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THE UNIVERSITY AS A “GIANT NEWSROOM”

Not-for-profit explanatory journalism during COVID-19

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The role and influence of academia in journalism has evolved against a backdrop of more than two decades of technological, cultural and economic transformation of media, presenting opportunities to circumvent the process of mediatization by traditional newsrooms. *The Conversation Canada* serves as an example of the increasing influence of the academic sector on the media, shifting from the edges of journalism to take on a more prominent role. It represents a peripheral news actor defined as “those who have not belonged to traditional journalism practice but have imported their qualities and work into it,” (Holton and Bélair-Gagnon 2018: 70).

The not-for-profit independent digital journalism organization was launched as a digital-only media outlet in June 2017, with a mix of university, foundation, and research funding. It is part of a global network of *Conversation* sites that includes seven national partners, namely Australia, Indonesia, France, Spain, the UK, the US, and South Africa. In the *Conversation* model of journalism, articles are written by academics and edited by professional journalists. The content is then free to republish under a Creative Commons license, serving to increase the reach and visibility of the articles. The published material can be seen as explanatory journalism, defined as “an explanation and interpretation of complex events and phenomena placed in social, political, or cultural context,” (Forde 2007: 227).

The Conversation Canada was set up as a journalism organization, independent of the academic sector, with a team of professional journalists, several of whom also brought academic expertise. Since the start, it has been led by veteran journalist Scott White, who has served as editor-in-chief for the national press agency, The Canadian Press. However, the launch of *The Conversation* in Canada was met with some institutional wariness from established media in the country, reflecting how journalists have tended to react when actors outside the field have taken on activities traditionally associated with the profession. Only one mainstream newspaper reported on its launch, and that as part of a series of special reports by a journalist

on a foundation fellowship. At the same time, a highly influential report for the federal government on the state of the media included it in a section on “citizen journalism” (Public Policy Forum 2017).

For legacy media, *The Conversation’s* funding model and its close affiliation with the higher education sector prompted consideration about editorial independence and whether its content was an extension of university communications. Such circumspection speaks to how it contests established conceptions of what is journalism and who is a journalist. From the start, *The Conversation* set out to explore such concepts, recognizing “that past forms and ways of being a journalist need to be disrupted and re-oriented for diverse audiences and changing technologies,” (Young and Hermida 2017: para. 7)

Universities as institutions, and scholars as members of those institutions, have a long tradition of being involved in journalism. Scholars have long been featured as knowledgeable experts and authoritative sources in news stories, or as opinion contributors providing analysis and commentary. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) talk about the historical close ties between journalism and academia. They highlight how journalists are part of a social elite that includes educational institutions and thinktanks, often spending time at leading universities through mid-career fellowships. Conversely, media organizations have provided financial support for research projects at universities.

By tradition, however, universities and scholars were kept at arms-length from the practice of journalism itself, with their contributions to news mediated by the newsroom and subject to its prevailing norms and practices. Scholars were “house guests” in the newsroom, and the boundaries between who belonged and who was an outsider were clearly delineated. In this sense, scholars’ engagement with journalism was subject to mediatization, described by Rowe as “the process by which such knowledge is fashioned or influenced by media imperatives, anticipating topics, approaches, explanations, arguments, interpretations, predictions, recommendations, and so on” (Rowe 2017: 230).

This chapter argues that the coverage of COVID-19 by *The Conversation Canada* points to the growing impact of academia as an institution, and academics as individuals, in journalism. It builds on previous studies pointing to how peripheral actors were benefitting from the economic challenges facing commercial media (Ferrucci and Nelson 2019; Hermida and Young 2019b). The advent and spread of the coronavirus dominated the media in 2020 and continued to do so into 2021. Interest in news about the pandemic increased in its initial months as people turned to trusted sources of news to make sense of a life-altering event on the scale of the virus (Fletcher et al. 2020). *The Conversation Canada* was no exception. Shortly after the WHO declared a global pandemic in March 2020, *The Conversation Canada* saw increased audience interest in articles addressing COVID-19 for the month of April, doubling page views compared to the same period a year earlier (see also, Bélair-Gagnon, this volume). These numbers reflect both rising interest from scholars looking to contribute articles exploring the multiple facets of the pandemic and increasing audience interest.

The increase in readership came alongside tough times in legacy media in Canada. In the first year of the pandemic from March 2020 to March 2021, 67

news outlets were temporarily or permanently shut down across Canada, including 29 community newspapers (Lindgren, Wechsler and Wong 2021). Amidst a flurry of consolidation and cuts, 49 newspapers and magazines cancelled some or all of their print editions. Media outlets sought to reduce staff costs as they struggled to cope with the financial impact of COVID-19. By March 2021, 182 outlets reported job losses and 3,011 editorial and non-editorial jobs had been either permanently or temporarily cut (Lindgren, Wechsler and Wong 2021).

The media ecosystem in Canada

Similar to other countries with a liberal, largely commercial media system (Hallin and Mancini 2004), Canada is showing signs of market failure in some sectors. It is highly concentrated with four newspaper ownership groups accounting for just over 80% of the market, and a recent trend of consolidation in daily and community newspapers creating “in effect, contiguous regional clusters of newspapers in one area after another” (Winseck 2019: 70). The narrative of decline is the story of the newspaper industry in mature media markets such as Canada, with similar falls in circulation and advertising revenues as other media systems have experienced since the advent of television in the 1950s (Picard 2009).

On top of shrinking circulation, newspaper revenue in Canada fell to CAD\$1.1 billion in 2019 from its peak above CAD\$4 billion annually between 2006 and 2008 (Winseck 2020). Unions reported losses of 16,500 jobs in the media sector between 2008 to 2016, with half of that number in the print industry (Canadian Media Guild, as cited in Fry 2017). An influential report largely written by a former senior newspaper editor warned of the “financial degradation” of the news industry (Public Policy Forum 2017). A year earlier the same think tank warned, “the inevitable result is poorer journalism, fewer voices contributing to the public debate and a loss of loyal readers, viewers and listeners,” (Drohan 2016, 5). A further apocalyptic warning came from prominent media executive Richard Stursberg, who outlined the likely collapse of Canada’s major media companies unless the government intervened with support (Stursberg 2019).

Some critics rebuffed talk of crisis and predictions of the end of the Canadian news industry as overblown (Edge 2020; Winseck 2017; Wilkinson & Winseck 2019). However, the narrative of crisis as defined by the plight of the newspaper industry has dominated discourse on the future of journalism and the evolution of media policy, signalling the institutional power of legacy media. The decision of the federal government in 2018 to allocate almost CAD\$600 million over five years to support journalism has been criticized for propping up legacy, commercial media institutions at the expense of promoting and supporting new entrants (Delamont 2019; Edge 2020; Millar 2019). Figures suggest that established media organizations have the most to gain, with two of Canada’s largest journalism outlets expecting to receive between CAD\$6–\$10 million in annual support from the fund (Young and Hermida 2020a). Similarly, an initiative to fund local reporters has been reproached for allocating the bulk of its reporters to newspapers, including at major dailies (Scire 2020).

A narrative of crisis by established news organizations has significantly shaped the recent media policies of the Canadian government. Canada is not unique in this given how the media industry as a whole has taken up the notion of crisis (Siles and Boczkowski 2012). However, this understanding of the state of journalism privileges the predicament of legacy news organizations. It tends to oversimplify both the perceived crisis and responses to it, papering over systemic gaps including media ownership, a “dismal” history of innovation in legacy outlets (Toughill 2016; Winseck 2016) and a persistent whiteness within journalism (Callison and Young 2020).

When *The Conversation Canada* launched in English in June 2017, it joined more than 70 journalism startups established in Canada over the past 20 years (Hermida and Young 2020). A French-language counterpart, *La Conversation Canada*, was launched in December 2018. The model for this type of journalism organization was established by former newspaper editor Andrew Jaspan when he launched *The Conversation* in Australia in 2011, based on a simple but novel premise. “Why don’t I just turn this university into a giant newsroom?” asked Jaspan. “Why don’t I just get all these incredibly smart people within their various faculties to become journalists and write for the public?” (as cited in Rowe 2017: 232). The aim was to address what Jaspan saw as a loss of expertise in newsrooms, lower editorial standards and a loss of trust. “*The Conversation* is a response to this crisis of journalism,” wrote Jaspan (2014: 172). He went on to describe it as “a new journalism model that attempts to deliver information based on deep knowledge, codified behaviour, codes of conduct and a commitment to delivering the highest quality content free of commercial, or political, interference or bias,” (Jaspan 2014: 17–18).

An academic intervention in journalism

As with many of the new journalism enterprises launched in Canada in the 21st century, *The Conversation Canada* was designed as an intervention in the media landscape. It can be considered as a complex peripheral actor, defined as “an emergent journalism organization that is peripheral on multiple levels, from who creates and produces its content to how it is distributed” (Hermida and Young 2019b: 92). At an individual level, the model disrupts the standard editorial model of journalist-as-gatekeeper and expert-as-source. It puts academics at the center of the journalistic process as all articles are written by scholars who have a proven track record of research and expertise in their field, working with *The Conversation’s* team of professional editors. The editorial team are all paid journalists. Scholars, though, are not paid for their contributions as these are considered as part of their duties as salaried academics.

The number of scholars writing for the site has risen considerably since launching. By June 2019, after two years of operation, 1,558 academics had written at least one article (Hermida and Young 2019b). The number rose to 2,989 by December 2020 according to proprietary analytics from *The Conversation*. While the editorial team sends out calls for contributions to member universities, academics can also take on

an additional journalistic role by pitching ideas for articles directly via the website. The homepage invites scholars to “pitch an idea,” with a page offering advice on what makes for a good pitch. The skill of pitching a story to an editor is considered fundamental in journalism as it requires “precision in identifying the essential from inessential, the ability to synthesize and to systematize information and the confidence to present it,” (de Burgh 2003: 100). As the reach and reputation of *The Conversation Canada* has grown, so has the number of pitches, which rose from 467 in the first year to 2,050 in 2020.

Interestingly, the majority of articles published in 2020, 85%, were the result of ideas pitched by scholars, with the remainder commissioned by the editorial team (White 2021). In some ways, the mix of pitched and commissioned stories replicates the traditional newsroom model, with the university sector as the giant newsroom described by Jaspán (2014). But one key departure from the newsroom model is that scholars retain the final sign-off on an article. Such a practice could be considered a challenge to the autonomy of the editor, tipping the traditional power balance in favour of the writer (Bruns 2017). By placing scholars at the core of the journalistic production process, the editorial model blurs traditional institutional definitions of who is a journalist and offsets the traditional power relationship between editor and contributor.

The *Conversation* model diverges from established media practice by making all its content available for anyone to republish for free. An invisible pixel is used to track republication and page views. Under the terms of use, articles must be republished in their entirety without any changes to the content. Publications can rewrite headlines and add their own images. Notably, the original author must approve any material changes to the body of an article. While *The Conversation Canada* articles cannot be sold by a third-party publisher, they can be used on sites that carry advertising. *The Conversation Canada* revenue model is different from traditional journalism organizations in that its value proposition is rooted in its unpaid reach, with its goal to recycle and republish as much free content across diverse media outlets as possible. As such, *The Conversation* model focuses on maximizing the visibility of articles in a fragmented and distributed media environment, capitalizing on on-site and off-site distribution.

Through the republication model, stories have appeared in legacy national media outlets in Canada, such as the site of the national TV network, Global News, the *National Post* newspaper, and *Maclean's* magazine, as well as in local and regional outlets. Distribution also benefits from the global network of *The Conversation* sites, with articles originally published in Canada appearing in international news outlets such as CNN, *The Washington Post*, Quartz, and the *Daily Mail*. Articles have also surfaced in non-traditional journalism outlets, such as AlterNet, IFLScience, Raw Story, and The Weather Network (Canada). While media outlets in Canada are often dominated by US content, particularly in the entertainment sector, *The Conversation Canada* has significant reach across the border to the south, with the US accounting for one-third of page views (Young and Hermida 2020b).

At an economic level, *The Conversation* is part of a broader shift toward not-for-profit journalism as a way to address the market failure of the commercial

news model (Pickard 2017). As a not-for-profit, independent journalism organization, its funding is from non-journalistic sources, similar to the findings of Deuze’s global study of startups (2017). But its non-journalistic funding sources are different from other not-for-profits, which rely mostly on philanthropy, foundation grants and individuals (Institute for Nonprofit News 2020; see Konieczna, this volume). Instead, *The Conversation Canada* relies on the higher education sector for most of its funding, with some support from federal research agencies, government subsidies for the media, and foundations.

It also belongs to a growing number of academic journalism initiatives in Canada with higher education affiliations (Hermida and Young 2019a). These outlets are able to access financial or in-kind support through their association with universities or research institutes. The involvement of faculty, often former journalists themselves, opens the way to pursue competitive research funding (Hermida and Young 2019a). Recent examples include the Global Reporting Centre, set up in 2016 at the University of British Columbia, and the Institute for Investigative Journalism, launched in 2018 at Concordia University. They focus on public service journalism produced in collaboration between journalists, scholars and journalism students. Housed at universities, such institutes and centres can receive charitable donations, as well as benefiting from funding and in-kind support such as facilities and administrative support.

Of course, universities have been long involved in the news through journalism schools, particularly in the US, usually providing local news coverage produced by students (Anderson et al. 2011). Such initiatives tend to rely on students who are unpaid but gain practical experience under the supervision and mentorship of experienced professors and professionals. Some prominent initiatives, such as News21 at Arizona State University’s Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, are funded by foundations. What sets apart *The Conversation* in Canada, as well as in the UK and Australia, is that they operate as independent journalism organizations, outside, though mostly funded by, universities. In contrast, *The Conversation US* relies significantly on philanthropy (see Konieczna, this volume).

***The Conversation* and COVID-19**

The coverage of COVID-19 by *The Conversation Canada* offers a case study to investigate the impact of a peripheral actor on the media. As an emergent journalism actor, the organization’s experience highlights the value of not-for-profit evidence-based journalism, by providing an outlet for academic experts to reach larger publics, and to counter misinformation about the pandemic. Such expertise also addressed a gap in legacy media reporting in Canada, given the shift towards precarious and impermanent positions and the “decline of stable, reasonably well-paid and well-resourced journalistic work” (Wilkinson and Winseck 2019: 389).

Figures from *The Conversation Canada* show how academics stepped into the gap. From the time the World Health Organization declared a pandemic in March 2020 to the end of the year, articles related to the coronavirus made up more than

half of the 1,004 stories published by *The Conversation Canada*. There were 543 articles published about COVID-19, written by 738 academics. The number of pitches and stories related to COVID-19 received by *The Conversation Canada* since the start of the pandemic suggests that academics were motivated to add their expertise to media coverage of the coronavirus. Pitches by scholars to the outlet doubled from a monthly average of 84 in 2019 to 171 in 2020 (White 2021). The model of partnering academics and professional editors effectively creates what Lisa Watts, Chief Executive of *The Conversation* in Australia, described as “a giant newsroom with the very best specialist writers” (quoted in Picard, Bélair-Gagnon and Ranchordás 2016).

As with most other media, *The Conversation Canada* saw an increase in traffic from readers seeking the most up-to-date information about COVID-19. This demand supported an increase in readership, especially in the early months of the pandemic. There were record page views in three months: April 2020, with 3.76 million views (double the page views in April 2019); May 2020, with 3.85 million views; and October 2020, with 4.4 million views (this latter month involved a combination of factors including US election coverage and COVID-19 content). Overall, COVID-19 articles received just over 13.5 million page views, according to proprietary analytics, accounting for 43% of the 31.3 million total page views recorded between March 1 and December 30 2020. The proprietary analytics only measure articles that include a tracking pixel intended for use by republishers. For various reasons, several major republishers, such as The Canadian Press, MSN and Yahoo, do not use the counter code so the actual number of overall page views is likely to be higher. Page views have limitations as they can be affected by a small number of users viewing multiple pages or by automated bots (Imperva 2020; Krall 2009).

Articles on COVID-19 were published across all site sections, not only Health and Science, but also Politics, Business, Culture, Arts, Education, and Environment, and featuring experts from a wide range of disciplines. COVID-19 articles covered critical race issues, including anti-Asian racism and the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on racialized communities. A new COVID-19 section was created to bring the articles together into one index. An analysis of articles published by *The Conversation Canada* in its COVID-19 section, from March 1 to December 31, 2020, sheds light on the most-viewed stories (see Table 4.1). The authors of the most-viewed COVID-19 articles include experts in medicine, epidemiology, public health and social media.

As all of *The Conversation Canada*'s editors are experienced journalists with backgrounds in traditional media, some with academic backgrounds, editorial decisions were guided by long-standing norms and practices, such as assigning stories in a fast-moving news cycle and editing and publishing them as soon as possible. This involved planning ahead and developing relationships with academics to identify emerging topics such as issues of inequality related to the pandemic.

Timely and relevant stories were often among the most popular, including the latest research on the virus, lockdowns, masks. Articles debunking conspiracy theories, FAQs, Q&As and “how-to” guides also tended to perform well. Over the first 10 months of the pandemic, content shifted as reader interests changed. Coverage started

TABLE 4.1 Ten most-viewed COVID-19 articles from *The Conversation Canada* (March–December 2020)

1	COVID-19 masks FAQs: How can cloth stop a tiny virus? What’s the best fabric? Do they protect the wearer?
2	Conspiracy theorists are falsely claiming that the coronavirus pandemic is an elaborate hoax
3	QAnon conspiracy theories about the coronavirus pandemic are a public health threat
4	When will the coronavirus restrictions end in Canada?
5	Drug-resistant superbugs: A global threat intensified by the fight against coronavirus
6	I study viruses: How our team isolated the new coronavirus to fight the global pandemic
7	Why it’s not OK to take small social risks during the COVID-19 pandemic
8	How the ancient Israelites dealt with epidemics — the Bible tells of prophecy and rituals
9	Coronavirus FAQs: Can people without symptoms spread COVID-19? How long does it live on surfaces? What cleaning products kill the virus?
10	Dangers of a sedentary COVID-19 lockdown: Inactivity can take a toll on health in just two weeks

with answering basic questions, including “What is the coronavirus?” Then, it addressed new behaviours: Should I wear a mask and, if so, what kind? As the pandemic wore on, coverage turned to the devastating impact: Loss of life, school and business closures and “COVID fatigue.” The year ended on a hopeful note with news of vaccines.

Science and health issues lend themselves to the format of explanatory journalism, given that the complexities and nuances of science journalism do not translate well into the traditional news pyramid format (Forde 2007). The popularity of COVID-19 articles that offered practical information on the nature of the virus, social distancing, duration of lockdowns, and hoaxes indicate an appetite for “news you can use”, a form of news that is often prominent in science journalism on health and medicine (Dunwoody 2014). The reach of these stories suggests they are an effective way for academic experts to translate complex scientific information about COVID-19 for a non-academic audience.

Some 300 media outlets across Canada and around the world republished articles on COVID-19, accounting for just under 50% of page views for pandemic articles. The top 50 republishers were analyzed by page views, and coded as legacy/professional journalism organizations, peripheral journalistic actors and non-journalism organizations (Hermida and Young 2019b). The results showed that 29 of the top 50 were professional media organizations (58%), with 17 peripheral actors (34%) and four non-journalism organizations (8%). The figures are largely consistent with a previous study of *The Conversation Canada* republishers, which found that mainstream outlets accounted for two-thirds of the top 50 republishers, with peripheral journalistic organizations making up just under a third (Hermida and Young 2019b).

Mainstream media outlets in Canada that picked up COVID-19 articles included the TV network, Global News, and newspapers such as the *National Post*, *Winnipeg Free Press*, *London Free Press*, and *Halifax Chronicle Herald*. The top international republishers included CNN, Salon, and *U.S. News & World Report*. There were also a number of digital-only, community-focused media outlets in Canada, including a network of local Ontario websites. Peripheral journalistic organizations included specialist sites such as The Weather Network (Canada), AlterNet, and Phys.org, as well as the aggregator Flipboard.

The World Economic Forum was one of the four non-journalism republishers. Aside from the WEF, the other three were university news sites, notably McMaster University’s Brighter World website, which highlights research news. By republishing articles from McMaster’s researchers, and then promoting those articles on social media, the university was able to support access to this information, resulting in several of the most-viewed COVID-19 articles on *The Conversation Canada*. The reach of university news sites raises interesting research questions about the role of the higher education sector in the media, including whether such content would be considered journalism or corporate communications.

Conclusion

A decade after launching in Australia in 2011, *The Conversation* is one of the most prominent examples of the involvement of the higher education sector, and individual academics, in journalism. More than 100 journalists are employed in its various newsrooms worldwide, with articles published across the network of *Conversation* sites reaching more than 30 million users monthly (Ketchell 2021). The model supports the development of novel infrastructures for the production, publication and propagation of journalism by actors on the periphery of journalism. As such, *The Conversation Canada* is a complex peripheral actor that operates “across individual, organizational, and network levels, and is active across multiple domains of the journalistic process” (Hermida and Young 2019b: 93).

The role and impact of peripheral actors is a burgeoning area of research given the range of people and organizations taking on journalistic activities, as this volume shows. The involvement of the higher education sector in journalism forms part of what Eldridge has described as “a pushback against an idea that ‘journalism’ rests solely with the traditional media field” (Eldridge 2018: 184). In Canada, the experience of *The Conversation* suggests some pushback from traditional media. Its launch in 2017 barely merited a mention in legacy media, while the influential Public Policy Forum 2017 report on the state of the media was rather dismissive of the organization as citizen journalism.

Since then, articles from *The Conversation Canada* have been placed across media outlets in the country and internationally. Indeed, during the pandemic, there was a healthy appetite for COVID-19 expertise with publishers making up almost 50% of page views. However, the numbers disguise a disinclination by some leading media to publish articles from *The Conversation Canada*, even during the pandemic.

A third of the outlets picking up COVID-19 articles were regional or local publications, which suggests that *The Conversation Canada* COVID-19 coverage was uniquely useful to their newsrooms. We suggest that their motives for using the content included the perceived importance of COVID content, the distinctive expertise and ease of access to articles, as well as financial imperatives given the challenges faced by this part of the journalism sector. Leading news outlets, including the national TV network Global News, and the newspapers, the *National Post* and *Toronto Star*, also picked up articles.

Absent, though, were the public service broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and *The Globe and Mail*, widely considered as Canada’s national newspaper of record. Both outlets have dedicated opinion sections and opinion editors, suggesting there may be some institutional resistance to republishing articles written by experts who were not commissioned or edited in house. Moreover, academics retain final sign-off on all articles in *The Conversation* model, rather than an op-ed editor. Such an approach contests the gatekeeping role of opinion editors in deciding how articles are framed, written, and by whom.

The model of *The Conversation* challenges journalism’s professional identities, historic practices, and commercial orientation (Rowe 2017). Journalism’s ideology and its traditional orientation to knowledge claims with the journalist as an objective, neutral outsider (Deuze 2005) is destabilized as the journalists producing the articles are scholars, working with experienced journalists as editors. It offers an alternative business model, where most of the funding comes from the university sector but operates as an editorially independent, standalone journalism organization. It disrupts traditional notions of exclusivity and control by making its articles available to republish for free under Creative Commons, meaning they appear in both core and peripheral journalism outlets, from legacy news organizations to niche science websites (Hermida and Young 2019b).

The success and resilience of *The Conversation*, not just in Canada but also globally, led the *Columbia Journalism Review* to note that it “may tell us a bit about where nonprofit media is headed” (Schiffrin 2020: para. 1). The growth of its contributors, stories and readership during the pandemic took place against heightened financial pressures on the media, with headlines in Canada about a “mass extinction” event (Bernhard 2020). The hunger for news and information about the coronavirus from the public did little to shore up a shaky news business that had not recovered from the 2008 financial crash.

While *The Conversation Canada* has been able to count on significant financial resources, a business model that is largely based on annual renewal of membership “has sustainability challenges embedded in it” (Young and Hermida 2020b: 129). Universities in Canada and globally are assessing the short and long-term impact of COVID-19 on budgets. As in other countries, the higher education sector in Canada has taken a financial hit, with a decline in tuition fees and the loss of revenue from ancillary services such as residences, food services, and parking (Ansari 2020).

For now, the ability of *The Conversation* to raise the visibility, profile and impact of scholars and their host institutions has proved to be an attractive proposition to

its university funders. The pandemic has made it possible to capitalize on the expertise of scholars, at a time when scientists and health experts enjoyed much higher levels of trust than news organizations and governments (Nielsen et al. 2020). As Beth Daley, the editor of *The Conversation US*, explained, “We have a direct line to the front lines of solving – or trying to solve – COVID-19, and our researchers are willing to share that with the public in real time” (quoted in Schiffrin 2020: para. 16).

The role of universities in journalism in Canada is still relatively modest considering the size and scale of the media conglomerates that dominate online news readership (Public Policy Forum 2017). That said, the higher education sector is seen as one of the new avenues to support journalism. In a follow-up to its influential 2017 report, the Public Policy Forum noted that “examples such as *The Conversation* highlight the roles that post-secondary institutions can play in strengthening journalism and local news” (Public Policy Forum 2018: 19). A decade after it first started in Australia, *The Conversation* model has demonstrated one way that the higher education sector can intervene in the media and help counter the market failure of commercial news, capitalizing on the unique position of universities as trusted generators of expert information.

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Notes

- 1 Alfred Hermida and Mary Lynn Young are the co-founders of *The Conversation Canada* and serve on its board of directors. They do not work for, consult, or receive any revenue from participation in *The Conversation Canada* or any related organization that would benefit from this chapter. Lisa Varano is the Audience Development Editor at *The Conversation Canada*.

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