Churnalism
Wayne Larsen
Churnalism

1. **Defining churnalism**

The media phenomenon we have recently come to know as *churnalism* is most commonly described as the deliberate publication or broadcast of a press release—or a similarly circulated communiqué from a nonjournalistic source—with minimal or no alterations, additions, or fact-checking by a journalist. As the pun of the title suggests, this unverified material is ‘churned’ out at a rapid pace by media outlets under the guise of legitimate journalism in order to satisfy increasing demands for content provision under a strict deadline structure.

2. **Causes and historical development**

The internet has played a crucial role in the proliferation of churnalism, not only by providing media outlets with easy access to a plethora of content that can be instantly copied and pasted into ostensibly legitimate news documents, but also by providing the multiplatform infrastructure that both creates and meets the demand for more content. Because of this, churnalism is a relatively recent area of study that has so far been addressed by few scholars and media critics. While the name is new, having been coined by the British journalist Nick Davies in his 2008 book *Flat Earth News*, the practice itself is not; we know that unsubstantiated ‘news’ stories have been finding their way into newspapers for as long as newspapers themselves have existed. However, the contemporary reality of rapidly expanding computer technologies and multiplatform journalistic capabilities has greatly contributed to a marked expansion of available space for news and features, while newsroom staff are being steadily reduced by budget-conscious publishers and media management. The resulting imbalance creates an ever-widening rift between the potential space for editorial material and the human resources available to provide it—in other words, the ideal conditions under which churnalism can thrive.