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“It’s Anonymous. It’s *The Economist*”. The Journalistic and Business Value of Anonymity

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ABSTRACT

The Economist is nowadays, at its 177 years, the only major news brand that remains loyal to the rule of anonymity with which it was born in 1843. As a unique exception, but also as a journalistic model admired and respected around the world, the magazine’s long romance with anonymity, and the reasons why this tradition has been maintained, despite going against the tide, makes interesting reading today, both from a professional and a business point of view. This article analyses and discusses the practice of anonymity in The Economist from its inception to the present, with the idea to connect its perceived advantages with some current debates on the problems of journalism. In order to do that, the article will focus on three editorial and business dimensions—editorial consistency, newsroom management and brand identity—with which the anonymous ethos of the weekly has contributed to strengthening its capacity to remain a unique news brand. Although the advantages of anonymity are the central point of this work, some related problems will also be noted.

KEYWORDS:

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes

1 “Newspapers as Property” had no bylines, as the rest of The Economist articles. However, St John-Stevas, in his *Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, includes this text in the collection of journalistic works of the author of *Lombard Street* and *The English Constitution* (St John-Stevas [1986](#), 408).

2 I will use the term “magazine” to refer to The Economist, even though I am fully conscious that the word “newspaper” is used in its newsroom. In the past, the reason was the peculiar way of covering the weekly topics and to the conversion of its weekly newsroom into a “daily” newsroom every Thursday. Today, the publication is always daily as well as weekly, starting with Espresso in the morning through to the collection of articles in “The Economist Today”, published on the website and sent out in a newsletter at the end of the working day in America. Plus, there are also daily podcasts, and social media messages (Daniel Franklin, The Economist Executive Editor, 2020, personal communication).

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