writing the first couple of paragraphs. This structure states that the most important information should furthest up in the article, with other, perhaps less significant, details in later paragraphs. Despite the structure usually being used for news articles, not review features, I felt it was appropriate to use in this case. Using the inverted pyramid was helpful when writing the review as it 'allows the audience to read the most crucial details quickly so they can decide whether to continue or stop reading.' (Roberts, n.d.)

Three Emmy's, a BAFTA and hundreds of rave reviews later and Phoebe Waller-Bridge has brought her hit production of Fleabag back to its roots on stage and it's just as good, if not better than the TV adaptation.

Fleabag is currently being shown in cinemas around Manchester thanks to National Theatre Live. NT Live film live performances of theatre productions and stream them to cinemas across the UK and beyond, allowing audiences from all across the world to experience the best in British theatre from their local cinema.

Everything but the actual content of the play is minimalistic, the stage layout is simply a chair in the middle of an otherwise empty stage and the only person the audience sees through the whole production is writer and main protagonist, Phoebe Waller-Bridge. And that's the beauty of the show, it doesn't need a big over-exaggerated production or a star-studded cast for it to be a more than enjoyable watch. Waller-Bridge's impressions of other characters in the story are, in fact, some of the funniest moments of the play, particularly her pursed lipped imitation of 'Rodent', a man she meets on the tube with a "vanishing mouth".

The monologue performance follows Waller-Bridge in character as a young woman trying to navigate her way through life while having to deal with the distractions of her difficult family, a failing business and many often-unsuccessful sexual relationships. Fleabag, which debuted in 2013, remains current and the elements explored in the show are far from dated. The show provides a subtle exploration of the pressures of being a modern woman, with worries about being open about sexual desire and if that makes for being a "bad feminist".

Despite the TV show being based on the play, there are still differences between the two which make for a slightly different viewing experience. There's no breaking of the fourth wall like in the TV show, instead Waller-Bridge addresses the audience as if she's having a catch up with an old friend, giving the play a more personal feel. One of the most memorable moments of the theatre production that wasn't included in the TV adaptation was the way in which Hilary the guinea pig meets her fate, which probably would have caused havoc for OFCOM complaints. Guinea pig lovers beware.

The dark, witty humour is present throughout the play, something that Fleabag is well known and loved for. Phoebe Waller-Bridge creates just the right amount of balance in the production with her light hearted funny accounts but also the inclusion of darker, more poignant stories surrounding grief and the suicide of her best friend, Boo, and the reasons behind it.

Watching Fleabag on stage confirmed just why it has been so successful since its debut at Edinburgh Fringe six years ago. Phoebe Waller Bridge shows her excellence as both a writer and actor/performer, having the audience in stitches throughout with her quick wit, excellent comedic timing and PG anecdotes. Be sure to catch the NT Live production of Fleabag showing in cinemas across Manchester until October 15th.

# Fleabag NT Live: A Review

As published on aAh Magazine's website



# The role of the editor and t

**D**EFINING the role of a magazine editor isn't always black and white as 'the essence of the editor's job is always changing' (Bradshaw and Morrish, 2012: 3). However, the core skills that are needed to be a magazine editor are something that generally do not change, no matter how much they need to be adapted.

Editors always need to be aware of their target audience and what their readers may want from the magazine when deciding what kind of content to produce and publish. In the book *Magazine Publishing: In Print and Online*, John Morrish and Paul Bradshaw identify this crucial role of the editor: 'knowing our readers and their interests has always been fundamental to editorship.' (Bradshaw and Morrish, 2012: 3) No matter how much the editor's role itself undergoes transformations, expert knowledge of target audience is undoubtedly key to the success of a magazine.

As aAh! is a hyperlocal student community-based magazine, reporting on local news as well as issues that affect students is one of the largest roles the magazine has to play. As Franklin McNair argues in his book *News and Journalism in the UK*: 'Local newspapers should offer independent and critical commentary on local issues, make local elites accountable and provide a forum for the expression of local views on issues of community concern.' (McNair, 1994) This suggests that hyperlocal reporting is generally trusted more and valued higher than the content produced by larger publications because of the closeness in proximity. Having this knowledge of aAh!'s audience has helped inform my role as an editor by ensuring I always had the readers in the back of my mind when editing/creating content in order to ensure it was what they would want from their student magazine.

When asked about her experiences as an editor, Editor-in-chief of *Good Housekeeping* magazine, Jane Francisco said: 'The most important part of my job has really never changed: I oversee a team whose top priority is creating the most compelling, inspiring, useful, authoritative, meaningful and engaging content to address the needs and wants of our extensive audience ... regardless of where or how they consume our content. That said, how we do this has changed a great deal, particularly recently'

(Francisco, 2016). Creating new, fresh briefs for their team and making sure they are relevant to what the target audience wants to read is something that will always be a relevant and very important skill, whether it's for online or print. Having to create these briefs for others had an impact on me as an editor as I had to take on a new leadership role in which I directed others, something I was not used to before.

Crucially, editors must have empathy with their readers in order to understand the audience's interests so they can retain their readership as the editor's 'most important relationship with the reader' (Bradshaw and Morrish, 2012: 29). Having the skill of empathy 'enables the editor to develop the vision and editorial direction of the magazine' (Personal Qualities Needed for a Magazine Editor, n.d.) which was something I experienced during my time working as an editor, particularly when working with the rest of the team of editors where we had to collaborate to pick what content would be most suitable for our readers. This was something that was most apparent when working on the print version of the magazine. Creating the call for submissions for the Food issue meant that as a team we had to create a selection of article ideas that would be appropriate for the magazine's student audience as well as having a wide variety of stories related to food whilst still being relevant to the readership. We decided to cover topics such as the environment with a feature on the university's vegetarian café, health/wellbeing with a piece on CBD use in food and gave contributors an opportunity to showcase their creative writing skills by including some poetry. By choosing such a range of features, we were certain there would be something for the majority of, if not all, readers.

As well as having an in depth understanding of their reader, it is important that editors have a knowledge of news values in order to create content that their audience want to read. When working with content, whether it be creating briefs, commissioning features or creating their own articles, editors must always be aware of news values in order for their readers to stay interested in the magazine's content. A list of 12 news values was originally created by Johan Galtung and Marie Holmboe Ruge in 1965 and they were initially intended for the coverage of international events

but are now often used by many media analysts. These 12 values are: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons and reference to something negative. (Galtung and Ruge, 1965: 65-71) However, these original news values were revisited in 2001 by Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill as they claimed the 1965 list often did not apply to a contemporary world of news, so they created a revised set of news values that can be applied to today's society as 'some of Galtung and Ruge's factors remain resonant today and can usefully be incorporated, if worded slightly differently.' (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001: 17) Harcup and O'Neill claim that: 'Although there are exceptions to every rule, we have found that news stories must generally satisfy one or more of the following requirements to be selected: the power elite, celebrity, entertainment, surprise, bad news, good news, magnitude, relevance, follow-up, organisation's agenda.' (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001: 18-19)

Having a knowledge and understanding of news values both old and new were essential when working on aAh! magazine. When creating briefs for other contributors, it was important that I remained aware of what was relevant to the target audience of the MMU student community. It was also crucial for me to remember these values when creating my own content. For example, when creating my piece, *The Problem with Period Poverty*, I made sure that the feature was covered by at least one news value in order to attract the most readers I could. Having researched the concept of news values beforehand, I wrote the article aiming to cover the values of bad news, magnitude and relevance. In their list of contemporary news values, Harcup and O'Neill describe bad news as 'stories with negative overtones such as conflict or tragedy', magnitude as 'stories which are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact' and relevance as 'stories about issues, groups and nations perceived to be relevant to the audience.' (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001: 18-19) By using the angle of period poverty during a global pandemic, as it is classed as bad news, I was able to portray the magnitude of the situation in something that was so relevant to not only the target readership,

# he skills that are needed...

but the entire world, as everyone has been effected by the Covid-19 pandemic. I felt that I produced a feature that had a significant impact on the readership, something which would not have been as easy had I not researched the concept of news values beforehand.

*Find this article (as published on the aAh! magazine website) on page 10.*

Being able to manage a team of writers, photographers and anyone else that may contribute is another key skill required to be an editor, as Ernst Jacobi says... 'hand-holding, fostering, pruning, snipping, squelching and encouraging have always been the true functions of the editor' (Jacobi, 1985). The use of horticultural terminology used in this quote from Jacobi suggests that the editor has to manage their team whilst simultaneously helping them to progress and better themselves in terms of their contributions. By doing this, the product they are responsible for creating is able to grow and advance. High quality management comes from organisation and time management, whether that be for themselves or implementing methods for this onto their team. This also includes harnessing the creativity of a team, knowing each individual's strengths and weaknesses in order for them to produce the best content possible that reflects the magazine in the correct way.

Organisation and time management are also two highly important skills throughout this process, as Rowena Ferguson says in *Editing the Small Magazine*: 'nothing will foul the editorial routine as much as missed deadlines.' (Ferguson, 1976: 11) Not being able to meet deadlines as well as not setting reasonable targets for others to reach would mean that the work being produced for the magazine would not be consistent or produced to the best quality that is expected as the house standard. As a lot of the content I produced for the site was music reviews of gigs, albums and singles, it was crucial that I wrote and published these within a couple of days after the event otherwise it may be seen as irrelevant further down the line and would not be of interest to as many people so long after the event had happened/the music had been released. More specifically, when creating a review of a gig in December, I had to manage the deadline for this as well as my

university deadlines as I had a couple of essays that were due in the same week. This involved delegating my time appropriately so neither pieces of work suffered.

Perhaps one of the most obvious yet most important editorial skills is a good grasp on language and grammar. Without this, the publication is at risk of looking unprofessional as well as ineligible which can have a devastating effect on a magazine's reputation. This attention to detail is crucial to the image of a magazine. As an English student, the literary and linguistic transferrable skills that my degree have equipped me with have proved invaluable in terms of editing others work in order to make them grammatically and linguistically correct.

From an editorial perspective, I was very aware of the type of audience the magazine appeals to. Being a student-based cultural magazine meant that the music section of aAh! was a huge part of the publication as music is generally a large part of many students lives. I felt it was important for me to create a new element to the magazine as it was something I had wanted to do since the beginning of the process. Combining my knowledge of the readership as well as my ambition to create something new for the magazine lead to 'Track/Album of the Week'.

It is important that editors are constantly able to think of new ideas in order to keep the magazine's content fresh, keep the readers interested and increase their readership. This is also a vital skill in non-student magazine publishing as new and exciting content helps publications to stand out from their competition. Whilst working on aAh! magazine, I decided that the music section of the website needed something new as the majority of it was live reviews and there wasn't much variation in content. Working with Georgina Hurdsfield, the head music editor, we came up with the 'Track/Album of the Week' section in which contributors could talk about their favourite song or album of the past week and have it published on the website. I felt this was something that would attract readers as it would be an opportunity for them to discover new music.

Creating 'Track/Album of the Week' also introduced me to another

crucial skill that an editor must possess in their role, communication. PR companies often email the magazine with examples of music they would like to be reviewed and it is vital that communication is kept up with these companies in order to preserve the magazine's reputation. If communication with other outlets is poor, there is a risk of potentially losing content opportunities which reflects badly on the editorial team.

*Find this article as published on the aAh! magazine website on page 14.*

Taking on the role of an editor during my time working on aAh! magazine meant that I was able to learn about and apply a lot of the core skills required to be an editor to my work. As the magazine has been running for years, there was no need for me to establish a target audience for the magazine, but I was wary that the content I had to produce must be suitable for their readership. aAh! produces stories for the student community, specifically those of MMU which means that all stories produced have to be relevant to and in the interest of students at MMU, whether its news or culture related. It was important for me as a new member of the team to keep creating content that students would be interested in reading. Another core skill that was vital to my time on the magazine was managing the balance between an independent leadership role and working as a team, as before this experience I was more of an independent worker, it was vital that I began to work better in a team in order for the publishing process to run smoothly. I did this by contributing more to our editorial meetings when I felt necessary, as well as listening to others and ensuring that the magazine was a combination of not only the editor's ideas, but also ensured that the contributors had an input as well. This is important to the success of a magazine as an editor 'is only as good as the magazine team.' (It will take teamwork to reach the top, 2008)

It is clear that the magazine industry has undergone many changes but generally, the role of the editor and the skills that are required are still extremely relevant to the publishing process. I experienced these skills first-hand during my time working with aAh! magazine and was able to use them in a way that helped the magazine and benefitted the content that was being produced and published.



# ...and how have they changed? The effect of

**A**CCORDING to sociologist Manuel Castells, changes and advances in technology have led to a new model of societal structure that he calls the 'information age.' Traditionally, Castells argues that: 'mass industrial society was predominately structured around large scale, vertical production organization and hierarchal state institutions.' (Castells, 2009: 22) The new 'information age' is a society which is heavily electronically based and relies on digitally processed information. This is particularly apparent in the field of journalism from the fall in print sales in recent years along with the rise of online publications.

Sales of print magazines have dropped significantly, particularly in the last few years. Between 2011 and 2018, print sales of magazines in the UK dropped by almost 450 million (Print magazine sales volume UK 2011-2018 | Statista, 2019) and in the same amount of time, online news consumption increased by 27% (Online news consumption Great Britain 2007-2018 | Statista, 2019). Despite the core skills needed for the role generally staying the same, this fall in print publications and subsequent rise in online journalism has meant that editors are now having to take on new skills and challenges within their role.

The rise of digital journalism has had lasting and irreversible effect on the journalism and magazine publishing industry. Editorial Director of Alphr.com, Dennis Publishing, Ian Betteridge said that: 'a journalist has to find stories, research keywords, look at whether the story will work on social media, write the story, do tweets, social posts... and much more. I'd say that a modern journalist will only spend 30 per cent of the time writing – the rest is promoting, researching, content strategy and more.' (Betteridge, 2016) Changing roles of the editor are important as traditionally, the editor's primary role was to read and offer feedback. However, in a more contemporary digital society, editors are expected to collaborate across different departments and teams. This is key in keeping the voice and branding consistent across many platforms.' (The Role of Editors in a Changing Publishing Industry, 2018)

Arguably the main and most important new skill that has been introduced to the role over the last few years is having the ability to use social media platforms in a way that benefits their publication and readership. In a world where more than 75 percent of journalists say they feel more pressure now to think about their story's potential to get shared on social platforms' (Edelman, 2015) it is important that editors have a strong knowledge of social media. This includes being able to organise digital news feeds, knowing about advanced search techniques and being able to optimise content

n.d.) This knowledge of the law as well as ethical codes will always be relevant in journalism, whether it's print or online.

Along with an increase in online journalism, there has also been a rise in freelance journalism in recent years. As defined in Dictionary.com, a freelancer is 'a person who works as a writer, designer, performer, or the like, selling work or services by the hour, day, job, etc., rather than working on a regular salary basis for one employer.' (Dictionary.com, n.d.) Freelancing in journalism has risen significantly over the past two decades, with the number of freelance journalists in the UK increasing 67 per cent from 2000 to 2015. (National Council for the Training of Journalists, 2016)

Freelance journalists often work independently online and submit their content to whichever publication they feel would be most suitable for them, meaning they do not work under an editor. This means that the need for editors to create briefs for their team is made redundant, however, most publications do not work on a freelance only contribution basis and still have a primary team which work with briefs from the editor. Editors are also responsible for choosing what freelance content their publication produces as well as editing their work. If freelancing continues to rise, it could have a small effect on the roles that the editor plays but currently, there is no damaging or lasting effect on the role.

It is important to note these changes when working on a publication that operates predominantly online, such as aAh! magazine. From personal experience, despite having its advantages and disadvantages, a rise in digital journalism is generally a positive one. As aAh! only publishes three print issues a year, having a strong presence online is vital for the publication to survive and also means that the audience are still able to access the magazine's content easily as well as regularly. Having an online content management system in WordPress for the writing process was also an advantage as it meant it was easily accessible anywhere at any time. Without the rise of digital journalism, aAh! magazine would not be as big of a publication and would also mean the variety and quantity of content would be nowhere near as large if there were only print magazines issued without an online presence.

Despite being aware of the challenges that face editors caused by digital journalism, I felt that during my time working on aAh! magazine, it was nothing but an advantage. Having to create a balance between my work as an editor and my university work meant that sometimes I was not able to attend team meetings but because of the team's internet presence, it was still



for their social platforms as integrating news flow with social media is crucial for a publication to survive in today's world.

Clearly, being a journalist in today's society often involves much more than it used to before the rise of the internet and that writing is

# a digitised society

no longer the only fundamental skill needed when creating content. Not only does this effect the role of the editor, but the entire publishing process has had to adapt to this change. The nature of the working process has become a much faster procedure, writers are now able to collate information quickly and much more efficiently through the internet as opposed to more traditional methods of newsgathering such as telephone conversations or in-person interviews. Journalists are now able to 'find a multiplicity of perspectives and a library of available knowledge that provides the context for stories' (Krotoski, 2011) which is seen as a positive change as stories can have more depth in a much quicker time. The speeding up of the writing process is something that editors have also had to adapt to, as the number of briefs they produce increases as the volume of stories being published also increases.

However, the rise of online journalism does come with its implications. The increase means an abundance of content and organisations that publish online rely heavily on their readership to share and spread their articles which means in the majority of cases, it is only the largest and most well-known publications that get their content across to large audiences. This means that independent and hyperlocal publications often find it difficult to get their content to a wider audience which may affect them negatively as 'the seemingly unstoppable rise of big tech and independent voices being squashed by commercial ownership.' (Krotoski, 2011) The rise of digital journalism also creates problems between the publication and their readership as it has resulted in a declining trust in the media, with 77% of British adults claiming they have little to no trust in journalists anymore. (Walker, 2018) A loss of trust has come from rising media bias, fake news and unreliable sources which have all become more prominent online. Not only are the publications themselves affected, but the editor also experiences some limitations. For example, some may argue that that online journalism has rendered the role of the editor to be almost obsolete as anyone can publish their content online, some may argue that there is no longer any need for an editorial position.

Digital journalism has meant there has had to be a change in a lot of the areas of the writing and publishing process, but there have also been roles that have stayed the same. For example, editors are still responsible for creating briefs for their team and editing/re-writing articles wherever necessary. It is also invaluable to have an accurate and up to date knowledge of legal and ethical codes as they are 'a complex and fluid series of decisions that define the boundaries of acceptable behaviour.' (The Role of the Law and Journalism,

possible for me make contributors aware of any briefs I had created through either Facebook or Trello. Being able to share articles on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were also a big advantage as it meant our content was able to reach a bigger readership. For example, as the aAh! Twitter

account shared each story and the author retweeted it from their personal account, the content is being shared to much more than their primary audience of just MMU students. Whilst editing the content for the print version of the Food issue, I found the internet to be an invaluable help as Natalie (head editor) sent an email with a link to a Google Drive that contained all of the submissions that needed working on. This meant that as a team, we were able to work on the pieces in our own time so didn't have to make a time where everyone was free to edit pieces together, something that is particularly difficult when the majority of editors are students with different and busy schedules. The use of a Facebook group for all of the editors was also a huge help for our team and meant that matters could be communicated with quicker correspondence than through email or in person.

A rise of new technologies has always come attached with predictions and misconceptions about what their influence on society may be. Vincent Mosco argues that the telegraph, telephone, radio and television were all surrounded by myths that they would 'bring about the end of history, the end of geography and the end of politics.' (Mosco, 2002:11) These inventions did change the world dramatically but was nowhere near as damaging as some first thought and obviously didn't see the end of history, geography or politics. This argument is applicable to the internet and the rise in digital technologies, as some may argue that it has had a damaging and irreversible effect on journalism. However, living in a digitised society in the 21st century is unavoidable and something that journalism has had to adapt to, in a way that is not particularly damaging but has meant that the audience of news consumers has been widened and presented more news at people's fingertips. This is relevant in terms of the editor as it proves there is still room for the role, despite the changes that have occurred.

Obviously, the editor has had to change and adjust because of the effect of a digitised society and will probably always experience some of these adjustments in their role. However, this is not something that completely out-dates the role and from personal experience, publications need an editor in order for them to function smoothly and successfully. Being able to adapt to journalism in an online world is arguably one of the most important skills of being an editor today and ultimately means that the publication is able to survive against its competitors in the field. As Graeme Harper argues in *A Companion to Creative Writing*, 'the combination of skills, an ability to work with people... allied with attributes such as creativity and inspiration, enthusiasm and enterprise, will be one of the reasons why the role will remain key to publishing output in the future.' (Harper, 2013)



Periods don't  
stop for  
pandemics



The Red Box Project

Image courtesy of The Red Box Project

FreePeriods



# The Problem with Period Poverty

**B**ritain in 2020. Over 14 million people are living in poverty and struggling to make ends meet. A problem that contributes to this statistic is period poverty. Period poverty is defined as being unable to access sanitary products and having poor knowledge of menstruation often due to financial constraints.

With one in ten girls between the ages of 14 and 21-years-old stating that they have been unable to afford sanitary products at some point in their life and over a quarter of women missing work or school because of their period, the problem in the UK is a lot bigger than most people might first think.

Charities across the country are helping in the fight to combat period poverty, including Every Month a Manchester-based charity tackling the problem across Greater Manchester.

Speaking to Isobel Southgate, a volunteer with the charity, about their background, she said: "It all started from our founders Rosy's mum's living room in 2016, she would make period packs and give them to her local foodbanks. She soon realised how severe period poverty was in Greater Manchester and made every month even bigger.

"By July 2019 Every Month became a registered charity! We have over 80 volunteers and a group of trustees. Most volunteers are students or have full-time jobs, so do Every Month alongside that."

The team at Every Month create around 800 packs of menstrual products a month to be distributed to food banks and other services to reach those living in poverty across Greater Manchester. These packs include applicator and non-applicator tampons, pads and a bar of chocolate. Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, the whole country is on lockdown. But period poverty is most definitely

not. Isobel illustrated the strain that Every Month is feeling due to the global crisis.

"Covid-19 has so many negative effects on small charities like us. People's fundraising events have been cancelled and people can no longer collect donations for us anymore. But a few good things have come out of it, we held a virtual quiz the other night and we raised over £500 which was just amazing.

"People are being so kind at the moment and donating to us which is so important because so many more people are being pushed into poverty due to sickness, insecure work and businesses closing and laying people off."

In spite of the negative impact that Covid-19 is having on organisations such as Every Month, they ensure they are working harder than ever to distribute their packs to those that need them.

Isobel explained: "We have a few volunteers who will be safely making the packs at home and distributing them to food banks and other services, so people will still get what they need! Period poverty doesn't stop during a pandemic, so we won't either."

At the beginning of April, the Department for Education announced that its free period products scheme will continue throughout the pandemic. This scheme is in place for schools and colleges to apply for free period products for their students and charities are urging that these institutions continue placing orders for this and take the right steps to ensure the products are made available in the safest way possible.

Steps are being taken by the British government to help



tackle period poverty. In February 2020, the Scottish government announced that it would become the first nation in the world to provide free menstrual products at designated public places such as youth clubs, community centres, and pharmacies.

In March 2020, Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced that the 5% Tampon Tax that is placed on menstrual products will be scrapped at the end of the year across the country but did not mention any plans to provide free products to those in need.

Despite there being some progress made in the fight against period poverty, some may argue that it is still not enough. Isobel from Every Month said: “Obviously, the abolition of the Tampon Tax is a huge victory for everyone that campaigned for it and no one should pay a luxury tax for essentials. But more needs to be done by the government.

“The government needs to give free provision beyond just schools, so give free periods products to universities, workplaces, hospitals, and public buildings and distribute them to private spheres – so that people have them in the home too.”

The stigma surrounding periods is also another huge contributor to those that are affected by period poverty, particularly young girls going through puberty who may feel embarrassed by their period and struggle to ask for help. Isobel explained that one of the charity’s aims is to help defeat this stigma.

She adds, “As a charity, we are also committed to breaking down taboos surrounding menstruation and poverty. No one should be ashamed to have their period, and no one should not be able to afford to have their period. We campaign to bring free and accessible access to menstrual products for people experiencing poverty in Greater Manchester.”

Isobel also made it clear that period poverty does not discriminate on age, having worked closely with those affected: “Anyone can be pushed into poverty at any stage in their life, and period products aren’t cheap.”

Someone that knows all too well the strains of period poverty is Fashion Design student Georgia, who grew up ashamed and embarrassed of her period.

“I remember when I first started my period when I was around 13, I used toilet paper and old socks and basically anything I could get my hands on to use in place of pads and tampons. It seems ridiculous when I look back on it, nearly ten years later, but at the time I didn’t know how to ask for help.”

“I was raised by a single dad for most of my life and both of my siblings are boys, we were your typical working-class family and far from well off. I think my household being so male-centric was a big factor in the shame I used to feel surrounding my period. Even though I knew it’s completely normal and natural, I felt so embarrassed.”

Georgia is one of the 49 percent of girls throughout the country who has missed one or more days of school due to their period. She said:

“Throughout my early teenage years I must have made up hundreds of excuses to miss school because I didn’t have the right supplies when I was on my period, I undoubtedly missed out on a lot of key learning even if it was only a couple of days here and there.”

People like Georgia that have experienced period poverty first-hand agree more than anyone that more needs to be done to help those that are struggling.

“The stigma surrounding periods is a problem when it comes to period poverty, of course, but this could massively be helped and even stopped by the government providing free products. Feminine hygiene products are so unnecessarily expensive.

“Growing up working-class also meant that my family had basically no disposable income, so I felt bad if I asked for tampons or pads as it would put a strain on our budget. I think what Scotland has done is amazing and will be a lifeline to so many people. Hopefully England, Wales and Northern Ireland will follow suit soon.”

Georgia, like Isobel, worries what effect Covid-19 will have on those experiencing period poverty and the charities that help them. “Charities like Every Month and The Red Box Project are amazing; I wish I’d known about them when I was younger. The work they do is so important, and I know these charities rely on the public for donations of cash and supplies. We’ve never experienced something like Coronavirus before so it’s definitely worrying how smaller charities will survive throughout the pandemic.”

Usually, Every Month hold ‘packing parties’ where volunteers from the public can get together and make the period packs that can then go on to be distributed to food banks across Greater Manchester. With the current ongoing situation, this not possible and they are instead asking for cash donations as people are currently unable to donate physical products.

Period poverty unfortunately remains a massive problem across the country, perhaps now more than ever. It is clear that the fight to tackle this is far from over.

# The Social Media Influence

**I**N January 2019, it was found that around 45 million British people use at least one of the social networking sites that are available to us and that around 67% of the British population were active social media users. (Digital in the UK, 2019) In a society that is so centred around the internet and digital technologies, editors not being able to use social media platforms efficiently and professionally can have a detrimental effect on a publication. Knowing how to optimise articles for websites such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram is vital for many reasons, whether it be for increasing readership or notifying the current audience of new content. Despite most magazines having a specialised team for dealing with social media, it is still a crucial skill for an editor to possess because of how prominent these platforms are in the modern magazine publishing industry. A rise in the use of social media has also meant that journalists are now no longer the gatekeepers of news.

In the 2015 Edelman Media Forecast: Storytelling in the age of Social News Consumption, it was stated that: ‘to make their stories more shareable, journalists are infusing their stories with five key ingredients: video/images, brevity, localisation, more use of human voice and a proximity to trending topics.’

(Edelman, 2015)

Using social media as a way to increase readership is one of their most common uses in magazine publishing, as Kris Boyle and Carol Zuegner argue in *Magatweets: A Content Analysis of Magazines’ Use of Twitter*, ‘as magazines seek to increase their digital readership, social media tools such as Twitter send readers to their websites’ (Boyle and Zuegner, n.d.). Twitter is, arguably, one of the better platforms for publications to get their articles spread, posting links to their articles on their website which drives website traffic and ultimately the amount of views they will get. Twitter is seen to be better than other social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram as it is more public and easier to share things using the Retweet function than sharing things on other platforms. It is also a social network that focuses on people’s interests rather than friends like both Facebook and Instagram do. Twitter is also one of the best ways that journalists acquire information they would not otherwise be able to obtain, whether it’s local or global. This includes things like tracking down sources and getting a more in-depth perception on stories.

Optimising articles for social media through the use of hashtags is another



skill that editors have to learn. Knowing when is appropriate to use them and being able to avoid the vague, irrelevant hashtags means that users will be able to find the content they want to read quickly and access it easily. Avoiding spam and hash tagging every word is also important for editors to know as it could damage the professionalism of their publication and how it is perceived by the public. The use of hashtags is most effective on Twitter and Instagram as users are able to search and follow hashtags that interest them.

Some may argue that the use of Twitter by journalists isn't necessarily always a good thing. In a study conducted by Shannon McGregor and Logan Molyneux of The University of Utah and Temple University respectively, they suggested that: 'Twitter's growing centrality in the news process warrants greater scrutiny from journalists and scholars.' (McGregor and Molyneux, 2018) They argue that journalists can often become reliant on Twitter for their content and may focus on what is being shared on the social media platform rather than what their readers may actually be interested in. The researchers however did note a positive in using Twitter for creating content, in that sources no longer come from traditional gatekeepers but journalists now have

a broadening range of sources, they say the benefit 'may be that journalists could come to rely less on official or elite sources, and begin to include a wider range of news sources coming through social media.' (McGregor and Molyneux, 2018)

Before working with aAh! magazine, I was well aware of the importance and significance of social media platforms in journalism as I had learnt about them in several modules on the Multimedia Journalism side of my university course. I was very confident I knew the best way to help aAh! with promoting their content as well as improving their already excellent online presence. Having personal Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts meant that I was able to share articles written on the magazine website to a new audience that they may not usually have reached. For example, as the aAh! Twitter account has around 2,000 followers but only a couple that were mutual with my personal account, sharing content from the magazine meant that it was reaching a whole new audience of approximately 1,800 more people that follow my personal account. This was important for me as an editor as I felt it was a big part of my role to promote content as well as encouraging more readers to visit the magazine's website.

# Album of the Week

## The Slow Rush by Tame Impala

Despite the fact that Tame Impala's new record *The Slow Rush* is their first offering to the music world in five years, synth maestro Kevin Parker has been nothing short of busy.

From working with the likes of Lady Gaga, Travis Scott and Mark Ronson to headlining Coachella, it's any wonder that Parker had the time to create a new addition to his discography.

'One More Year' is a sublime opener for the album with its steady beat and hazy synthesizer riff, the track sets up the rest of the record and gives the listener a taste of what's to follow.

Upon first listen, second track 'Instant Destiny' feels like it would be a more appropriate fit on Tame Impala's 2015 album *Currents*. It's only after hearing the rest of what the album has to offer that it feels a little underwhelming and almost an attempt at playing it safe, which is a surprise from a man like Kevin Parker who's musical style is constantly evolving.

Lead single 'Borderline' is the first song on the album that represents Parker's ever-changing and experimental ways. Despite it being a reworked version of the single that was released last May, the track still combines melancholy lyrics with an upbeat almost pop-like melodies that work excellently together.

The rest of the singles, 'Lost in Yesterday' 'Posthumous Forgiveness' and non-album track 'Patience' do an excellent job of showcasing the range of sounds

within the album and they might just be the best thing about it.

'Breathe Deeper' begins with a delve into elements of West Coast hip-hop and is followed by a progression into 80's synth-pop. A combination that doesn't sound right on paper but works almost perfectly to create one of the highlights of the album.

Penultimate track 'Glimmer' wouldn't be out of place in an '90s Ibiza club with its electro tone but it doesn't set the album up for a strong finish and is almost forgettable.

'One More Hour' is the album's grand finale that is enough to forgive Parker for its predecessor track and is the perfect mirror to the opening track with its use of powerful yet hazy guitars that develop into a pleasing fade out at the end.

The overall feel of the album is one surrounded by an obsession with time, whether it be nostalgia for days that have passed or the idea of life rushing by.

There's no denying Parker's phenomenal talent as a multi-instrumentalist/singer/songwriter/producer and despite some of the tracks being a little lacklustre, *The Slow Rush* encapsulates everything that Tame Impala are about.

Ambitious production through the use of genre-bending is something that is not as apparent in earlier works by Tame and is extremely refreshing to listen to.

# Conclusion

It is clear that the role of the magazine editor has undergone many significant changes caused by the shifts that have occurred in the publishing industry. It is these changes that have meant the traditional process is now transformed to more contemporary ways. All roles have had to adapt to a revamped field of journalism, but the editor is particularly significant because of how vital their role is in the publishing process. Some may argue that the need for the role is decreasing and may become obsolete within years, however, having first-hand experience of the editorial process during my time working as an editor and contributor for aAh! magazine has proved to me that the editors of a magazine are invaluable and without them, publications would struggle to survive. There is no denying that the role of the editor has had to change but that is not necessarily a negative thing, gaining new skills as well as having a better understanding of a contemporary publishing process will only improve an editor as well as improving their attitudes towards the team that they work with. Despite undergoing changes, the role of the editor definitely remains as important today as it did in the traditional era of publishing and is far from becoming a redundant position.

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# A Final Reflection of the Process

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**H**aving researched models of reflections and used many in previous work for other modules during my time at university, I found Graham Gibbs' reflective cycle to be the most effective for me personally. It covers six stages of: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan. (Gibbs, 1988) Using this model of reflection allows me to get the most out of the reflective process and by having it split it into six different steps, it helped to provide a detailed analysis of the process.

Looking back on my time working on aAh! magazine as well as the creating of this critical project, I feel I have achieved personal development by gaining a whole new skill set of working with an editorial team to produce a successful publication. The experience has improved many of the transferable skills I had struggled with originally. For example, my time management and organisation were something I had always struggled with but having to balance the project work with other university work meant that I was forced to manage and pri-

oritise my time in a way that wouldn't affect either pieces of work. The project has also improved my leadership and teamwork abilities, being able to find the right balance between the two was something I was not confident in before the process but working with a team of editors as well as being able to create briefs for others allowed me to create a good balance between working with others and working independently in a leadership role.

As well as strengthening existing skills, I gained new ones that will be invaluable to me when looking for a career in the industry in the future. Being able to step out of my comfort zone in terms of the content that I write has widened my journalistic ability which will make me more attractive to future employers as it shows I can write a range of content. Despite only being a student publication, the way in which aAh! is run has many similarities to professional publications. Experiencing this editorial process has also been invaluable as I now know the ins and outs of the publishing world which has furthered my ambitions to be able to



work in the industry when my time at university is over.

As I created my critical project in the form of a magazine, despite it being a more challenging approach, I felt this was appropriate because of the topic of my project as well as being able to experience another part of the process. The design process is something I had only briefly touched upon before my time on aAh! magazine in a module I completed in second year of university in 'Editing and Production.' Having basic inDesign skills motivated me to improve my understanding of the programme and create something that I was proud of. Teaching myself the tools was frustrating and often difficult at times as I was only a beginner, but it was definitely worth the final result that I have managed to produce. I chose to present my project as a magazine rather than just an essay as I wanted to challenge myself but also because I wanted to gain more skills that would benefit me in the future when looking for employment in the journalism field.

There were many issues I had to overcome during this critical project. For example, having to be patient when learning how to use inDesign at a more advanced level was something I struggled with throughout the creation of my magazine and I had considered scrapping the idea of presenting it as a magazine all together many times. However, I overcame this by persevering with myself and sticking with my original idea. I am glad I persisted with creating my own magazine as it was a very different experience than what I had encountered when creating other pieces of academic writing, it was also a lot more rewarding to see the final product rather than just seeing a word document, it was more aesthetically pleasing. I also found I had certain issues with the academic side of the project as, at the beginning, I struggled to provide critical analysis for the points I was

making. I was able to overcome this challenge by working with my tutor Usma Malik, having one-to-one tutorials with her as well as sending her my drafts through email meant that I was able to work closely with her to provide more critical analysis and make my work more academic. This benefitted me hugely as without feedback, my project would not have been able to develop to its full potential. Another issue, which was out of my control, came with the Covid-19 pandemic. Having my studies disrupted and moved online in the last crucial few weeks of my final year was extremely unsettling for me and made it difficult to find the motivation to produce work to the highest ability I know I am usually capable of. However, I was still able to access the support I needed and overcome the challenges of my time at university coming to a sudden and unexpected stop. It was also disheartening to realise that I would no longer be able to hand my magazine in as a physical artefact and it would be an online hand-in. Despite this, I was still able to create a project that I am more than proud of and hope to get my magazine printed as a physical copy once I am able to. If I were to do this process again, I would do more academic research before starting the process of writing my project as I feel there could still be more inclusion of critical analysis included. I see this as a weakness of my finished project however, I feel the reflective element and critical analysis that I have included, combined with the presentation element of my own magazine are definitely strengths to my project.

Overall, the process of writing, editing and creating a magazine for my critical project has been a rewarding experience that has benefitted my in many ways. I have challenged myself throughout the process and been able to gain new skills as well as improving ones I have already had. I feel this experience will definitely benefit me in future searches for employability as it has further developed my determination to work in the industry.

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