**Why Open School of Journalism believes that Human Interest Journalism is important zu know**

Human interest journalism takes a closer, more personal look at the news. While conventional journalism presents the big picture, sticking to hard facts and statistics, human interest journalism focuses on details or aspects that resonate emotionally with the public. It is sometimes described as "getting the story behind the story" or "putting a human face on the news."

The straight story might tell you that West Africa has seen 13,268 cases of Ebola and 4,960 deaths. The human interest piece may feature survivors who have united to care for orphans whose parents succumbed.

The goal of hard news is to remain objective, but human interest stories can be written and presented under less stringent rules and with greater flexibility. These two styles of journalism have completely different goals; the one attempts to inform, the other, to engage readers or viewers on a personal level.

**A brief history**

Human interest writing has been around for a long time. Even the Bible, insofar as it is a historical record, is populated with in-depth profiles of its prominent figures.

In modern journalism, printer Benjamin Day may have pioneered the human interest story when he launched The New York Sun in 1833. Helen MacGill Hughes, author of the highly regarded 1940 book, "News and the Human Interest Story," described The Sun as consisting of "chatty little reports of tragic or comic incidents in the lives of the people." James Gordon Bennett followed two years later with publication of The New York Herald. Bennett's goal was to broaden news coverage to "areas of life not hitherto reported."

Both papers were subsequently purchased by Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, respectively, who enlisted the support of advertisers. Pulitzer and Hearst came to see their readership as individual consumers and news as a highly desired commodity. They fueled interest by sponsoring crazy stunts and contests. Their newspapers, which capitalized on human interest stories of broad public appeal, enjoyed record circulations. Human interest journalism had become a prime marketing ploy.

But this once novel, groundbreaking form of journalism is now prevalent and respected in all outlets: print, television, radio and the Internet.

**Purposes of human interest journalism**

Human interest stories often relate to or support other content. Coverage of a devastating tornado in Texas included a story about a man who'd erected a homemade sign in his yard: "For Sale. Split-level. Mostly Level." The article was about maintaining a sense of humor in times of crisis. Some articles are written to tug at heart strings, but others provide levity on bleak news days.

Other pieces are meant to entertain. The ordinary lives of movie actors, athletes and politicians are interesting to the public, as proven by the enduring success of Reader's Digest and People magazine. People like knowing that their favorite daytime soap star eats junk food for breakfast—it makes them feel less guilty about their own diets. With the help of the media, former First Lady Jacquelyn Kennedy ushered an enthralled public into the White House. Americans, women especially, relished reports of her table settings, the clothes in her closet and her day-to-day life with the president. That is one example of how the side story becomes the story.

One of the most common forms of human interest journalism is the article or series featuring people or animals bearing up in the face of adversity. People respond emotionally to accounts of rescue, citizens pulling together, individuals maintaining their faith in the midst of catastrophe. Human interest coverage of 9/11 may have forever altered public perception of what New Yorkers are really like. Film footage following the Japanese tsunami in 2011 inspired hearts worldwide; victims in the aftermath were shown not looting, but helping shop owners put their businesses back together. Just about everyone is moved by stories of human resilience. Profiles of cancer patients, amputees or victims of violence may hold the public's interest for years. Videos of rescued animals are often the Internet's most frequently viewed.

**Detractors**

Human interest journalism does have detractors. Many conventional journalists feel that this approach removes objectivity. They contend that stories are usually written with a slant toward furthering a certain agenda, or to manipulate an audience into thinking or responding in a certain way. Its harshest critics don't believe this format should be included in objective news reporting.

American journalism as a whole aims to give citizens all the information they need for contributing and succeeding in a democratic society. But journalists can't inform if John Q. Public doesn't buy himself a source of news. This chasm between objectivity and boosting circulation, many experts believe, is bridged by human interest journalism. Opinions clash as to whether or not it's appropriate or necessary, but everyone agrees that it must still be responsible journalism.

**The integrity of the journalist**

Most seasoned news people regard human interest journalism as a double-edged sword.

Criminal profiles could alert people of the need to take precautions—or they could be luridly sensational.

Personal stories could create greater awareness of domestic violence, alcoholism or child abuse—or they could become fodder for tabloid TV.

A feature story on AIDS patients could increase understanding and inspire compassion—or it could start a panic. It could solicit contributions for research and treatment—or it could promote hateful stereotypes.

In the hands of gifted journalists, this human approach inspires charity, encourages civic involvement and sparks public discourse on tough topics. At its noblest, it rouses people out of apathy and into action. Sometimes it is a catalyst for change, prompting readers to take a deeper look inside them. At the very least, it may elicit a much-needed laugh or touch of inspiration at the end of a rough day.

It is the talent and integrity of the individual writer that determines the value of human interest journalism.