

Public Abstract

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Title:GATEKEEPING AND UNPUBLISHING: HOW EDITORS MAKE PUBLISHING AND UNPUBLISHING DECISIONS

This study interviews newspaper editors to discover how decisions are made regarding unpublishing (the removal of stories after they have been published online). The qualitative research uses gatekeeping theory, which gives insight into what kinds of influences play roles in decision-making processes within newsrooms. Journalism does not currently have a policy or best practice for dealing with requests to remove stories after publishing. The Internet is growing at a rapid pace, and it is impossible to ignore the fact that people are becoming more aware of their online reputation while newspapers are increasing the amount of online content (and becoming more web-first based). The combination of events turns into a perfect storm for an increase in the number of unpublishing requests.

The results show that the news editors are hesitant to remove anything once published, but will make corrections and additions, if necessary. The main reason for the overall hesitancy is that editors do not want to make changes to the public historical record. While it is hard to imagine one policy embracing every type of unpublishing request, it is logical to use a policy that states that a newspaper does not remove stories except in extreme circumstances. Doing so would improve transparency between readers and editors, and give readers a small, yet existent, hope that there is a chance of getting a story removed (if it is truly merited).