



Unit 5

The power of the press

International cultural knowledge – Current affairs

1 Choose the correct definition for the following terms and then read the web article quickly to check your answers.

- 1 Phone hacking:
 - a using a phone to gain access to a person's online records
 - b gaining access to a phone to listen in to conversations and voice mail
- 2 An investigative journalist:
 - a someone who uncovers details about newsworthy stories for newspapers
 - b someone who helps the police investigate criminal activities

WORD BOOSTER

Match the words and definitions.

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 take for granted | a happen again |
| 2 ups and downs | b ignored |
| 3 cater for | c accusations |
| 4 gone astray | d disappeared |
| 5 turned a blind eye | e accept without thinking about |
| 6 brought to its knees | f the good and bad points |
| 7 allegations | g destroyed |
| 8 recur | h provide what people need |

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1 From the birth of the printed newspaper to online editions accessible to millions free of charge, the newspaper and its role in society have changed beyond recognition. Most people would agree that the primary purpose of the press is to distribute information to as wide a readership as possible, and to that extent it fulfils an essential role that we often take for granted.

2 However, more recent trends in reporting have seen a significant increase in stories that have little to do with distributing essential information. Today's newspapers frequently include stories about the ups and downs in the lives of celebrities, no matter why they are famous. The general public is a hungry animal, seeking more and more personal details about celebrities of any description. We read the news for different reasons and different newspapers cater for these. However, the tactics used by journalists to discover details about people, in order to feed the public's constant hunger for scandal, may cross legal and ethical lines.

3 In recent years many big stories – especially political ones – have been built upon 'leaks' passed on from interested parties. Sensitive information has reached the press in the form of personal emails, personal and official papers that have conveniently gone astray, or anonymous phone calls. In general the public has turned a blind eye to the sources of many stories that have hit the headlines as long as the stories themselves have been mouthwateringly juicy.

4 But there has long been a suspicion that journalists were not playing by the rules. In 2011 this exploded into a scandal that damaged some powerful people at the top of the news industry and brought one newspaper to its knees. This happened when it emerged that some journalists had been obtaining personal details about people in the news by hacking into their phones: the ultimate invasion of privacy. Public reaction to the allegations was at first not



too fierce as those involved were politicians and celebrities, but then revelations that the phones of crime victims and their families may also have been hacked caused an enormous public outcry and the withdrawal of advertising by major companies from the newspaper involved.

5 Many questions have been raised about the ethics of investigative journalists. Some people believe that their activities should be more carefully monitored and that we need laws to ensure that this cannot recur. Others fear that we are at a crossroads where the rights to privacy and the rights to free speech are finely balanced and unless we are careful an overreaction to these events could stop journalists doing their jobs properly.

On today's forum we have several questions we would like you to comment on:

- 1 How far are the readers of newspapers to blame for the lengths that journalists go to in search of a story?
- 2 Is it acceptable to hack the phones of celebrities and politicians?
- 3 Do the ends ever justify the means in investigative journalism?
- 4 Should journalists be restricted in what they can and cannot report?

Post your comments below.

2 Read the article again. What do the following phrases refer to and why does the writer mention them?

- 1 fulfils an essential role (*paragraph 1*)
- 2 a hungry animal (*paragraph 2*)
- 3 leaks (*paragraph 3*)
- 4 public outcry (*paragraph 4*)
- 5 a crossroads (*paragraph 5*)

3 Choose one of the questions and write your own comment to post on the site.

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