Responsibility, Accountability and the Importance of Diverse, Independent and Sustainable Media

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In this talk, I will make the case that a robust media ecology which facilitates accountability must include a mixture of media types, characterised by independence and financial sustainability. This is particularly vital in in the context of increasing polarisation, aligned to the rise of social media and the spread of misinformation. It is essential that media organisations are able to hold the powerful to account through the provision of trustworthy and reliable information in the public interest.

Against that backdrop, the second half of the talk will look at a specific case – that of local journalism startups in the UK. A number of local journalism startups have stepped into the void created by the closure of local newspapers. This emerging sector is characterised by small-scale, entrepreneurial publishers which often operate on a shoe-string budget.

Drawing on in-depth interviews and surveys with independent local journalism entrepreneurs, carried out in 2020-2021, the talk discusses these journalists see their responsibility to their communities. The research demonstrated that their conceptions were shaped in and through their interactions with their audiences, and by normatively inflected interpretation of what constitutes news in the public interest in their particular local area.